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Empirically Examining Prostitution through a Feminist Perspective

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EMPIRICALLY EXAMINING PROSTITUTION
THROUGH A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

by

Shyann Child

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

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in

Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Empirically Examining Prostitution
Through a Feminist Perspective

by

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Utah State University, 2009

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The purpose of this thesis is to empirically explore prostitution through a feminist perspective. Several background factors are explored on a small sample of women in the northeastern United States. Some of these women have been involved in an act of prostitution in their lifetime; some have not. This research will add to the body of knowledge on prostitution, as well as highlight the unique experiences of women. The goal is to understand whether or not these life experiences have had a hand in women's choices to engage in prostitution.

(51 pages)

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Shyann Child

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer.
-Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

As stated by Dalla (2000) “a prostitute by definition is one who exchanges sex or sexual favors for money, drugs or other desirable commodities” (p. 344). According to academic as well as public opinion there are many reasons why women or young girls enter the world of prostitution. While many of these reasons may be important to examine, relatively few capture the experiences of women. As such, I will argue in this thesis, after presenting some of the basic underlying assumptions that are frequently associated with this controversial subject, that some approaches to understanding prostitution are more valid than others. For the purpose of this thesis only female prostitutes will be discussed. While male prostitution is of equal interest, the feminist point of view presented here rules out a discussion of this topic.

Prostitutes and prostitution have always been a controversial subject that make many individuals feel uncomfortable. Historically and officially, it appears that prostitution is something that is typically looked down upon and viewed as morally repugnant—something in which only women with low self-esteem and low socioeconomic status participate. This, however, is not always the case. Prostitutes, as well as the men who use them, come from all walks of life; in fact, some prostitutes make a great deal of money. For example former Madam Heidi Fleiss came from a well-

established, wealthy family and used the connections that she possessed to run a high-priced prostitution ring in the early 90's (www.cnn.com 2008).

Research shows inconsistent results when examining the relationship between prostitution and class. While a number of studies have found that more females from lower class or working-class backgrounds are involved in prostitution, these studies tend to employ small sample sizes (Flowers 2001). On the other hand, research done with larger samples tends to find that there are a significant number of girls and women from upper-middle and middle-classes who are involved in prostitution (Flowers 2001). Prostitution is a profession that includes numerous individuals from not only poor and neglected backgrounds but also from affluent and successful backgrounds. Thus it would appear that prostitution transcends class boundaries.

Many people have difficulty understanding how individuals end up in the prostitution industry. Similarly, many prostitutes have a difficult time leaving prostitution. This thesis will explore mainstream criminological as well as feminist perspectives to identify the root or key factors that lead someone into prostitution. The sole purpose of this thesis is to focus on female prostitution; this thesis moves beyond common perceptions of prostitution and examines this topic from an academic perspective. Such an approach will provide a more valid understanding as to the different reasons why women end up in a life of prostitution. Because of the nature of their job, it is fair to say that many individuals in society tend to look down upon prostitutes. I am interested in bringing to the forefront their individual situations and clarifying common misunderstandings that are held about prostitutes and prostitution within our society.

Why Study Prostitution?

Prostitution has been a controversial subject that sociologists and psychologists alike have found interesting over the years. Psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus (1909) once stated that prostitution has had a long past however has also had a short history. Ebbinghaus argues that prostitution is a very complex subject to study. He suggests the difficulty is in obtaining any sort of worthwhile data on a representative sample of women who engage in prostitution. I want to understand the specific circumstances through a women's point of view; I believe that it is important to approach the topic of female prostitution through a feminist perspective. Further, I seek to understand which of the main factors found within the academic literature are the most important in becoming a prostitute. Therefore, the following literature review will discuss these factors, as well as demonstrate the important aspects of each factor.

Prostitution can come across to some people as a less than desirable career choice; however, for some women, it is a means of survival and subsistence. Understanding many of the background factors may help us to have a deeper empathy towards what they have gone through and why they are in the positions they currently are. This is the underlying reason as to why I chose to study the act of prostitution through a feminist point of view and I hope that by the end of this thesis you have a deeper understanding as to the importance of women's unique experiences and the impact her past can have on her future.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Types of Prostitutes

In this literature review I am going to first discuss the types of prostitutes that are in existence and then I am going to discuss the many background factors identified within the academic literature. These background factors include: physical, emotional and sexual abuse; runaway teens; the economic factor and finally forced prostitution.

There are many different types of prostitution that exist within our society, almost all of which are illegal (Flowers 2001). The first is that of forced prostitution. This is a widespread phenomenon that can be found in every country around the world. With an increase in economic growth and modernization, the demand for prostitutes has also grown immensely. Some parents in developing countries feel that the only way they can survive economic pressures is to sell one of their children to slaveholders (Bales 1999). Compensation for these children is small, but because of dire situations, these families believe it is the only way. Another gateway to forced prostitution is when men and women find themselves deceived by what a young female Brazilian called “their beautiful words” (Bales 1999). By this she means that slaveholders come into poor villages and talk of the “beautiful” United States; the slaveholders promise individuals wonderful and well-paying jobs there. With no other opportunities these impoverished individuals believe the “beautiful words” and go with the slaveholders. When they arrive to their destination, they are stripped of any identification and belongings they possess. Men are usually sent off to do some type of hard labor and the women and young girls to

live a life of forced prostitution within many of the brothels that exist all over the country (Bowe 2003).

The second type of prostitute is that of the homeless woman. These women are usually teenagers that have run away from home and are what Barri Flowers calls “survival prostitutes” (Flowers 2001). Given that they have nowhere to turn, these young girls find prostitution the only way to get necessities such as food and shelter to survive.

The third type of prostitute is the streetwalker. This type is narrowed down to a group of mostly women who find themselves trapped in this lifestyle (Flowers 2001). These individuals, for the most part, are also from broken or abusive households, from which they ran away, in order to escape the abuse (Young et al.1983).

