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Moving in the Shadows: The Reasons Why Men Purchase Commercial Sexual Services and the Connection to Strain Theory

Transactions of sexual services involve two parties—the “buyer” and the “seller.” Yet, the indubitably limited exposure the public most often gets to prostitution projects the seller, or the prostitute, as the primary criminal. Although the seller would not exist if it were not for the demand of the buyer, those who purchase sexual services both in-person and through online media are rarely, if ever, depicted. Instead, they remain as faceless groups, largely male in population, who are permitted to return to their everyday routines uninterrupted by lawful interference (Farley, 2015; Ward et al., 2005). Statistics reported by the FBI’s *Uniform Crime Report* (2019) speak to the major disparity between men and women who are arrested for sexual solicitation crimes. Their data revealed that 37% of those arrested for sexual solicitation crimes were male, while 63% were female.

Studies that examine these discrepancies explore the basic demographics of the types of men who purchase sex. These demographics reveal that Caucasian, middle-aged men who are well-educated and earn median-to-high incomes are the group most likely to utilize sexual services (Bretns et al., 2021; Monto & McRee, 2005; Monto & Milrod, 2013). While these demographics are meaningful contributors to our understanding of the dynamic of prostitution, most of these studies fail to take advantage of incorporating any theoretical framework through which to consider the reasons of purchasing sex. There is much room within the scope of Robert Agnew’s general strain theory to study male clientele of prostitutes. Developed in the 1980s, strain theory has been used as a reliable framework for criminal actions as it explains that deviant behavior originates through three different forms of stress: the inability to reach a goal one has specified for themselves, the perceived or real deprivation of beneficial incentives, or the

manifestation of a negative impetus (Agnew, 1992). Strain theory is a potential framework to study buyers of sexual services as both qualitative and quantitative studies have identified motives that fit easily within one or more of this theory's tenants (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Levina et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2005).

Most of the literature that focuses on prostitution seems to portray the women who sell sexual services and the various reasons why they do so (Monto & McRee, 2005; Serughetti, 2012). While this is important information to collect, an entire population remains underrepresented in research. The few studies that do exist with male buyers as the focal point recognize the importance of demographics, but neglect to analyze these men through the theory of strain. As such, this paper considers the behavior and motives of those who purchase sex in-person and online through strain theory to gain valuable insights into the buyer-seller dynamic.

Definitions, Prevalence, and Clientele

Definitions of Prostitution

It is important to acknowledge that the term "prostitution" does not always simply equate to the exchange of monetary instruments for sexual services. Behaviors that may be considered prostitution to one researcher, group, or organization may not hold the same demarcations to others (Farley et al., 2009). Another obscurity is the type of sex that is being purchased, as assorted sexual acts may be purchased in addition to, or instead of, traditional penetrative sex. Exotic dancing and suggestive massages could be considered sex work to some. Pornography depicts commercial sex acts, and it can be illegal in certain circumstances, but is a completely different delineation from prostitution.

In other cases, the terminology within the definition may not be very clear. For example, a review of the Uniform Crime Report (2019) defined prostitution, "to engage in commercial sex

acts for anything of value.” Similarly, their definition of purchasing prostitution is “to purchase or trade anything of value for commercial sex acts.” While that may be explanatory on its face, the UCR does not further define what is “commercial.” Do their arrest statistics reflect sex acts that take place indoors as well as at the street level? These locations return demographics that are not entirely consistent with one another. The UCR does not ascertain exactly where their arrests have taken place, or what types of sexual acts are included in their numbers, leaving room for error in data collection. Farley et al. (2009) also expresses those varying definitions of prostitution will yield drastically different statistics in relation to just how common solicitation of sexual services really is. Depending on the terminology used within the study, those who have purchased sex could be as high as 80% or as low as 10%.

Deogan et al. (2020) defined prostitution as, “the trading (buying and selling) of sex for material benefit, i.e., exchanging money, drugs, food, shelter, or other items for sex” (para. 1). Although this definition does not include the location of the exchange of material benefits, or that of the actual consummation of the exchange, the definition adequately identifies the means that are deemed valuable for trade between the parties that are participating in the trade. Thus, this is the definition of prostitution that will be used for the purposes of this paper.

Prevalence of Purchases and Outline of Prostitution Clientele

How Ubiquitous is the Purchase of Prostitution?

