

A Feminist Interrogation of Prostitution, Sexual Surrogacy and the Identity Question: A Peek into *The Surrogate*

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Abstract

A woman's identity is always on trial as she is associated with all negativities especially on narratives bordering on her body: the way she dresses, the way she is viewed by the camera and in cinema, her sexuality, her relationships, etc. Cinematic representations of women are often replete with such narratives that question their true identity and thereby challenging their quest for gender equality within the African society. Against this backdrop, this study examines prostitution and sexual surrogacy and how they portend danger for the true identity of the female gender. This qualitative study adopts radical feminism and morality feminism for its theoretical framework. This study recommends the reconsideration of a feminist approach towards addressing the lopsidedness and gender inequality associated with sexual narratives that undermine women's leadership and intellectual skills towards the development of our society and future of our younger generation.

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Background to the Study

The general conception about the female gender as a prostitute is deeply rooted in our patriarchal culture where only the female gender is tagged as wayward even when an innocent young girl is enticed or lured by a full-grown man into a sexual escapade. More so, such identity tagging is worsened by misconceptions and misunderstanding between a male and his female counterpart. Sadly, the first insult that may proceed from the male's mouth would be "*ashawo*" (a prostitute). No matter how much of personal efforts a female works to excel in the academic, political or managerial sector to ascend the corridors of power, her success will often be distorted with the assumption that such feats could only be accomplished through *bottom power* (sex as a commodity of exchange). Such stereotyped negative narratives often downplay on her integrity and true identity.

Conversely, sexual surrogacy may tend to push the female sex surrogate or therapist into an identity of perdition as she has now put herself on another realm or platform that would further jeopardize her already misconstrued identity and intentions. This brings about the question of how males who indulge in prostitution and surrogacy are viewed in relation to their female counterparts in the same sexual and body and sexual exploitation profession.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine how prostitution and sex surrogacy affect women's image and identity.

The Set Objectives are to:

1. Ascertain if society views males in prostitution/sex work differently from the females
2. Determine if sex surrogacy can affect a heterosexual relationship of a couple
3. Ensure if there are professional boundaries that aid the sex surrogate's personal emotional from getting more intimate with clients.

Statement of the Problem

With the identity of the woman at stake, it becomes worrisome on how females can salvage themselves from the socially constructed negative identities. However, the incorporation of sexual surrogate therapy to the restoration of a couple's sexual life gives cause for worry if this technique could jeopardize their sexual intimacy and ultimately the relationship. This work has seen the gap on the identity of the woman as the prostitute without addressing the male partner who is the chief patron. This works also seeks to understand the moral justification for accepting sex surrogacy, which is a formalized means of prostitution, as a therapy, without according same status to prosecutes who give sexual gratification and services to their clients and they are paid like the sex surrogates.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts morality feminism in its critical analysis of the female identity in a patriarchal structured society. Knowing fully well that feminist theory is made up of the different brands of feminism; this study engages radical feminism and morality feminism to foreground the discourse. Simply put, feminism is the belief that females should have equal treatment as their male counterpart. Here resides the notion of gender equality. "Feminism is a range of social movements, political movements and ideologies that aim to define and establish the political, economic, personal and social equality of the sexes. Feminism incorporates the position that societies prioritize the male point of view and that women are treated unjustly within those societies" (as cited in Wokoro, .1).

Radical Feminism, a brand of feminism that sees patriarchy as the root cause of female subordination and that helps to perpetuate gender inequality. Thus, the advocates of this movement want women to be totally free from men, and if possible, live in a separate society different from men. In her M.A thesis, Silver Wokoro defines radical feminism as a philosophy that lays emphasis on the "patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or more specifically, the social domination of women by men" (Wokoro, 2021, p.4). She also noted that there are many disputes among radical feminists, one of which is "whether females should live in societies completely separate to men and assume the role of lesbians" (p.4). This radical thinking has given room to splinter groups within the radical feminism brand. Already, the emergence of splinter sub-brands under radical feminism have taken centre stage since the 21st century hence LGBTQ+ now have an established identity which was alien to the original concept of radical feminism. Today, the sex workers, the lesbian and gay community, the transgender, the cross dressers and drag queens, and many more are appendages of these splinter groups that emerged from radical feminism.