The last type of prostitute is known as the drug-addicted prostitute. Many of the individuals that enter a life of prostitution do so to support an alcohol or drug addiction (Flowers 2001). Another common issue here is the fact that women and girls who enter prostitution later end up having a substance abuse problem further compounding their prostitution (Potterat et al.1998). It is important to be aware of the different types of prostitutes that exist in order to accurately understand why they ended up in their unique situations. This research will add to the body of knowledge about how women become involved in prostitution.

Mainstream Criminology

Criminology is the systematic or scientific study of crime; through the theories that guide it, criminology can provide some answers to questions concerning the root causes of prostitution. Criminology should help us to better understand not only why

individuals within society commit criminal acts, but also highlight why and how someone becomes a prostitute. Because prostitution is often considered to be criminal, it is important that we look to what the various criminology theories have to offer for explanation.

Discussing some of the major criminological theories is important so that the lack of women's perspectives within them can be shown. Traditional criminological theories mainly fail at explaining why women participate in criminal behavior; although a few of the theories within traditional criminology have addressed women's criminality, they were simplistic and relied on stereotypes of women (Vold, Bernard, and Snipes 1998). Robert Merton (1949) who presented the original and most famous statement on the role of anomie and strain, identified an over-emphasis on cultural values, coupled with an under-emphasis on the means to achieving those goals. He argues cultural values in society are a problem because the main goal for everyone in society is to obtain wealth and status; however, not everyone has access to legitimate opportunities. Normally, individuals obtain these goals through a good education and career. On the other hand, Merton felt that class structure interfered with the opportunity for the lower classes to access the legitimate means to material success. In other words, the lower classes experience "structural blockage." Thus, some are "forced" to employ innovative (i.e., non-legitimate) means to achieve their goals.

Various control theories have been substantially important within the field of criminology. Travis Hirschi first started out with his social bonding theory, which described the four types of social bonds that individuals have. These include:

1. Attachment: This involves how emotionally attached individuals are to the important people that they have in their lives. This may include close familial relationships and friends.
2. Commitment: This would be the stake in conformity that individuals have. It is important because if individuals want to be successful it is unlikely that they will engage in risky or delinquent behavior.
3. Involvement: This includes the involvement of individuals, as well as how much they engage themselves in conventional activities. It is believed that if a person's time is highly occupied with other activities, delinquency is less likely to occur.
4. Belief: This is the simple understanding that individuals believe in the rules that society has in place; consequently, they choose not to partake in delinquent behavior.

Hirschi believed that if these bonds are weak, the individual is more likely to participate in delinquent behavior because they have nothing to lose. If these four bonds are strong, however, the individual is less likely to commit a delinquent act because they have more to lose in the situation.

Later on Hirschi moved away from this earlier control theory and merged his ideas with Michael Gottfredson. The two then developed what became known as *A General Theory of Crime*. The combined theory is more focused on the idea of self-control. This theory looks at how individuals commit criminal or delinquent acts when the opportune moment arises; individuals also follow through with the act because they find it gratifying in some manner. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) found it interesting that

some individuals commit crimes and others do not. They found the reasoning behind this was the amount of self-control that a given individual possesses.

Why Look at Prostitution Through a Feminist Perspective?

I have not gone into any great detail about many of the criminological theories that exist; although they are very important to the field, they are not as applicable to the topic of female prostitution. This is true because many of the basic criminological theories lack the attention that is needed when looking at the female, the crime and the delinquency in which she participates. Feminist theory on the other hand, fills in this gap and posits why this is not to be ignored. Regoli and Hewitt (2003) acknowledge that

criminology as a discipline has, by and large, been the domain of males. It thus should be no surprise that explanations of female delinquency essentially reflect male perceptions of females. For the most part, these perceptions evolved from beliefs about innate or biological differences between males and females. Even when sociological explanations of delinquency became mainstream, theories were largely developed from studies of boys; girls were still viewed as “naturally” less delinquent. The relative inattention given to female delinquency was also due in large part to the fact that most criminological theory has been policy driven. (P. 219)

As a result, the perspectives that feminists have to offer are of the utmost importance when discussing female delinquency, including the act of prostitution. They are relevant within the context of prostitution because of the specific viewpoints they hold about the oppression of women. When discussing prostitution, they hold firm that prostitutes are exploited whether they choose to be a prostitute or not. The other criminological theories tend to leave out the issue of female delinquency at many levels. In fact, early research on female delinquency was influenced by the stereotypes of gender and many assumptions were made that only boys could be delinquent. The girls that were found

delinquent were seen as lonely, masculine, or unattractive (Kerpelman and Smith-Adcock 2005). Although these criminological theories have a lot to offer in terms of criminal acts, they fail to explain female delinquent behavior altogether. Merton does not use strain theory to explain the experiences of women who inappropriately adapt their lives to reach their goals; therefore, strain theory is not as applicable to the topic of prostitution.

Albert Cohen, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin were also criminological theorists that were interested in explaining delinquent behavior; however, like many other theorists in the area of classical criminology, their research excluded accounts of female delinquency, including the act of prostitution. Gottfredson and Hirschi's *General Theory of Crime* is also weak in the area of female crime and delinquency. They believe that females are socialized differently than males and are taught to be less impulsive and risky (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). This theory of Gottfredson and Hirschi's has been said to explain any type of crime; however, when female prostitution is brought to the forefront the theory fails to deliver because the experiences of females are ignored throughout their socialization theory.

Feminist Theories

Traditional theories fail to acknowledge the unique experiences that women face. Feminist perspectives take that uniqueness into account and are in fact the most appropriate way to approach this research. Cullen and Agnew (2003) remind us that

the rejection of male-centered traditional criminology has resulted in the emergence of the competing paradigm of "Feminist Criminology." In this approach sex is not simply another variable added to a multivariate empirical

analysis. Rather gender relations become central to understanding human behavior, including crime. (P. 398)

Feminist theory looks intricately at what females experience in their lives and is helpful to explain why women or girls may exhibit certain types of delinquent behaviors, including the act of prostitution. Marxist feminist theory is a segment of feminist theory that concentrates on the idea that patriarchy is ever present in society. Patriarchy is a term that is therefore best used to describe the control that men have over women, especially within the household. Marxist feminists believe that many of the social problems involving women originate because of patriarchal controls.