One of the many disadvantages presented by having research that is preoccupied with one side of a dichotomy is that we do not know approximately the population that occupies the other group. Further complicating this aspect are the stereotypes that surround men in society as creatures who are sensitive to their testosterone-driven compulsions, and the lack of consensus among researchers as to how many men actually take advantage of commercial sexual services

(Monto & McRee, 2005; Serughetti, 2012). With this being said, what has previous research found about the frequency with which sex is purchased?

There is no data related to prostitution and sex work that appears before the mid-twentieth century. The earliest information, which reaches back to the 1940s, suggests that nearly 70% of men in the United States alone had purchased sex at some point in their lifetimes. Roughly a quarter of those men did so on a regular basis (Serughetti, 2012). A study conducted in the 1960s reported their findings to support an increased figure of 80% (Monto & McRee, 2005). These dated figures certainly support the idea that buying sex was an activity that was widespread among the male population, perhaps as a side effect of powerful sexual hormones exclusive only to them.

Yet, evidence from the last 20 years presents a much different picture. Ward et al. (2005) did acknowledge that transactions with sex workers were on the rise in Britain, based on their examination of the results of a survey that was distributed nationally in 1990 and 2000. Nearly 10% of men in their sample reported having purchased sex over the span of their lifetimes (Ward et al., 2005). More recent percentages from Hammond and van Hooff (2019) bring the figure of lifetime purchase in Britain to 11%, with just 4% of those transactions occurring within the previous five years. Similarly, only a quarter of men in the United States are estimated to purchase sexual services (Monto & Milrod, 2013). These numbers are consistent across a number of nations, according to comprehensive research collected by Deogan et al. (2020). Percentages range from 11% to 19% in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and other European countries. Serughetti (2012) concludes that these numbers of men who participate in the commercial sex industry by purchasing services could be as high as 40%, but that even that percentage is drastically lower than what was initially believed in the 1940s.

Demographics

American citizens are conditioned, most often by the media, to associate stereotypes in connection with particular phenomena. Walker et al. (2018) gives the example of a young black male being the representative for most criminal actions but contends that numerous data sources disprove any evidence that the image holds true. The opposite is the effect in the case of male sex buyers. The fact that men are so anonymous in their role of purchasing sex means it is difficult to conjure up an image of the archetypical client. Fortunately, studies that focus on these men concentrate heavily on demographics and help to contribute to the idea that there is no “typical buyer” (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Levina et al., 2012; Serughetti, 2012).

From descriptive demographics that are collected throughout several studies, diversity has been observed in relation to every category such as age, race, level of education, income, and marital status; yet, it can be ascertained that men who conduct transactions for sex are more likely to be white, middle-aged, well-educated, and be employed on a full-term basis (Brents et al., 2021; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Monto & Hotaling, 2001; Monto & McRee, 2005). A significant portion of these men were also married (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Monto & Hotaling, 2001; Monto & McRee, 2005).

While some groups do demonstrate overrepresentation, especially in the category of race, there are no physical characteristics that can be relied upon to determine who is more likely to purchase sex. Clientele can truly assume any form or identity.

Objectives for Purchasing Prostitution

Through the contradictory standards that exist between male buyers and female suppliers of sex, men have long been considered to be victims of their biological sex drive (Serughetti, 2012). They simply cannot control themselves, and prostitutes allow for instant alleviation of

these testosterone-influenced urges. On the other hand, because the nature of prostitution goes against traditional ideals of what sex should mean, some studies have considered the likelihood of male customers being inherently abnormal; a sense of deviance that leads them to purchase sex (Monto & Milrod, 2013). Yet, several studies have debunked this particular notion and asserted that there are no outstanding personality features that differentiate men who purchase sex from men who do not (Monto & McRee, 2005; Monto & Milrod, 2013; Serughetti, 2013).

As the initiatives of research and punitive measures have begun to shift from female suppliers to male buyers as the driving force behind prostitution, the motives behind why men utilize commercial sex are becoming more clear than just simply trying to meet a physical need, or acting out as a result of mental illness (Serughetti, 2012). It is through this research, especially that of qualitative studies, that we are coming to a greater understanding of the true complexities of this social issue.