Morality Feminism is a term I framed from my many years of research and studies in the field of feminism and gender studies upon the realization that there is a lacuna that needs an urgent attention otherwise, the good efforts of the founding mothers and proponents of feminism would be done a disservice. Thus, prostitution is a far cry from morality rather it has a semblance of radical feminism and its splinter groups. It is against this backdrop that I coined the term morality feminism to address this gap created by these divergent groups, especially, the prostitution/sex workers profession for feminists to look inward and address the "waywardness" of females who trade with their bodies in exchange for money and other selfish gains. To say the least, prostitution makes the woman a commodity and reduces her self-worth.

This is the background that laid the foundation for the theory of morality feminism to alert the feminist community of the dangers of these categories of women who, in the bid to exercise freedom to explore and be proud of their bodies; and to be self-assertive and independent, should not undermine the sacrifices of the proponents of feminism in the quest for females to gain equal access and opportunities with their male counterpart. Thus, where lies the moral justification for a woman who has cheapen herself through

sexual transaction, to compete favourably with the same men whom she has entangled herself. How can gender equality be achieved under such circumstance?

In the same vein, “morality feminism proposes that all of feminine or women's attributes have to be employed in the fight against gender discrimination and feminine subjugation, but within the permissiveness of morality, dignity, decency and social decorum” (God'spresence & God'spresence, 2010, p.52). Morality, in this instance, is a form of self-respect, self-check and restriction from engaging in any activity that could cause eyebrows to be raised in one's direction. It is not out of place to state that morality feminism extends a hand of fellowship to feminists in order to address the lopsidedness of tagging the female as prostitute while exonerating the male partner who makes the business of sexual gratification a viable profession for the wayward and insatiable sex-seeking male. In sum, “morality feminism frowns at and fights against gender discrimination, sexual objectification of women to satisfy men's insatiable gusto and libido, polygamy, divorce, extramarital sex adventure, sex slave deals, sexual exploitation of the minors, stereotyping, domineering patriarchy and oppression of the “weaker sex” (God'spresence & God'spresence, 2010, p.53).

Significance of the Study

This study is very significant for its adoption of two contrasting theories of feminism:

- i. The radical feminism which requires a drastic measure and confrontational approach towards addressing women's issues
- ii. Morality feminism which takes a deeper insight into one's conscience with regards to value systems. It is a psychological approach on self-assessment as well as moral reasoning to reconsider if radical feminism is truly helping to improve women's image and identity or it is indirectly frustrating the feminist agenda.

Prostitution and Sex Surrogacy

Prostitution is a sex for money profession involving a female provider and a male client or customer. It is the exchange of sex for money and sometimes for favours or to achieve a goal. It is a transaction where money exchanges hands for sexual gratification. In most situations, the female is paid money to provide sexual satisfaction to a male customer.

Yetunde Arebi, reporting for *Vanguard* (Online, August 22, 2015), in Entertainment news tagged “Who is a Prostitute?” She paints the foregoing scenario:

So, what do you call a woman who agrees to sleep with the Boss for a raise or promotion in the office? A married woman carrying on a relationship with her Boss to secure her position? A student having sex with the Lecturer to raise her scores? Can a married woman who offers sex in exchange for groceries to feed her family be compared with a man who turns a blind eye to his wife's adultery with a highly influential political godfather in exchange for a juicy post of his own? The truth is that sex is a very potent weapon. Those who engage in it do so for a reason, obvious or remote (Arebi, 2015, n.p.)

Emphasizing on the subject of prostitution, Erin Fuchs (2013) specified the six categories of prostitutes that were stated in the book of the Sociologist, Ronald Weitzer titled *Legalizing Prostitution*. These six categories are:

- i. Independent Call Girl/Escort: they are found in private buildings such as houses and they are self-employed and their charges are often high. They even advertise their services online.
- ii. Escort Agency Employee: their charges are relatively high. They pay their employers/agencies. They are found in private locations or hotels. They are patronized by politicians.
- iii. Brothel Employee: Brothels are known to be “dedicated locations where people pay for sex.” They equally charge highly as they are expected to pay the brothel owners part of their earnings.
- iv. Window Worker: This category of sex workers is common in Amsterdam where prostitutes are showcased in the windows to attract and lure people passing by. These window workers income range from low-to-moderate.
- v. Bar or Casino Worker: Such prostitutes have first contact with their client at the casino or bar and thereafter go to another location for sex. In Thailand, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic are some examples of where clients pay bar fees to be permitted to “leave a club with a worker and spend several days with her.” These prostitutes are also low-to-moderate income earners.
- vi. Street Walker: This category of prostitutes earns low income, and they are “vulnerable to exploitation” and do not get job satisfaction. Research in Colorado Springs on streetwalkers showed that they were “18 times more likely to be murdered than other women of similar age” (Fuchs, 2013, n.d).

