

Marriage and prostitution research paper examples

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Marriage is considered an honorable institution. In the genre of literature, marriage and prostitution are common issues. One should consider the objective of marriage as a business in which people choose mates that are financially beneficial for both of the involved people. Society sees one as honorable while the other is considered an illegal act. Are these two a continuum of each other? As we examine such literary works as *Pygmalion* by Shaw and *Measure for Measure* by Shakespeare, and *Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck, we get a clear vision of these two entities. Prostitution is usually called the world's oldest profession but it is not. It has been thus labeled because of western society's attitudes towards women. It is their belief that women are property, sinful and placed here to serve men. Prostitution has been a temporary job where there was the involvement of choice.

Most prostitutes leave the profession and get married. Some however, remain because of their economic standing. " Throughout history prostitution has fallen into three classes; the street walker who walks the streets looking for clients, the women in brothels and courtesans or call girls." (1) There is very little difference between marriage and prostitution. Prostitutes have more freedom to say no while in marriage the wife has to comply with most of the husband's wishes. If the prostitute says no, she is free of any obligation while in the case of the wife she might be subject to some type of domestic abuse, be left to fend for herself or used as an inanimate object. One could then say the prostitute is her own woman. A housewife is seen as a woman with dignity because she has her husband and family while the prostitute is seen as an independent entity with no one to support her. This is a plus as it presents a united front to the world. The prostitute, however

does not have that luxury although she might have a good partner.

Historically, prostitutes were used even in the churches where they were classified " temple prostitutes." They were slaves and considered the lowest class of prostitutes. It was believed that these prostitutes were associated with the temple strictly for economic reasons. They performed business in the streets and turned over their earnings to the temple. In most cultures, prostitution played a significant role in the shaping of the morals of the country. In the Victorian era life presented many economic hardships.

Marriage was seen as a financial contract but the rise in benevolent marriages grew enormously. This however, did not stem prostitution. W. R Greg, the social critic, believes prostitution is ongoing because for each prostitute that sells herself locally, ten are available to a husband. He is therefore comparing prostitution to marriage.

In Shaw's play, Pygmalion these two institutions are closely related. This is seen in the character Mrs. Warren because this is her chosen profession.

When this play was written, the female professional was a new concept. The only profession other than prostitution was for women to become housewives before this period, and there was some lingering opposition to the idea of females entering male dominated professions. It is believed that Shaw wrote the part of Eliza Dolittle for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a beautiful actress, with whom it was rumored that he was having an affair. Shaw had strong beliefs and used his play to bring light to the pretenses in relationships especially marriage.

Shaw was involved in a sexless marriage so he seemingly feels free to condemn marriage as an interchange of sexual interactions for money

similar to prostitution although he was giving the gifts a husband would give to a wife but gained the rewards of sex from his wife. Eliza's father expresses no regrets when he is led to believe that Eliza will take up this profession. She however denounces it. She declares that she was less degraded as a flower-seller than as a refined lady trying to make an appropriate marriage. She felt that as a flower-seller, at least, she wasn't selling her body. She was appalled by the idea of prostitution and was indeed more satisfied with the small pay earned by selling flowers than earning more in the career of a prostitute. " Eliza responds that she was above selling herself when she was a working-class woman; she merely sold flowers instead of her body." (Act IV)

In Shakespeare's play, Measure for Measure, there is again reference to the profession of prostitution and the fact that sex is a big deal and is often linked with the overall deterioration of the society. He feels that Vienna has more than its fair share of brothels and that causes the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and the rise of children who are considered unlawful. Although prostitution and fornication are illegal, it often seems like decadence surrounds all of Vienna as it has engaged in forbidden carnal behavior. The play acknowledges that illegitimate children and the spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases are pressing social concerns.

“ Behold, behold Madam Mitigation comes

I have purchased as many diseases under her roof

As come to ---“(Act1. 2. 9)

Shakespeare also felt the only way to stem prostitution was to get rid of the whore houses.

These institutions are very much related in Shaw's plays, especially in Mrs. Warren's profession. Measure for Measure also questions whether or not the government should be involved in regulating sexuality. This seems to be a resounding question in every era. Shakespeare, in Measure for Measure, seems to allude to the sin of lust, corruption and the weakness of men. In essence he places the blame on the seductress or harlot, while the weak man is absolved.

Many researchers have looked at the pros and cons of both marriage and prostitution. Some researchers agree that wives and street prostitutes are somewhat different because they believe wives are superior to prostitute because of their value in society. It would seem, in the economist's thinking that they are like goods whose value increases with the economy. Because of this, prostitution is not as popular in countries that have good financial standing. In their comparison, they see wives and prostitutes as major commodities. Wives however seem to have an edge because of their ability and choice to have children while most prostitutes do not. It is believed that marriage is a beneficial form of income. Interestingly, however is the fact that men utilize fewer prostitutes as their monetary value increases. One must then wonder if the use of prostitutes is just a fleeting pastime to fill the gap of inactivity and boredom.