Loneliness and Need for Intimacy

An interesting pattern emerged from descriptive demographics that focused on male clientele, which was that of marital status. While the results of some studies showed large portions of single individuals, or those who were divorced or widowed (Brents et al., 2021; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016), a compelling number of respondents were, in fact, married or otherwise involved in significant relationships (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Levina et al., 2012; Monto & McRee, 2005). Testimony and other data that explored men's motivations for buying commercial sex revealed that several of their participants felt disconnected from their partners, and it was through the purchase of sex that they were trying to obtain a feeling of intimacy and connection with another person (Brents et al., 2021; Deogan et al., 2020; Farley, 2009; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Levina et al., 2013; Monto & McRee, 2005). This motivation was most

observed among men who sought sex online (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016). One respondent explained that the emotional bond he felt during his encounters with sex workers was more desirable than the physical contact alone. Most of the participants in their study claimed to only have a business relationship established with just one worker, or the same small group of workers (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016). These findings further demonstrated the idea that these men are looking for a connection beyond sex.

Farley et al. (2009) found similar evidence of this particular motivation being the most cited among men who purchase sex, as more than half of their participants recognized that they had, or wanted to have, an “emotional connection” with their transactional sexual partners.

Levina et al. (2012) conducted a study that was unique in that it asked the sex workers themselves about the men who buy their services. Many of the women noted that their customers were lacking intimate and personal connections in their private lives, and they were looking for an experience in which sex was only secondary. The evidence presented in these studies that men are looking for more than just physical relief establishes that intimacy is a primary factor behind the purchase of commercial sexual services.

Variety

A common impression among society about those that purchase sex may be that men who do so are unable to find other partners that are willing to engage in sexual activity without an additional cost (Deogan et al., 2020). This component has been confirmed to some degree (Deogan et al., 2020; Serughetti, 2012). However, Farley et al. (2009) disputes that misconception, and claims that buying sex is generally not for lack of a partner. Rather, a great proportion of these men prefer variety in their choice of partner and their sexual experiences, and

commercial sex allows them to do just that. In fact, this factor was one of the most cited motivations among sex buyers (Farley et al., 2009).

Qualitative data from Huschke and Schubotz (2016) supported this claim. Over half of the participants in their study stated they preferred to see different sex workers. Numeric figures collected by Monto and McRee (2005) showed that almost 20% of those in their study had 3 or 4 sexual partners in the previous year. Three-quarters of those in yet another study reported having more than 15 sexual partners in their lifetime, and verified their predilection for variety (Farley et al., 2015). Nearly 30% of sex buyers in a study completed by Farley et al. (2009) reported they had more than 50 sexual partners.

Some literature explains that men buying sex as a means of alleviating powerful biological urges is a dated, elementary assumption (Bretns et al., 2021). Interestingly, others use this exact reason to interpret the need these men clearly demonstrate for sexual variation and diversity (Farley, 2015; Hammond & van Hooff, 2019; Serughetti, 2012). Hammond and van Hooff (2019) explicitly state that men likely rely on an assortment of female sex workers as a primal need to assert their virility. Another popular reason given for multiple partners is that some may be more willing to participate in particular sexual acts over others (Hammond & van Hooff, 2019; Monto & Milrod, 2013).

Exploring One's Sexuality

Demographics that display age display the average male clientele's age to be between 30 to 50 years of age (Bretns et al., 2021; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Monto & Hotaling, 2001; Monto & McRee, 2005). Perhaps coincidentally, this is also the age range that men are considered to have fully matured emotionally enabling men to feel more capable in learning to understand their own sexualities (Horne, 2021).

One's sexual needs and interests change according to different phases of their life (Hefner, 2018). Interacting with sex workers can assist in recognizing the deeper meaning in these changes. This was an interesting trend that emerged within the qualitative data of Huschke and Schubotz (2016), who cited that the sexual repressive attitudes in Ireland, where their study took place, directly attributed to the rising popularity of commercial sex, as more and more individuals grew to accept their personal sexual aspects.

One of their participants expressed that purchasing sex aided in his journey of self-discovery after an ongoing battle with mental illness, while another felt that sex workers were the only ones who were open-minded about his self-expression through cross-dressing. A third man stated that sex with an escort simply empowered him to experiment (Huschke & Schubotz, 2016).

Sexual exploration was popularly referenced among married men in particular (Hammond & van Hooff, 2019; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016). They alluded to the fact that their wives' sexualities had also changed, but in ways that were divergent from their own. In fact, many of these men explained that their wives were no longer interested in any sort of sexual relationship, leaving them to feel as though there were no alternative aside from commercial sex. It should be further noted that this motivation overlaps with that of variety, in that sex workers are often more willing to perform particular sexual acts over spouses or other non-transactional partners. This serves in providing further exploration on behalf of the buyer.