The description of the different categories above gives credence to the thought that perhaps the legalization of prostitution may help to secure the lives of these women.

In rare cases, males are the sex providers. Ironically, this lopsided assumption makes it hard to realize that sex is a two-way emotional transaction/contract that is mutually experienced by both partners, hence, in a way, both are providers and receivers. The only difference is that the exchange of money for this mutual experience gives it a business outlook. After all, a business only thrives where there is money, and the monies are in the pockets of the patriarchs, the capitalists- men. So, if you, the female needs the money, your back has to be on the ground to allow a male access to your body for his sexual gratification in exchange for money in your pocket-the vulnerable female. In the play, *Beyond the Boundaries*, the prostitution discourse is graphically and explicitly projected in Afoke's speech, the Presidential candidate of the New Era Congress party during her campaign:

AFOKE: Our party's emblem is the Unicorn. Vote for the Unicorn, the New Era Congress. Women, I will not disappoint you. I will make policies that will favour you all. First, no more prostitution in our land. This is because prostitution is a symbiotic exercise, yet nothing is heard about the male patron who makes the business thrive. Can there be a business boom without patronage?

ALL: No.

AFOKE: So, since only women are tagged prostitutes, we shall close that business and let the customers starve. Na who be de customer?

ALL: Men!

AFOKE: *Man na customer, woman na service provider so, time don come wey our women and girls wey dey prostitute go withdraw their services. E be like when you wan make call, you get credit for your phone but no network. Na so too, whether man get all the money for pocket, and he want your back for ground, cash for your hand, make you tell am say "no network" for your area. Women, wetin una go tell am?*

ALL: *No network. (God' spresence, 2016, 29-30)*

Afoke succinctly patronizes the morality feminist's standpoint in justifying women's assertiveness to resist prostitution which denigrates a woman's true essence and makes her a sellable commodity in exchange for money, thus she emphasizes:

AFOKE: *Women and girls, make una remember tell any man wey wan spoil your body say 'no network,' make him shift go another side" (p.30). And also encourages those who depend on prostitution as their source of livelihood to desist from it, thus:*

AFOKE: *Mama, no worry. You or your pikin no go disgraces womanhood before una go chop. We get work for all prostitutes. Secondly, no more condom! Yes! Dem dey make woman sex-slave because of condom. They exploit your bodies frequently because condoms are readily acceptable and available. Condom don become license for promiscuity. Women, make una hold una children. We no want hear say one boy dey spoil our girls because condom dey. We no want say our young girls go dey get belle and no fit go school. We want our children to be responsible. Again, those men wey dey rape small children, wetin we go do dem?*

ALL: *We go fight dem. (pp.30-31)*

The conversation above between Afoke and her Ewhokpokpor community women directly speaks to the subject of morality feminism in the face of daring circumstances that puts to test the women's ability for self-control and direct confrontation against the temptation of submitting to prostitution in exchange for money.

Sex Surrogacy, on the other hand, is like a twin sister to prostitution. While a prostitute may not have a regular client, a sex surrogate may stick to one client for as long as the therapy will last. This may be viewed as another form of prostitution as females are mostly the sex providers and therapists.

A sex surrogate or a surrogate partner is one who engages in sexual intimacy and physical touch with his or her client. Sex surrogacy is a form of sex therapy for clients who

are having challenges in their sexual relationships. While sex workers (prostitutes) job is majorly to give sexual gratification to a client, the aim of a sex surrogate, according to Neha Pathak, is to “help a person overcome troubles they have around sex and intimacy, whether they are physical, social, or emotional, they may focus on areas like relaxation, communication, and social skills training. In some cases, surrogate partners never have physical contact with their client.” (Pathak, 2020,n.p). Most importantly, there is the need to discontinue any relationship or contact with a client as soon as the therapy process comes to an end.

Surrogate partner therapy would be needed by people with various sexual challenges such as:

- i. Physical or mental disability
- iii. Sexual identity questions
- iv. Anxiety or fears around sex and intimacy
- v. Other sexual dysfunctions like early ejaculation or vaginismus (a problem with the muscles of the vagina). (Pathak, 2020).

