Gender and Power Issues Underlying Sexual Exploitation in the Entertainment and Hospitality Industries

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Abstract

It is arguable that the highlighting of sexual exploitation in the high profile film and entertainment industries has had the salutary effect of ‘taking the garbage lid’ off what much of society has preferred to treat as a ‘can of worms’ more comfortably ignored than confronted. This paper is necessarily discursive, since it takes a broad historical approach to the power relations between the two principally recognized genders. It discusses the breakdown of the traditional division of labour in society (Durkheim) and a similar fragmentation of Talcott Parsons’ social and organizational bedrock of pattern maintenance structures. Engels’ sociological observations of Victorian society are paired with the literary analysis of his contemporary Thomas Hardy. The thread common to all is the connection between the power relations of the two major genders and the degree of sexual exploitation. Earlier traditional role models are borrowed from the Bible, of both genders (Abraham, Sarah, Jael, Samson and Delilah), suggesting that the inter-gender power relations of male-female partners are not necessarily and consistently skewed in favour of the male, within a traditional family setting. It seems worth pursuing the argument that, with the diremption of the traditional family unit as the cornerstone of society, the balance of power between genders is upset in favour of the male. If this is the case, one might expect higher degrees of sexual exploitation in industries where the majority of females have manifestly lower status jobs, especially if their job security is weak, income is low, and alternative job opportunities are limited. This scenario would help explain the very high proportion of prostitutes in London in the 19th century; together with the large number of pregnancies among domestic servants. In the present century one could posit that much of the female workforce previously employed in private domestic service have now been re-deployed in the hospitality sector. The consequences of birth control are discussed within this context and contemporary examples of sexual exploitation analysed, from the viewpoint of increased transparency. The recent exposures of exploitation in the film and entertainment industry raise the question as to how much in common they have, with the older types of sexual exploitation typified in wholesale prostitution; and the precarious, sexually vulnerable job roles of domestic service and latterly, hotel service. The notion of organizational motivation, and its adulteration and potential exploitation, is discussed, to suggest potential differences as well as commonalities, in the dynamics of sexual relations and exploitation in the two industries.

Key Words: Gender, Power, Sexual Exploitation, Entertainment Industry, Hospitality Management