

How can the sexual contract help us to understand the relationship between prostitution and domestic service?



Catherine Weiss
School of Global, Urban and Social Studies
RMIT University

Overview



- ❧ Introduction
 - ❧ the theoretical rift over prostitution
- ❧ In the literature
 - ❧ the “empirical” connection
- ❧ The “theoretical” connection
 - ❧ 1. sex work position feminists (Guillaumin, Tabet)
 - ❧ 2. abolitionist feminists (Dworkin)
 - ❧ 3. Bringing these together (Pateman)

Introduction



- ❧ “Empirical” relationship between prostitution and paid domestic service
- ❧ Recognition of this relationship depends heavily on theoretical position in prostitution debate
 - ❧ Sex work position feminists
 - ❧ Abolitionist feminists
- ❧ Legacy of socialist and radical feminism

In the literature



- ❧ Recognition in historical literature not uncommon
- ❧ In the sex work position literature:
 - ❧ A few detailed contemporary accounts: Mahdavi, Lévy (& Lieber), Oso, Moujoud (& Pourette)
 - ❧ Other research mentions broader links between industries: e.g. Anderson, Agustín
- ❧ In the abolitionist literature:
 - ❧ Not mentioned
 - ❧ Or differentiated: e.g. Jeffreys
 - ❧ Except when talking about mail-order brides

The “theoretical” connection



❧ Tinsman (1992):

“Scholars’ recognition of the fluid boundaries between paid housework and sexual services and/or violence sustain [the] assertion that what is bought and sold in the domestic marketplace is not simply alienated labor but the right to control the whole person. This places sexual domination at the center of the labor contract... the basic conditions of the domestic worker’s contract [are such that] women sell sexuality as part of their labor.”

The “theoretical” connection



Overview

1. Sex work position – Colette Guillaumin, Paola Tabet
2. Abolitionist – Andrea Dworkin
3. Bringing these together – Carole Pateman

(1) Sex work position



- ❧ “French materialist feminism”
- ❧ Colette Guillaumin (1995): women’s entire person is appropriated by men – not just labour power
 - ❧ Women’s bodies perform labour and are used sexually by men
 - ❧ Prostitution = “collective appropriation”
 - ❧ Domestic service fulfils Guillaumin’s conditions of appropriation (Galerand and Gallie, 2014)
 - ❧ Sexual abuse of domestic workers can be understood as appropriation according to Guillaumin (Weiss, 2017)
- ❧ Paola Tabet (2004): “economico-sexual exchange” – a continuum of all sexual relations between men and women involving an economic transaction
 - ❧ Marriage: women provide a group of interlinked services (emotional labour, sexual access, child-rearing, domestic service, etc.) in exchange for material support
 - ❧ Prostitution: “sexual services” alone are sold for a well-defined price
- ❧ Domestic service can be located on Tabet’s continuum

(2) Abolitionist



- ∞ Dworkin (1974): women are not afforded access to sex-neutral labour, so must do “sex labour” to survive

“Wife or whore: the whore comes in from the cold to become the wife if she can; the wife thrown out into the cold becomes the whore if she must”

Differences with (1)

1. Focuses solely on sexual component of marriage
2. Marriage and prostitution equally negative?

(3) Bringing them together



- Pateman (1988): labour power cannot be separated from the person of the worker – this is a *political fiction*
 - True for all workers but completely nonsensical for prostitution
 - Domestic service is an intermediate case
- This concept allows the relation of domestic service and prostitution