Women have to fight hard to overcome the power that men have over them in various aspects of their lives. In the past, men have often been the breadwinners within the family, while the women have traditionally been the ones who raised the children and took care of the household duties. It therefore goes without saying that women typically have had to depend on their husbands for money and subsistence. Along with the circumstances that exist within the home, survival in the work place is just as difficult for women; for instance, women are susceptible to lower paying and unsatisfying employment opportunities. Marjolein Van DerVeen (2001) explains this by saying:

Women often worked as prostitutes when other lucrative employment alternatives were unavailable to them, given the gender discrimination and occupational segregation that funneled women into particular occupations. (P. 32)

According to this perspective many women are involved in prostitution for a means of living. Marxist feminist theories argue that male dominance is the center of concern because male dominance is a combination the patriarchal that exists within the home and the means of production. Patriarchy is a predominate issue here. Marxist feminists view

prostitution much like the commodification of labor as according to the ideas of Karl Marx. These individuals would also say that prostitution is not far from the labor process itself and that what these women experience on a daily basis is much like what the everyday laborer goes through. Both groups of individuals sell their bodies and whatever else they offer to the highest bidder. Because of the increased amount of inequality that exists between men and women, women are found to be more oppressed and susceptible to jobs and positions in society that are less than desirable. Within the context of prostitution, this would include finding work selling sex. Karen Green (1989) believes that women who experience an increased amount of oppression in their lives are more prone to becoming prostitutes.

Marxist feminism also looks at two systems that work hand in hand with each other. The first is economy or capitalism, while the second is home life or family. Both systems contain instances of patriarchy. Both of these systems are also what structure men's and women's lives. Men, however, have a sort of escape from one of these systems. Men generally go to work and earn a living wage that supports their family. Although the capitalists exploit them, men get to come home and have their wife feed them, tend their children, clean their house and please them sexually.

Women, however have to deal with both of these systems because if her husband loses his job she must then enter the workforce. She will be paid less than her husband, even if they were to do similar work. At the end of the workday she still has to return home to take care of the chores, children and her husband. Arlie Hochschild (1989), a well-known sociologist, suggests this process is the "second shift." Hochschild's "second

shift” highlights the fact that women work just as much, if not more, than their husbands on any given day.

Now let us look at the circumstances of a single mother trying to survive in the labor force, while at the same time trying to tend her children and keep up with the chores. In many cases, it is possible for a woman to fall prey to prostitution. She can make three weeks pay in just a couple of nights and be home during the day to take care of her other obligations. This is a real phenomenon that transpires every day in our society because of the oppression that women experience in the labor force. Many of them cannot find employment that pays well enough to support their families and, therefore, they must find higher paying jobs even if they are not “morally” desirable, such as acts of stripping and prostitution.

In fact “92% of women engaged in prostitution said they wanted to leave prostitution, but couldn't because they lack basic human services such as a home, job training, health care, counseling and treatment for drug or alcohol addiction. (www.catwinternational.org 2008)

So when a woman is put in this type of situation, what is she to do? In many instances she continues to prostitute herself for the basic necessities required for her and, in many instances, her family to survive.

With all of this said it is also important to look at how the criminal justice system has treated women. In addition, it is also important to look at what could be one of the reasons effecting the choice that many classical theories made to avoid women's criminality. Vold, et al. (1998) posit that

women accused of sexual crimes were often treated more harshly than men accused of the same crimes, but women accused of violent crimes were often treated more leniently than men. These differences in treatment led to differences

in official crime rates, which then affected the explanations of women's criminality by criminological theories. (P. 275)

The issue of double standards gets to the very center of criminological theories that need to understand the female perspective. Not only does theory not account for their experiences but the criminal justice system itself also fails in many ways to look at things from their unique place.

Consequently, feminist theory is an insightful perspective to use for the research of female prostitution. The following factors were derived from various pieces of literature on prostitution and also draw from feminist theory in general because they focus on the experiences of women. These factors include: physical, emotional and sexual Abuse, runaway teens, the economic factor and forced prostitution.

Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse

Many who have conducted research in the area of prostitution discuss the relationship between abuse and prostitution. R. Barri Flowers (2001) is one of those researchers and posits that girls in particular, are much more likely to enter into high-risk activities, including prostitution, than girls who have not been abused in some manner. It is important to underscore that abused children often become more vulnerable to high-risk situations than children who have not been abused. Promiscuous behavior is one of the outcomes of sexual abuse. Brannigan and Van Brunshot Gibbs (2002) posit that

the abuse thesis is that childhood sexual victimization leads to being a prostitute, a role itself characterized by sexual exploitation teaches the victim to view herself as sexually degraded, which in turn prepares her for entry into adolescent and adult role in which deviant definitions of self are functional. The sexually victimized child learns a sexually deviant identity. (P. 2)

When a teenager is exposed to circumstances of sexual and physical abuse over a period of time, running away from the problem may seem to be the best answer.

Therefore, many of the teenage prostitutes that are found on the streets are victims of physical or sexual abuse; in their opinion, the only escape is to run away from home.

Potterat, et al. (1998) claim that when certain women experience certain traumatic events in their lives—for instance incest or rape—they can be particularly vulnerable to prostitution. The authors also add into their equation a second component because not all women that experience rape or incest in their lives will become prostitutes. They, therefore, take into account susceptibility to certain psychological characteristics in which the woman feels completely worthless in her life. According to their research findings, women in these situations are much more likely to become prostitutes.

We can then infer from these pieces that young girls who experience any type of abuse are much more likely to run away from home to escape their surroundings and find some sort of safety. However, when this happens, they often find themselves in situations where behaviors such as prostitution seem like the only way to go if they want to survive on the streets. Rochelle Dalla (2000) brings up an important point about the abusive backgrounds of female prostitutes. She explains:

Childhood correlates of later prostitution have been well documented. Investigations of women who prostitute themselves on the streets have revealed systematic (and life-long) patterns of abuse, exploitation and degradation at the hands of men, including fathers, brothers, intimate partners, clients and pimps. (P. 344)

After a young girl has experienced abuse, it is possible that she will become extremely vulnerable to the charisma of a pimp or Madame who plays the friend role to the needy girl. However this individual is only luring them into a life of prostitution. Typically, the

pimp or madame promises young girls a good life and the trusting young girls become submerged into a world of prostitution from which they often do not escape.