The “Girlfriend Experience”

The desire to have a short-term, no-strings-attached connection with a woman, and one that was still somewhat romantic, was frequently mentioned among the male respondents in several studies. Referred to by researchers as “The Girlfriend Experience” (Bretns et al., 2021;

Farley et al., 2009; Milrod & Monto, 2012), those men who cite this as their primary motivation of purchasing commercial sex state that they want provisional interactions with straightforward expectations (Farley et al., 2009). One individual within a study elaborated by saying, “I want them [prostitutes] to role play to be a pretend girlfriend. To a third person it looks like we’re in love - but it’s a casual hookup” (Farley et al., 2009, p. 20).

The studies that feature the Girlfriend Experience within their analyses offer quantitative data in the form of statistical frequency, as well as qualitative data that allow men to expand upon why this is their objective when purchasing commercial sex. Milrod and Monto (2012) reported that 72% of their respondents claimed that they wanted their encounters with prostitutes to resemble that of interactions they would have with significant others. Farley et al. (2009) showed that 32% of their responses were dedicated to buying sex as within this category, or as other entertainment.

The descriptions men gave within qualitative data regarding their reasons for seeking out this kind of interaction was rather consistent across the sources that were used for this review. Men disclosed that they enjoyed the intimacy they felt with sex workers, but lacked confidence in seeking out conventional romantic partners or simply did not have the time to spare for a genuine relationship (Farley et al., 2009; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Milrod & Monto, 2012).

Another dimension added to the element of the Girlfriend Experience was offered by Milrod and Monto (2012), wherein they suggest that this dynamic is actually fraudulent on its face. In other words, men are not truly looking for a meaningful, intimate connection with a temporary partner; rather, this is a way men may justify purchasing commercial sex. Hammond and van Hooff (2019) made a similar suggestion within their study, as their participants felt the exchange of monetary instruments for sexual services was fair. Once again, research that is

designed to investigate this motive further would determine whether this suggestion can be validated, as well as the support behind it.

Aggression and Objectification

The evidence that has been presented so far has helped to identify the motivations of male sex buyers beyond the idea that they are using prostitution to satisfy a physical urge; rather, their inclinations hold many more intricacies. However, there is also much evidence to demonstrate the dangers of prostitution, and to support the fact that a percentage of men do utilize the practice to satisfy violent urges or as opportunities to demean women (Farley et al., 2009; Monto & Hotaling, 2001). In fact, this is the motivation which was most contradicted within research literature.

Those studies which argued that men purchase sex as a means of hurting or otherwise degrading women held that there were specific reasons men relied upon for doing so. Beliefs in rape myths was one of these which was somewhat pervasive among men who purchased sex, potentially acting as an explanation for their susceptibility to violence and objectification. Rape myths are cliched, unfounded ideologies that neutralize, or in some cases encourage, assault and objectification of women (Monto & Hotaling, 2001). These ideologies allude to victim-blaming, or the notion that women hold responsibility for any displays of violence that are perpetrated against them.

Farley et al. (2009) found that rape myths played a direct role in whether men were likely to demonstrate violence against female sex workers. Nearly half of their participants held the belief that once paid, prostitutes were not entitled to any liberties or further input as to the actions the men took against them. An alarming 16% of them also reported they would commit rape if they knew there would be no legal consequences. In a later study by Farley et al. (2015) in which

it was hypothesized that men use prostitution to assert distorted views of masculinity onto vulnerable women, patterns of sexual belligerence once again emerged; as significant numbers of their male sex buyers were more likely to exhibit sexually coercive behaviors, to consider women as secondary citizens, and to have lower levels of empathy toward women involved in the sale of sex. Similar findings were mentioned by Hammond and van Hooff (2019). It was concluded that even if men did not demonstrate physical aggression toward sex workers, the fact that they utilized commercial sexual services in the first place was adequate indication that they endorsed harmful actions directed toward women (Farley et al., 2009).

On the other hand, multiple studies found little--to-no evidence of men using prostitution to act violently; and that other motivations, such as those that met men's emotional needs, took precedence. Huschke and Schubotz (2016) explicitly examined the likelihood of men taking advantage of sex workers, and found that their participants indicated they would only initiate and continue sexual encounters if they could determine that the seller was acting of their own accord. Correspondingly, the sex workers they studied reported their customer base was generally considerate inside of their interactions.