We have looked at the negative aspects of prostitution but novelists and artists saw prostitution as a sexual freedom from the conventions and restrictions of society. They saw prostitution as a physical desire which was

free from ethics, religious conviction and society. French literature used prostitution as a metaphor of commerce, or city life. Balzac used this to describe Paris as a “ great house of prostitution” in his book *Girl with the Golden Eyes* and to compare all work for money as a form of prostitution. “ Gold and Pleasure! If we comprise in it all those who hold out their hands for alms, for lawful wages, or the five francs that are granted to every kind of Parisian prostitution. In short, for all the money well or ill earned, this people [Parisians] numbers three hundred thousand individuals.”(5) The wealthy society needed a place to air their anxieties about female sexuality, which they believed a threat to female independence and suffrage movements, so they used prostitution as the place to do so. Prostitutes were never under the control of the male dominated family and middle class union of marriage but the courtesan continued to entice the bankers, businessmen and counts. It offered them an alarming case of female self-sufficiency, sexuality, socially and politically. This fear of the prostitute’s independence continued into the late nineteenth century in the form of hatred of women as they were seen to be just as carnal and greedy as prostitutes.

Prostitution, however seemed to be a conduit bridging the gap in boring, sexless marriages. It was able to replace the glamour that was otherwise missing from the lives of people. Most courtesans went on to become married women much like the modern call girl who might have prostituted in order to survive economically. But what does that say about modern marriages and the effects of prostitution? In modern times most men who go to prostitutes do so to satisfy a fantasy or a need that they do not get from their wives. There are times, also when they have the desire for someone

new because they see the sex act with their wives as stagnant and boring. When they pay for the service all their needs are met without any guilt on the part of the partner. At times the male feels he cannot abstain while his spouse is away so it is easier to go to a prostitute. They also feel there is no emotional involvement so it is easier for them to gain their pleasure and have no fears or repercussions. Another reason for the modern man's use of a prostitute is because he is still rebelling against his mother's early lectures against his having forbidden affairs. Unconsciously, might be spiting her through his wife, another mother figure, rather than to seek the kind of sex-love fulfillment that he really wanted.

There are many changes that have taken place during the passage of time. This calls for a reexamination of modern marriages. Marriage is no longer just a means of joining families but a money making venture which should provide handsomely for children as they grow. It is now meant to also serve as the buffer for all the emotional, sexual needs of each other. In this institution of marriage, two people are supposed to meet most of the needs of each other for most of their lives. This is somewhat impossible as people do grow in different directions. This fails to allow growth, and develop, over their lives. They usually grow but at different rates. It causes one mate to stifle a part of themselves to accommodate the other. When the sexual needs are not being met, the male, most often, chooses to find this in the comfort of another female which is usually a prostitute or a mistress.

So we must examine our reasons for frowning on prostitution. Are we so blinded by tradition that we are unable to look at prostitution objectively? After all it would seem that marriage and prostitution are the continuum of

each other. It is the belief in some circles that a prostitute gets paid up front for her services while a wife gets paid in gifts, vacations and other monetary gifts. In essence, then, we must look at the fact that most women and men could be classified prostitutes. There is another school of thought that we all prostitute ourselves. We offer service to our jobs and are remunerated after the service is complete. Isn't this a form of prostitution? The one thing that separates us from prostitutes is the fact that we are not selling our bodies. Some believe prostitution is harmful to those who indulge in it. " The majority of female prostitutes become HIV/AIDS infected by having sexual relations with customers and being IV drug users (Flowers 30)."

As we look back at *Pygmalion*, we can clearly see that Mrs. Warren although is involved in an illicit type of business is no worse than the prostitutes of today. She provides a service and is quite helpful to others. Prostitution does not deter her from being compassionate. There is more evidence though very subtle that there was prostitution in Curley's marriage in *Of Mice and Men*. In *Choose Your Own Woman: Of Mice and Men*, there are two options: a prostitute, or Curley's wife. Because they are always on the move, the availability of nice girls is nonexistent. Faced with this obstacle, they realize their options are either to find any woman or get involved with another man's wife. George sighed. " You give me a good whore house every time," he said. " A guy can go in an' get drunk and get ever'thing outa his system all at once, an' no messes. And he knows how much it's gonna set him back. These here jail baits is just set on the trigger of the hoosegow." (3. 185)

George sees women as objects of sexual pleasure and of course Carly's wife falls under that category. Though attracted to her, he knows that she spells

danger. He feels that he is safer with a prostitute because he will get what he pays for. There were also other reasons men frequented whore houses. This is the case with George, who sees trouble when a man gets involved with what he calls "jail bait." It is his belief that if he goes to a good whore house he can get drunk and get what he pays for without any hassles while with a young girl, he is faced with the possibilities of prosecution.