Tyler, Hoyt and Whitback (2000) also find that abuse is at the root of some major social problems, including female participation in deviant acts like prostitution. They go on to explain:

Negative developmental outcomes have been reported for adolescents with a history of sexual abuse. Depression, poor self-esteem, substance abuse, inappropriate sexual behavior, suicidal ideation, running away and prostitution are just some of the effects that have been noted. (P. 235)

Runaway Teens

A different way of looking at the perspective of sexual abuse is combining it with another perspective that will be discussed next. Brannigan and Van Brunshot Gibbs (1997) have done plenty of research in this area and combine two of the theories discussed within this literature review. They believe that it is not so much the sexual abuse that leads to prostitution as it is that running away from home leads to prostitution. They believe that when a child is exposed to abusive behavior it is more likely that they will engage themselves in runaway behavior and therefore experience the risks that exist on the streets.

It is also hypothesized that when young girls are exposed to abuse they find gratification only in the option of running away from home. In many instances however these girls are penalized by the criminal justice system for running away and are returned to their abusive homes. With the sexual abuse continuing they again run away and find refuge on the streets for a short amount of time. With no means of survival they turn to

the only thing they have, their sexuality, which ultimately leads to a life of prostitution in many cases (Cullen and Agnew 2003).

Given this idea it is necessary to understand some of the reasons that lead individuals to run away from home. A young girl's reason for running away can differ dramatically from another. If they are not turned around they are more at risk of ending up in a dangerous situation. The reasons for running away often include not only sexual abuse but also: 1) problems with the teenager's school life, 2) domestic violence and 3) extreme poverty.

Problems within the teenager's school life may include failing grades, bullying or even a disinterest in being a part of the school system. When adolescents begin to have issues in school, parents often begin to notice; school life is an excellent starting point for fights between the parent(s) and children. This could then trigger an emotional reaction within the teenager to run away from home, in attempts to escape the pestering.

Domestic violence is also an issue that is found to have existed within the home of many run away teenagers. When a teenager is exposed to a vast amount of abuse to one or both of their parents, the living situation becomes extremely tense; therefore, running away from the problem seems to be the best answer to the child.

Extreme poverty is an experience that is difficult for teenagers to live through. In fact, poverty can make them feel like it would be easier to try and make it on their own. Consequently, poverty is yet another reason young girls might decide to leave their home lives and never return.

This perspective sheds light on the fact that young girls run away from home for various reasons, whether it be abuse or continuous arguments with their parents. When

they choose this way out it is usually not well thought out and they soon realize that they have no means to survive. Jarvinen (1993) informs us that young girls who repeatedly run away from home often become homeless and begin selling their bodies for things such as food, alcohol and shelter. After they realize that it is an “easy” way to live they continue the pattern.

Young, et al. (1983) note that after a girl runs away from home she can become increasingly susceptible to the charisma of a pimp. In addition, many of the teens that run away from home have a history of sexual or physical abuse within their homes.

It is estimated that 600,000 prostitutes between 6-16 years of age, with the majority emerging from runaway and abandoned backgrounds, while some female adolescents are reacting to physical and sexual abuse, most runaways who become prostitutes do so because of an abusive sexual experience or solicitations by pimps. (P. 278)

When a teenager is exposed to circumstances of sexual and physical abuse over a period of time, running away from the problem may seem to be the best answer. Therefore, many of the teenage prostitutes that are found on the streets are victims of physical or sexual abuse; in all likelihood, the only solution commonly available to each of them was to run away from home.

The Economic Factor

Economics is the third factor that I have found to be prevalent within the prostitution research literature. When women or young girls feel the crunch of financial needs and cannot obtain employment that will relieve this crunch, they begin to feel desperate and turn to jobs such as prostitution. Feminists, in fact, argue that the social structure has much to do with the economic struggle of women; therefore, the social

structure leads women to be trapped into these types of employment positions.

Some of the women that end up working as prostitutes are not looking for that particular type of employment. In May-Len Skillbrei's (2001) article on Norwegian massage parlors, she says:

At the beginning of the decade the massage parlors advertised in one of Norway's largest newspapers. Many women were recruited through these advertisements' appearance in a respected newspaper made massage parlors seem legitimate for women searching for solutions for their immediate economic difficulties. (P. 72)

Many of the women and young girls that enter a life of prostitution do so because they see the economic benefits as being more than they could have ever earned at a regular job. In instances such as the ones discussed in the piece on massage parlors above, we continue to see the depth of this problem and the many ways that it continues to occur. The economic issues become increasingly apparent in cases where a single mother is raising children and has no other means to take care of her family. Minimum wage employment just does not cut it for these women. They can make enough money in two nights of prostituting to feed their families, whereas it would take weeks for them to make that same amount at a minimum wage job. T.C. Esselstyn (1968) mentions that women become attracted to the idea of prostitution because of the available high income that makes it possible for them to have more, buy more and live a better life. This type of lifestyle would not be available to these women if they did not become prostitutes.

When discussing prostitution in the Third World the economic factor becomes a dominant theme. In places such as Nigeria, for example, the economic situation is extremely dire and unless the situation changes in these areas prostitution will continue to thrive. Bamgbose (2002) states:

The widening gap between the rich and the poor is producing more potential exploiters for the sex industry and the family members often condone prostitution as long as it is bringing an economic benefit into the household. (P. 574)

In a survey conducted in 1965, Wardell B. Pomeroy found that by far the highest percentage of women reported earning a high income was the most important reason for becoming a prostitute. In agreement with several other scholarly articles, Pomeroy states that the gross income from prostitution is usually larger than could be expected from any other type of unskilled labor. In a more recent piece on prostitution and ambivalence Lynn Chancer (1993) asserts:

Women yearn to buy nice things such as a car, clothes, whatever. A given individual may realize that sex work can easily yield better and quicker money than is otherwise available. (P. 163)

All of these points of view are extremely important when looking at the economic factor in prostitution. It is interesting to look at each and every one of them because they all play into the issue of prostitution and why a woman might become emerged in the lifestyle.