Furthermore, it was generally agreed upon that men who purchased sex were not more likely to support rape myths or show sexual aggression than men who did not buy sex (Brents et al., 2021; Monto & Hotaling, 2001; Monto & McRee, 2005). In fact, findings from Brents et al. (2020) showed that men who purchased sex were actually more likely to hold favorable views toward women and when they projected their survey answers across that of the male population nationwide. Through this data, they concluded that men regarding female sex workers with hostility was simply not conducive to the experience of sex-buying.

While violent behavior is certainly a reality in the world of prostitution, study results showed these percentages of men were minimal. In fact, in a study published by Monto and McRee (2005), less than 1% of participants reported forcing themselves on a woman. Sex workers who were interviewed by Levina et al. (2012) estimated that 10% of their customer base was prone to violent behaviors, but that these were most associated with those who were aroused by deviant sexual fetishes. In other words, men requested the violence be directed at themselves by the sex worker.

No matter the disagreement among researchers about this aspect of male clientele, a primary contributor to the continued hostility directed at female sex workers was found within its legal status. In most cases, legislation grants women no legal protections as sex providers, leaving them open to perpetrators and offenders (Farley et al., 2015; Levina et al., 2012; Monto & Hotaling, 2001).

Locations of Purchases

The sale of sex has historically been conveyed as a man trolling the streets in his vehicle, looking for a woman who most closely fits his desired criteria. Once a woman is located and an agreement is established, the woman climbs into the vehicle and they retreat to another location, oftentimes a parking lot, to complete the transaction (Khan, 2015).

Of course, while this dynamic of interaction, which is often referred to as “in-person” or street-level (Brents et al., 2021), is certainly a reality when it comes to the purchase of sex, data show that the introduction and growth of the Internet has created new opportunities for men to purchase sex from a variety of outlets. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that this method is utilized much more often than in-person purchasing (Brents et al., 2021; Farley et al., 2009). Escort websites, chat rooms, dating apps, and even advertising websites like Craigslist are

popular mechanisms men use to establish contact with a sex worker wherein they actualize plans to meet at a later date for sex.

Interestingly, research has uncovered demographic and personality patterns between men who prefer using online services to obtain sexual services over men who buy sex at the street level (Brents et al., 2021; Farley et al., 2009). For example, men who purchase services online are more likely to earn higher incomes, which aligns with the fact that many of the outlets available on Internet platforms are more expensive (Brents et al., 2021).

Personality patterns among men who purchase sex are more complex. Those who prefer to purchase sex in-person have been found to be more insecure with themselves, indicating a sense of shame or embarrassment for their actions (Farley, 2015). However, they also espoused masculine ideals that supported their feelings of entitlement to females' bodies (Monto & Hotaling, 2001). The combination of these characteristics makes this subgroup more likely to exhibit violent behaviors toward female sex workers (Farley et al., 2009; Farley et al., 2015).

On the other hand, men who utilize online services to purchase sexual services display greater enthusiasm and acceptance for their choices. As Farley et al. (2009) wrote, "the online subculture of buyers placed significant value on the notion that paid sexual encounters are normal and non-deviant, with significant value placed on buyers' experiences and knowledge of the sex trade" (p. 10). This notion was supported by Monto and Milrod (2013), in which the participants in their study viewed the purchase of sex as completely ordinary. Similarly, Brents et al. (2020) reported that this subgroup described an understanding of commercial sex as a legitimate product for sale and the importance of considering the other party within the transaction.

The differences among men who purchase sex online and those who prefer to utilize in-person services have become evident in just the last decade or so in which the interests of research into prostitution have been centered on male clientele. This particular aspect of the dynamic also speaks to the need for continued, more-detailed studies to discover the other ways in which these differing methods demonstrate men's attitudes, as well as their conduct within the encounters themselves.

Strain Theory and How it Applies to Buying Sex

The Evolution of Strain Theory

Strain theory has sustained numerous revisions throughout its development and now serves as one of the most reliable criminological theories (Lanier et al., 2015). Its foundation, which was originally introduced as anomie theory, was built by Emile Durkheim at the turn of the 20th century. Durkheim believed that humans are naturally egotistical, and unable to regulate their ambition for gratification unless guided by outside forces. He asserted that societal structures acted as this guide by identifying goals and ideals that could be widely valued throughout the community; in turn, these goals would help to restrain the natural human drive (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). In other words, once a society was able to identify the measures that would bring fulfillment, individuals within those communities would strive to reach those criteria. This could be education, strong careers, monetary earnings, and ideal family structures.