Prostitution, over time, has been at the helm of society. Men have needs that must be met for different reasons and prostitutes provide the service. The disconnection of emotional entanglement makes it easier for the trade to thrive and for the needs of men be met. Is this wrong? One does not know the answer as it seems to serve a purpose. Modern marriage and modern prostitution seems to balance each other as they both provide services. In the days of slavery, men would go to their female slaves while their wives turned their eyes away from what was happening. The man, who was being deprived sexually by a wife who was cold and emotionally removed, went to his slaves and forcefully fulfilled his needs. These are some of the reasons that husbands go to prostitutes. It is his feeling that because he pays for services; he should get anything and everything that he desires. The prostitute obliges because she has been paid for her services.

Prostitution then is like slavery and it occurs even in modern times when children and women are caught in the cycle of human trafficking for the sex trade. Women and children are usually the property of pimp's, brothel owners and some customers who use them for monetary gain, sexual gratification and power or domination. Women, who work in the prostitution trade, have been subjected to maltreatment of sexually abusive adults. She

is usually held in bondage with a pimp or by a customer who uses her on a weekly basis while taking her earnings.

Prostitution was always linked to women but in modern times there are also male prostitutes and gigolos. When men practice the selling of their bodies for pay, they are likewise called prostitutes. Researchers have not done much work in the area of male prostitution. One woman said she pays for a male prostitute because she does not want the complications that might be involved in a relationship. It does not take away from the relationship with her children and does not complicate her job or her life. She knows that she can get involved in clandestine arrangements but she would prefer not having to deal with the results of what will happen the next day. : " I can't be bothered with dating, as it's fraught with complications, and lots of men don't like an Alpha female who concentrates as much on her business as I do."

These men are also paid for services by professional women. The difference is that it is done discretely and no one knows about the women that use them. They are however not ostracized. It is as if they have Carte Blanc to be who they want to be and to maintain their dignity as gentlemen. Unlike the female prostitute, the male prostitute is unlikely to be treated with impunity. He earns his money and spends it without a pimp to control him. Does male prostitution help in female boredom as well? That is a question that is unanswerable at this time.

We cannot address prostitution and marriage without looking at the prostitution of children. Child prostitution is defined as the use of a child in sexual acts for monetary gain. Child prostitution is forced labor. " The Greek

'boy love,' the Victorian cult of the little girl, and international child prostitution are all practices which illustrate the pervasiveness of the problem in human history." The child has no choice in the matter. This is a heinous act that has been in force since the early nineteenth century. In some countries these children are forced to participate because of poverty in their families. It has become more popular over the years. How can a man or woman, married with children, use a child for sexual purposes? This proves that child prostitution is about power and monetary gain. I do not believe it is even about the pleasure as much as it is about taking what they have paid for. The common belief about child prostitutes is that they are sexually active, independent and immoral. They are appealing to the desires of men because they tend to be more vulnerable. Adults in society see them as sexually aggressive and stubborn. Society has the tendency to see this child as troubled rather than seeing the child as abused. Here again, we blame the victim. Child prostitutes were appealing to men because of their "purity." Because of the risks involved in illicit sex, most customers of the trade would rather use a child. Another sector likes virgins, thus their choice to procure a youngster who has never been touched. They are willing to pay top dollar for relieving a child of his/her virginity. The fear of a disease seems to be the reason for this violent act against children. 'The high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS make customers of prostitutes to look for children who are considered to be of low risk, and most probably virgins.' (Robinson, 2001: 13) Not only is there child prostitution but some cultures practice child marriages. Most cultures see marriage as consensual agreement between two people over the age of eighteen but up to the early

twentieth century, there have been cultures that have marriages between children. Child marriages are now being considered child prostitution because it is a forced union. Who, then benefits from this union? It would seem that a culture or families that indulge in this act are the beneficiaries. Marriage, a supposedly righteous union, has been debased and likened to prostitution because of man's disrespect of cultural mores and the major religious beliefs. Wives are no longer revered as most men are open with their indulgencies. Women no longer respect their spouses because they know of the acts committed with prostitutes, thus the breakdown of marriages. Although these indiscretions at times help a marriage to grow, most often it causes the deterioration in these relationships. In all eras and societies prostitution has existed. It seems to be the balancing force of marriages. It is demeaning and has been used to castigate and enslave a sector of society but as shown in history and in literature that it is a needed component. Prostitution has served as a pacifier of what ails our world. It has prevented random sexual abuse such as rape and murder. It serves a purpose and like marriage it has a place in society.

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