Just like the other major themes of prostitution, the economic factor cannot be looked at as the only reason why a female would enter the prostitution industry. Kingsley Davis (1937) explores the fact that

prostitution embraces an economic relation and is naturally connected with the entire system of economic forces. But to jump from this truism to the conclusion that prostitution can be abolished by eliminating its economic removal is seldom a panacea. (P. 749)

Therefore, we continue to identify useful perspectives on the causal roots for prostitution. However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that not just one perspective is the answer to what we are trying to discover.

Forced Prostitution

The fourth predominant factor found to be an important contributor in the literature on prostitution is probably the most inhumane of them all. This is the issue of forced prostitution; this is something that is becoming increasingly widespread with each passing year. Forced prostitution is an issue that, contrary to popular belief, exists in the United States, rather than just Third World countries. John Bowe (2003) informs us of this increasing social problem. He goes on to explain:

The State Department estimates that every year smugglers bring into this country illegally some fifty thousand women and children, either involuntary or under false pretenses. (P. 114)

Our society is faced with an increasingly large epidemic, one that has led to the idea that people have become the newest renewable resource and available to the highest bidder.

An article in the New York Times tells us just that:

An ounce of cocaine can be sold for \$1200.00, but it can only be sold one time. You can sell a woman or child for \$50.00 to \$1000.00 however they can be sold each day, every day, over and over again. The markup is immeasurable! (www.nytimes.com 2008).

In 2003, President Bush stood up in front of thousands at the United Nations General Assembly and talked about the crisis of human trafficking. He stated the following in David Batstone's (2007) novel on modern slavery:

Each year 800,000 to 900,000 human beings are bought, sold or forced across the world's borders and the trade in human beings for any purpose must not be allowed to thrive in our time. (P. 3)

With the act of forced prostitution increasing more substantially every year, we have to look at the cause of such a global force. At an earlier time in civilization prostitutes were blamed for what they chose to do with their lives. However, some insist that prostitutes

are no more to blame for prostitution than poor people are to blame for poverty. There are larger global forces at hand here; there are forces that need to be addressed before any change is seen in these areas (Wonders and Michalowski 2001).

Some of these global forces have increased the commodification of women and children as prostitutes, via the practice of consumption in general. Today people are constantly consuming, not only material goods, but other people as well, via the purchase of human services, relational experiences and sexual encounters. Indeed, consumption may be the most important force that unites the contemporary world (Wonders and Michalowski 2001).

Therefore, as Wonders and Michalowski see it, consumption is a very large issue that exists within our society. It does not stop at the consumption of bodies for sex and does not stop with the women and children that are forced to provide it. When discussing prostitution in many of the Third World countries we can look also at instances of rapid urbanization, as well as a large amount of rural urban migration. High unemployment rates often follow rapid urbanization; consequently, unemployment rates can generate the circumstances of prostitution, both voluntary and forced (Bamgbose 2002).

As I have demonstrated throughout the course of this literature review, without key background factors, prostitution is not the type of activity in which most women decide to participate. The act of prostitution has deeper causal roots than what can be viewed at first exposure; I am interested in continuing the exploration of these very important factors of causation.

Based on the prior research and literature on prostitution, there are a few main hypotheses that have been developed to guide this research study. These hypotheses

include:

1. Running away from home before the age of eighteen has a significant effect on the outcome of prostitution, while controlling for the other variables in the study.
2. Physical abuse by at least one parent will have an effect on whether or not a woman will engage in prostitution, while controlling for the other variables in the study.
3. Females that have experienced sexual abuse as a child or young adult will be at a higher risk of participating in deviant sexual behavior than other female children, such as the act of prostitution, while controlling for the other variables in the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter, I will present a description of the data set, variables and construction of the variables that were used in this research study. First, I will provide information on the data set, as well as the description of the sample that was used. Second, information will be provided about the coding of the independent and dependent variables that were chosen for this study. Third, the methods of analysis will be discussed. Finally, the limitations that are applicable to the research study will be examined.

The data for this study comes from a quantitative research project known as *Risk Factors for Violent Victimization of Women in a Major Northeastern City, 1990-1991 and 1996-1997*—VVWMNC for short. The data reports several background factors that young women have experienced at different times in their lives, most predominately sexual abuse. This study then seeks to determine if these various background factors in a woman's life lead to deviant and criminal behavior as she gets older. During the first wave of this study, data was gathered from 206 girls at a local hospital that reportedly were victims of sexual abuse. These girls ranged in age from 10 months to 12 years. The second wave of this study followed up on 136 on the original 206 girls, ages 18 to 31 years old; the second wave identified whether the girls were engaged in criminal behavior, risky sexual behavior and drug or alcohol dependency. During the second wave, researchers followed up on a control group of individuals who were not abused as children; the control group was meant to verify that childhood abuse was indeed a factor

in adult criminality. Eighty out of the 174 were in the control group and were not abused as children. The researchers wanted to find out the following:

1. Are the victims of child sexual abuse at an increased risk of adolescent or adult sexual victimization, as compared to those who are non-victims?
2. Are victims of child sexual abuse at increased risk of physically violent non-sexual victimization, as compared to non-victims?
3. How is the risk of sexual re-victimization and physical victimization, among abuse survivors, affected by their engaging in violent behavior, such as physical fighting; engaging in heavy drinking; and practicing risky sexual behavior, such as having multiple sexual partners?

The variables in this study were part of a secondary analysis and contained certain selected variables that were collected throughout the two different waves. Several different Likert-type scales were used as well as Conflict Tactics Scale and the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test. The variables I am testing are mostly in the second wave because this age group is more likely to have participated in the act of prostitution.