A critical point brought forth through Durkheim's theory was that there was a greater likelihood of crime when civilizations were unable to act as this guide in times of quick, dramatic changes within. This was the case even if these changes were positive (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). When such climatic changes occur, the management and organization of human aspirations was also interrupted, allowing individuals to give in to their most primal

motive of gluttony (Lanier et al., 2015). This phenomenon of rising crime rates that are attributed to the oversight of societal regulation is what Durkheim referred to as anomie, or normlessness (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015).

In 1938, Robert Merton modified Durkheim's anomie theory by suggesting that it was not so much the decreased modulation featured in fast-paced societal change that acted as a catalyst for increased criminal activity, but a combination of communal expectations and the limited means to obtain them (Antonaccio et al., 2015). To clarify, this means that those who wanted to achieve the goals that were indicative of success but did not have adequate methods of doing so were more likely to engage in criminal or deviant behavior in order to reach their objective. Merton insisted this type of strain can be observed through three factors: the imbalance between the indications of success and the lack of commensurate circumstances for each individual to reach those indicators; allowing those within a society to succumb to their personal ambitions while failing to establish critical behavioral principles; and neglecting to adequately assign individuals to work environments that are appropriate to their level of competence (Lanier et al., 2015).

These variations of anomie and strain theory influenced Robert Agnew to develop his general strain theory, the most modern presentation of strain theory as we know it today; however, this paper will follow his original iteration which was published in 1992. In this approach, Agnew credits the manifestation of criminal behavior to be a result of strain experienced throughout everyday life and relationships with others; not the strain of trying, and failing, to achieve communal standards of success (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). The three origins of strain as outlined by Agnew (1992) are "strain as the actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals, strain as the actual or anticipated removal of positively valued

stimuli, and strain as the actual or anticipated presentation of negatively valued stimuli.” (pg. 47). Agnew argues that a response to these types of strain may very well likely be engaging in criminal behavior (Lanier et al., 2015).

At first glance, Agnew’s adaptation of strain theory may resemble those of Durkheim and Merton by attributing criminal behavior to particular environmental factors and somewhat unreasonable societal standards. Yet, Agnew’s take on strain theory distinguishes itself through its targeted audience. Durkheim and especially Merton’s theories concentrate on working classes, as those most likely to experience the types of strain they defined (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). The strain criteria that were established by Agnew are much more personalized; and in turn, are better applicable to individuals who occupy each class. In this sense, general strain theory was able to gain recognition as a reliable means of explaining criminal behavior, especially as Agnew worked to further refine his ideas.

While each of these respective theories hold aspects that are unique to themselves, each one concedes that criminal or atypical behavior is a natural reaction to aberrant circumstances (Lanier et al., 2015). For the purposes of this paper, prostitution will be observed through the guidelines of Robert Agnew’s general strain theory.

How Strain Theory Relates to Purchasing Sex

Viewing the act of commercial sex buying through Agnew’s strain theory holds the potential to gain key insights as to the inner workings of this phenomena. Understanding the primary motivations of men who purchase sex can help predict future implications for the practice, both culturally and within legislation.

In its most basic sense, Agnew’s version of strain theory focused on microstructural levels of strain, or those which manifest among individuals rather than economic systems. For

example, strain, or frustration with one's circumstances, can emanate from career goals and expectations to domestic relationships, such as friendships or romantic partnerships; therefore, anyone, in any socioeconomic class, is vulnerable to feelings of strain (Lanier et al., 2015). The truth in this statement can be observed within the descriptive demographics that were collected by each of the studies, as men who purchased sex belonged to every racial category and age bracket, level of education, annual income, and marital status (Brents et al., 2021; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Monto & Hotaling, 2001; Monto & McRee, 2005).

However, comparing the basic element of who strain applies to against the labyrinthine pathologies of those who purchase commercial sex does not fairly demonstrate exactly why this theoretical framework is a solid method in which to further explore these practices. To adequately apply general strain theory to the male clientele of sex workers, it is crucial to examine the motivations they have identified within the studies and how they compare to the components of general strain theory as described by Agnew.

Once again, the three origins of stress as outlined by Agnew are "strain as the actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals; strain as the actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli; and the strain as the actual or anticipated presentation of negatively valued stimuli" (Lanier et al., 2015, p. 229). Agnew asserts that resulting perceptions of strain from any of these sources can ultimately lead to criminal or deviant behavior (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). In this case, the criminal or deviant behavior is the purchase of commercial sex.