Why is it important to study prostitution from a feminist perspective? I chose this study because I believe it is important to look at the act of prostitution through a woman's point of view. It is also important to understand the unique experiences that women go through in order to end up in such a controversial line of work. Consequently, feminism provides a useful perspective by which I can interpret the study's results.

A more comprehensive look at what these women experience gives us a clearer understanding as to prostitution's causal roots. In order to do this I chose to use a basic logistic regression with prostitution as the dependent variable. I then regressed all of the

relevant background factors. The background factors that were picked out of this data set were ones that were predominately found within my review of the literature on prostitution and reflect the experiences of women. My task is to understand which of the background factors, if any, help to explain a woman entering a life of prostitution.

Dependent Variable

Prostitution is the dependent variable that will be used for this research study. It will be measured dichotomously by whether the individual took place in the act of prostitution or not. The prostitution variable will be labeled 0 for no prostitution throughout life and 1 for having prostituted at some point in life. This code specifies whether or not the individual has ever engaged in the act of prostitution at any time during their life; therefore, the code lets us apply other variables to get a more accurate understanding of why women engage in prostitution to begin with.

Independent and Control Variables

The primary independent variables will include physical abuse by at least one parent, sexual abuse by a relative and running away from home before the age of eighteen. These variables also relate to the feminism aspect of the thesis, because these are specific experiences of women in the data set. The control variables for this study will include race, education and age of the subject.

Descriptive Data

Table 3-1 summarizes all of the variables that were used in this study. The control variables are not necessarily listed in any order and the independent variables are listed

by the relationship to my hypotheses—listed earlier in this thesis.

Table 3-1. Summary of the Independent and Dependant Variables

<i>Dependent Variable</i> Prostitution	Yes and No (1-0)
<i>Independent Variables</i> Sexual Abuse by a Relative Physical Abuse by at Least one parent Ran Away from Home before Age of eighteen	Yes and No (1-0) Yes and No (1-0) Yes and No (1-0)
<i>Control Variables</i> Race Education Age	Black or Not Black (1-2) <HS, HS, >HS Age of Subject

Analysis

Logistic regression was chosen for this study to better understand the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. Logistic regression is a great tool that describes the combination of independent variables. This is the best prediction of membership within a particular group, as measured by a categorical dependent variable (Mertler and Vannatta 2005). Logistic regression is used within this research study in order to understand which of the independent variables raises the odds of prostitution lifestyle choices.

Logistic regression is the most effective type of analysis to do for this research because it is most commonly used when the dependent variable is not a continuous one. In this research the dependent variable is prostitution and it is of interest to find out whether or not the subjects were involved in an act of prostitution at some point in their

lives. The variable is therefore dichotomous and the only two possible answers are yes (engaged in prostitution) or no (did not engage in prostitution).

Limitations

It is important to understand that all research has certain limitations and this research is no exception. Because the sample size in this study is relatively small it presents some potential issues with the outcome of our results. The subject of prostitution is not a very well researched topic in the academic world because it is difficult to obtain information on such a widespread, underground world. The data set that was chosen for this topic seemed to be the best choice of all of the data sets available.

As mentioned earlier some of the variables in the literature review were not tested in this research because of the limited amount of measured variables in the data set. I believe that it is important to acknowledge these limits; however, I also believe that many of the most important variables were tested in this research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to determine which background factors (physical abuse, sexual abuse and running away from home before age of eighteen) may affect the later outcome of prostitution, as well as determine which of the variables are correlated with one another. This chapter will demonstrate the univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis methods that were used to better understand the topic of prostitution and the various background factors that are available in the VVWMNC data set. First, I will show the univariate analyses, which demonstrate the distribution of key variables that are of value to the study. Second, in the bivariate analysis section, I will look at the relationship between prostitution and each independent variable, as well as the relationship of all the independent variables that were used in this study. And third, I will address the multivariate analysis (logistic regression) that was used, as well as answer the research questions that were posed earlier in this thesis.

Univariate Analysis

Univariate analysis is an important step in understanding each of the variables that are used in the data set. Univariate analysis also gives a clear understanding of each of the variables' frequencies so that it can be better understood why each variable is important to the research at hand. Table 4-1 explains the dependent variable of prostitution in greater detail. Of the 174 subjects, 23% of the respondents say that they have engaged in prostitution at some point in their lives, while 77% say that they have not engaged in any act of prostitution. The dependent variable (history of prostitution)

is coded as 1=Yes and 0=No; in other words, prostitution is dichotomous and either happened or did not happen when discussing the actions of the respondents.

Table 4-1. Reported Prostitution by Women in the VVWMNC Data Set

<u>Ever Prostituted</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>(N)</u>
Engaged in Prostitution	23.0	40
Have Not Engaged in Prostitution	77.0	134
Total	100.0	(174)

Source: Risk Factors for Violent Victimization of Women in a Major Northeastern City, 1990-1991 and 1996-1997.

Table 4-2 features race as a key demographic in this study. Race is one of the control variables that were used in this research; race is of particular interest because 88.5% of the respondents in this sample are African American, while only 11.5% of the respondents are of other racial backgrounds. Insofar as the amount of African Americans is so high in this particular sample, race is coded as 1= Black and 2= Non-Black.

Table 4-2. Race of Respondents in the VVWMNC Data Set

<u>Race</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>(N)</u>
Black	88.5	154
Non-Black	11.5	20
Total	100.0	(174)

Source: Risk Factors for Violent Victimization of Women in a Major Northeastern City, 1990-1991 and 1996-1997.

Another control variable that is used in this research project is the years of education that are completed by a respondent. Table 4-3 summarizes this educational experience; the study divides education into three different categories: 1) less than high school 2) high school degree and finally 3) at least some college. The educational experience of the respondents is compelling because less than 20% of these respondents ever attended college, even while 50% of the respondents did not even graduate from high school.

Table 4-3. Education of Respondents in the VVWMNC Data Set

<u>Education Level</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>(N)</u>
Less Than High School	45.4	79
High School Degree	36.8	64
At Least Some College	17.8	31
Total	100.0	(174)

Source: Risk Factors for Violent Victimization of Women in a Major Northeastern City, 1990-1991 and 1996-1997.

Table 4-4 summarizes several of the key independent variables (physical abuse by at least one parent, sexual abuse by a relative and ran away from home before age of eighteen). The percentage for each of these background factors is out of 174 respondents; in fact, 174 is the total amount of respondents in the samples. The amount of physical abuse the respondents experienced is also interesting; almost 85% of the sample was physically abused by at least one of their parents. Sexual abuse by a relative and running

away from home are close in comparison. Sexual abuse is 36% and running away from home before the age of 18 is shown at 40%.

Table 4-4. Background Factors That May Lead to Prostitution

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>(N)</u>
Physically Abused By At Least one parent	83.9	(146)
Sexually Abused By a Relative	36.2	(63)
Ran Away From Home before Age of eighteen	40.2	(69)
(N)		(174)

Source: Risk Factors for Violent Victimization of Women in a Major Northeastern City, 1990-1991 and 1996-1997.

Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis is the step in statistical analysis where we want to determine the correlation or association between two variables. In this research we want to discover how the independent variables (race, education, physically abused by at least one parent, sexually abused by a relative and ran away from home before age of 18) are correlated with the dependent variable (history of prostitution). Table 4-5 demonstrates the results of the correlation matrix. The relationship between prostitution and the variables of education, physical abuse by at least one parent, sexual abuse by a relative and running away from home before the age of 18 are in the expected direction. Specifically, in terms of the relationship between prostitution and education is $r = -.190$ and the correlation coefficient between physical abuse by at least one parent is $r = .128$. For sexual abuse by a relative the correlation coefficient was $r = .214$ and finally the correlation coefficient for running away from home before age eighteen was $r = .304$. Thus, at the bivariate level

prostitution is more likely among those who ran away from home. However, the relationship between prostitution and race is not statistically significant.

The bivariate relationships between the independent variables are also examined in table 4.5. There are several statistically significant correlations of note. First, there is a significant relationship between race and sexual abuse ($r = .141$), where non-blacks are more likely to be sexually abused. Second, there is a modest relationship between education and running away from home ($r = .276$), where those with more education are less likely to run away from home. Third, physical abuse by at least one parent is positively related to sexual abuse by a relative ($r = .135$) and running away from home ($r = .168$). Lastly, those individuals that are sexually abused by a relative are more likely to have run away from home before the age of eighteen ($r = .284$).

Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate analysis is the final step that is used in this research study; multivariate analysis is a statistical step where more than one variable is analyzed and compared at one time. As mentioned earlier in this thesis the model of multivariate analysis that was chosen for this study was logistic regression; Table 4-6 displays the overall results of the logistic regression that is used for this particular data analysis.

Throughout this project I have discussed the impact of several key variables on the outcome of prostitution. In order to examine the impact of these variables I have regressed the following onto prostitution—the dependent variable in this study:

- physical abuse by at least one parent

Table 4-5. Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix for Prostitution

<u>Variable</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
Ever Prostituted	-						
Race	-.068	-					
Education	-.190	-.033	-				
Physically Abused By at Least one parent	.128	-.087	-.037	-			
Sexually Abused By a Relative	.214**	.141	-.042	.135*	-		
Ran Away From Home before Age of eighteen	.304	.109	.276**	.168*	.284**	-	
Age	.068	.201**	.066	-.005	.079	.130	-

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

** Corelation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

- sexual abuse by a relative
- running away from home before the age of eighteen
- race
- education.

Overall Model Results

As mentioned before many times within this study, prostitution is my dependent variable and physical abuse by at least one parent, sexual abuse by a relative and running away from home before the age of eighteen are the independent variables. My logistic regression model has yielded statistically significant results with my -2 log likelihood

resulting in 159.235 and the Nagelkerke R square or pseudo R square giving a result of .288.

Using odds ratios, I can examine the impact of the independent variables on the outcome of the dependent variable (prostitution). Specifically, I can calculate a girl's odds for becoming a prostitute given the variables outlined in this thesis. A girl who runs away from home before the age of eighteen is 3.1 more likely to be a prostitute than girls who did not run away from home. A girl who is physically abused by at least one parent is 2.3 more likely and a girl who is sexually abused by a relative is twice as likely. When looking at the variable of race, the odds of being a prostitute for blacks is .287, when compared to individuals that identified as being non-black. Lastly, the variable of education provided some interesting results. When compared to those individuals who had at least some college education, the odds of being a prostitute were 2.799 greater than those who completed less than a high school education. Another interesting aspect of the education variable is that a girl with a high school diploma is 1.297 more likely to become a prostitute than a girl who completes less than a high school education. However, the only odds ratios that are statistically significant are running away from home before the age of eighteen and those individuals with at least some college education.

Table 4-6. Logistic Regression of Likelihood of Prostitution on Running Away from Home, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Race, Education and Age.

<u>Variables</u>	β <u>Logits</u>		e^{β} <u>Odds Ratios</u>
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
<u>Ran Away From Home before Age of eighteen</u>			
Have Run Away (Have Not Run Away)	1.134 (.422)	---	3.109
<u>Physical Abuse by at Least one parent</u>			
Abused by at Least one parent (Not Abused)	.851 (.686)	---	2.342
<u>Sexual Abuse by a Relative</u>			
Abused by a Relative (Not Abused)	.695 (.414)	---	2.004**
<i>Control Variables</i>			
<u>Race</u>			
Black (Non-Black)	-1.249 (.728)	---	.287
<u>Education</u>			
At Least Some College High School (Below High School)	1.029 (.487) .260 (.549)	---	2.799* 1.297
<u>Age</u>			
Age of Subject	-.069 (.064)		.933
<i>df</i>			7
Constant			3.099
-2 Log likelihood			159.235
Nagelkerke R Square			.228
<i>N</i>			174

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Note: Variables in parentheses indicate comparison group.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study had been to identify the background factors that may be present in women that choose to become a prostitute and understand why prostitution is her chosen life path. The analysis of this research also looked at these background factors as to identify whether or not they have a relationship to one another. These background factors once again included: physical abuse by at least one parent, sexual abuse by a relative and running away from home before the age of 18.