A primary motivation that was referenced within several publications was the desire to have a meaningful emotional connection with another human being through sexual intercourse. This was common among both single and married men; yet, married men were unique in that

they explained it was their strained or damaged relationships with their wives that led them to make the decision to purchase sex (Brents et al., 2021; Deogan et al., 2020; Farley et al., 2009; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Levina et al., 2012; Monto & McRee, 2005). The fact that men within these studies cited buying sex because of dissatisfactory sexual relationships with their partners has an overlapping correlation with two of the elements of general strain theory. First, that which outlines that frustration can stem from the failure to reach highly regarded goals. For these men, this may take the form of a happy marriage, which they are unable to pursue or obtain for any number of reasons. Second, unsatisfactory relationships correspond with the element of strain which explains that frustration may manifest from the “actual or anticipated removal of positive stimuli,” which is that of their sex life with their chosen romantic partner (Lanier et al., 2015). This is somewhat unsurprising, as Tibbetts and Hemmens (2015) claim that this element, the removal of positive stimuli, is the most common catalyst for tension within one’s personal life.

The motivation of exploring one’s sexuality presents variables of strain theory which were observable within the studies. This was most transparent within the data analyses of Huschke and Schubotz (2016). Their study took place in Ireland, a country that is heavily influenced by Christian religious ideals that shun the expression of sex. Their male participants reported their culturally-sensitive attitudes toward sex resulted in their suppression of their biological appetites, even when their wives became unable or otherwise unwilling to have a sexual partnership. They went on to explain that it was only when this castigating, religion-induced environment felt unbearable that they sought out commercial sexual services. This could correlate to the third element of strain theory, which proposes individuals act out in the face of adverse provocation.

The Girlfriend Experience is a motivation that can draw an alignment with the first element of general strain theory; that is, those negative feelings that emerge as a result of the lack of success in attaining goals that meet their own or others' intentions. Many of these men reported feeling unconfident in approaching women for personal relationships, being skeptical about their roles inside of personal relationships, or simply not having the time to pursue meaningful connections (Farley et al., 2009; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Milrod & McRee, 2005). Therefore, a temporary agreement with a clear objective in mind was most satisfactory. As previously stated by one study participant, "To a casual observer, we're in love - but it's a casual hookup" (Farley et al., 2009, p. 20). Given this quote, it would not be a far stretch to assume that these men, at least some of them, are using paid sexual encounters to project the idea that they are in a happy relationship to others in order to meet what expectations they may have.

Further evidentiary support for the purchase of sex to be responses to strain is offered by Serughetti (2012) when she summarized that men often respond to negative emotions like anger or depression with sexual behavior. A resolution which would be more conducive to processing these emotions and healing from them would be to explore themselves cognitively and simply recognize their feelings without making sexual correlations. In other words, finding ways to relieve frustrations that were not sexual, or confronting the source of strain entirely.

Variety in sexual partners and aggression toward women did not present variables which were parallel with the elements of general strain theory, but that should not discount the indisputable potential strain theory holds for exploring the purchasing of commercial sex. Research that is specially designed to measure these elements may very well uncover correlations that were not evident within this review.

Conclusion

Decades of studies on prostitution are beginning to change the focus from female sellers to male buyers, which has brought an entirely new understanding to the dynamic of prostitution and buying sex (Brents et al., 2021; Deogan et al., 2020). Despite the deliberation between researchers as to how prevalent the buying and selling of sex truly is, it is a safe assumption that at least some populations of men are going to continue to purchase sex. Rather than turn a blind eye to this reality, or continue efforts of arresting and punishing women for their sales, it would be in our best interest as a society to better understand why these behaviors materialize and what other information they might offer us. This provides better nuance not only to our cultural standards, but legislation as well; as observable patterns may work to reduce violence by influencing lawmakers to implement better protections for female sex workers (Deogan et al., 2012).

The motivations that were previously studied by a myriad of researchers and presented within this review contribute to the idea that we have a foundational understanding of male sex buyers, although much more exploration is necessary. More detailed research may uncover reasons that were not previously mentioned or otherwise known within the field of social sciences. Additionally, research that is directed at comparing these motivations even more closely to Agnew's general strain theory may create more transparency within this phenomenon, while further solidifying the theory's standing within the world of criminal justice.

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