The purpose of this chapter is to tie any loose ends that may have come up throughout the research process, as well as answer the research questions in order to discuss the final conclusions. Conclusions will also be discussed to clearly state the similarities in the academic literature and the data set that is used in my research. Finally, I will suggest ideas for future research at the conclusion of this chapter.

Conclusion

My statistical results provide some interesting overall findings. In this conclusion, I will first address each of my hypotheses. Then I will address the findings of the relationship between the control variables and the dependent variable of prostitution. The hypotheses that were made in this study are as follows:

- Running away from home before the age of 18 has a significant effect on the outcome of prostitution, while controlling for the other variables in the study.

- Physical abuse by at least one parent will have an effect on whether or not a women will engage in prostitution, while controlling for the other variables in the study.
- Females that have experienced sexual abuse as either a child or young adult will be at a higher risk of participating in deviant sexual behavior, such as the act of prostitution, while controlling for the other variables in the study.

Running away from home is a factor in prostitution; I found considerable support for this idea. Specifically those respondents who ran away from home before the age of eighteen are over three times (3.109) more likely to have also prostituted at some point in their lives. This also supports most of what was previously stated in the literature. Young et al. (1983) discussed how the majority of the 600,000 prostitutes that exist in our country, from ages 6-16, are in fact runaways. In addition, Meda Chesney-Lind (1989) has completed a lot of research in the area of female delinquency and is a well known feminist criminologist. She really gets at the very reason a feminist approach is so important and finds that the criminal justice system itself is helping to perpetuate the cycle of patriarchy. She gives a four-part scenario of what she believes is happening to these young girls. First, she believes that young girls are already vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse because they are usually much smaller than their abusers. Therefore, this makes it much more difficult for these girls to fight back against their perpetrators. Second, she says that the option of running away becomes very real; however, young girls are faced with another obstacle of patriarchy and the criminal justice system defines them as sexually promiscuous and runaways. Third, Chesney-Lind argues that the

criminal justice system seeks after these runaways and punishes their behavior; in many cases, the system returns the girls to the homes where the abuse originated. Finally these teens runaway for the last time; however, they make sure that they are not easily found and seek refuge in “the streets.” In most instances, it is believed that these young runaways turn to the only thing they have to survive—their sexuality. Consequently, the criminal justice system enables the birth of a prostitute.

While I felt physical abuse is a factor in prostitution causation, I failed to find statistically significant results. This means that individuals who have been physically abused by at least one parent are not as likely to become a prostitute, although the odds ratio is 2.342 in the right direction. Moreover, I failed to find statistically significant results for my third hypothesis. My results are, however, approaching statistical significance ($p < .077$). Therefore, I have some evidence that there is a relationship between prostitution and being sexually abused by a relative. Specifically, I found that those being sexually abused by a relative were just over twice as likely (2.004) to have prostituted than those who have not been abused by a relative. This is also consistent with many of the quotes that were previously stated in the literature review of this thesis. Rochelle Dalla (2000) was previously quoted earlier in the literature review section of this thesis saying that many of the women who have been found on the streets as prostitutes have experienced abuse at the hands of men, this includes their fathers and brothers.

Physical and sexual abuse are not statistically significant; although this is not what I originally hypothesized, the results do make sense. Running away from home is what leads many individuals into prostitution. If an individual is abused and they just

remain in the household then the abuse is not what pushes them into the act of prostitution. When an individual runs away from home on the other hand, they run away from any sort of protection or guidance that may have previously existed. This is then what leads them into the world of prostitution. Van Brunshot Gibbs and Brannigan (1997) tell us exactly this in the literature review. They posit that it is not so much the sexual or physical abuse that leads into prostitution, but instead it is the running away from home at such a young age that leads to prostitution.

My thesis also examines the relationship between the control variables race and education. There is no statistically significant relationship between race and education. However, a relationship between education and prostitution is both statistically significant and substantively startling. Although common sense would dictate that education would be inversely related to prostitution, that is not entirely the case. At the bivariate level I found evidence of such an inverse relationship ($r = -.190$), my logistic regression indicates the opposite. In other words, there is no statistical significance between high school graduates and those who have not graduated high school when it comes to becoming a prostitute; at the same time, I find that when compared to the below high school group, those with at least some college education were just over two and one half times (2.799) more likely to be a prostitute. This may make no sense using mainstream criminology, but a feminist perspective has the ability to shed some light on this interesting relationship. The women in the sample for this study were mostly minorities, living in what is presumed to be a low-income area. A feminist perspective suggests that even though many women have some education, many of the good jobs are already taken—most of which by men. As mentioned earlier in the literature review for

this thesis, women tend to be funneled into low paying jobs because of the ever present patriarchy in society; this is one of the ways that women who are desperate enough end up involved in prostitution. The sexual division of labor is an important aspect of this to discuss, Van Der Veen (2001), for example, tells us that

Marxists and Marxist-Feminists alike find absolutely nothing “natural” about prostitution and that it is purely a phenomenon that has proliferated with the spread of capitalist markets and with gender, sexual and racial oppression. (P. 32)

Feminism has influenced the findings in this project because of the specific experiences that women relate to when it comes to physical abuse, sexual abuse, and running away from home. The vulnerability that women can sometimes face gets to the very essence of why looking through a feministic viewpoint was, in my humble opinion, the best choice for what answers I was enquiring throughout this project. Overall, I have to say that this has been a very interesting and rewarding research project. So much has been learned during the process of this project, including how many ways the subject of prostitution can be misunderstood. I can only hope that I have demonstrated a new way of thinking about prostitution and the women that live this lifestyle every day, whether by their choice or not.

Future Research

Ideas for future research would include, but are not limited to, focusing on the importance of running away from home before the age of 18, as well as the education variable in this particular data set. There are some interesting results that were found within these variables and future research could expand on those problems. When approaching issues involving female delinquency and crime, it is also suggested that a

Feminist theory perspective is utilized because of the perspectives that it can give to women's unique situations.

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