Importantly, sexual surrogacy involves three persons to make a team, namely:

1. Sex therapist
2. Sex surrogate
3. Client.

The first two work for the success of their client. The sex therapist works directly with the client while the services of the sex surrogate is only employed when the therapist feels that this will further help to bring more rewarding result to his client. It is however, imperative to note that there is a professional organization that is set up for people who are in the field of Surrogate Partner Therapy known as the International Professional Surrogate Association. In the ethics of their profession, which aligns with morality feminism, the organization makes sure that its members keep to the code of ethics and receive trainings as well as achieve competency.

In further emphasis on the role the sex surrogate, Marie Claire (2019) clarifies that a sex surrogate is “a professionally trained sex partner, who charges between 100 pounds to 200 pounds an hour to practice intimate physical contact with clients – including penetration if necessary – to help them work through sexual problems that prevent them from engaging in healthy sexual relationships” (Claire, 2019, n.p). This revelation puts further thought to the question of how similar prostitution to sex surrogacy is. If it involves sexual intimacy and penetration which may culminate in payment for the services rendered, then let the reader make the final analysis of the status of these two related professions.

Projected Risks

This process of surrogacy becomes worrisome when the therapy takes longer period especially for a married couple where a partner seeks the intervention of a sex surrogate

therapists. Morality needs some justification here as the client will have to deliberately work within limits agreed upon with his or her spouse so as not to jeopardize the healthy marital or sexual relationship or foundation, they may have laid over a period. Will this kind of sex surrogacy intervention result to infidelity, adultery or prostitution? Where is the place of morality in the midst of this self-seeking sexual gratification therapy?

Claire (2019) affirms that sex surrogacy has its associated risks. She noted Mike Lousada's observation that "the crucial role of any good psychotherapist is to monitor clients' emotions and keep them grounded in reality – but the surrogate must stay down-to-earth, too" (n.p). I dare say that this reality puts both the therapist and client in a very daisy position. Claire cited some revelations made by Mare Simone, a 59-year-old sex surrogate who has worked for over 30 years. Simone cautions that "when you're making breakthroughs and sharing wonderful moments with clients over many months, things feel deep, and endorphins are released that mimic the buzz of falling in love; you have to be very self-aware" (Claire, 2019, n.p). This kind of therapy which tends to penetrate sensitive and private areas that other therapists would naturally not encroach, throws up a challenge to all partners who are either directly or indirectly involved in this process.

Mike Lousada, a 48-year-old London-based sexologist clarifies that the process of sex surrogacy is supported by a therapist who delves into discussions on the client's emotions after each session and at the same time addressing the concerns of the mind and body. Lousada who has counseled one thousand clients says, out of the lot, he has acted as a surrogate to 25 of them. However, he emphasized the importance of the application of sex surrogate therapy which will further help to achieve the desired success; an experience he referred to as "life-transforming." According to him, "many of these clients had undergone talk-based therapies for years, but they needed more than conversation;" adding that "directly exploring sexual touch with a surrogate in a safe, controlled environment enabled them to move forward" (Claire, 2019, n.p.). This is indeed a radical approach to an issue that begs for moral justification of a process that is totally decisive of a client's future relationship with his or her spouse. Little wonder that Monique 38, had her doubts over her husband, Nathan's 41 involvement in a sex surrogate therapy session to resuscitate their sex life. After several failed sessions with different counselors, they finally had appointment with Simone when they learned about surrogacy which they believe have prospects. However, the challenging aspect is whether Nathan will trust himself to practice sex with a woman other than his wife "who'd teach him techniques and wouldn't take his anxious hesitancy personally? Could being touched by someone accepting and supportive restore Monique's self-esteem? (Claire, 2019, n.p.). This process requires a reassessment by the couple who want to adopt it to own up to whatever the outcomes may be.

The Surrogate in a Glance

The Sex Surrogate in the film, *The Surrogate*, is a female who has a male client. As she meets her client, he tells her that her money is "over there." Perhaps she was not expecting such overly formal and business-like kind of reception that is bereft of intimacy

and emotional attachment. So, she tries to justify her mission and purpose by dissociating herself from the known sex business-like atmosphere of prostitution, thus:

Sex Surrogate: Although the aim is for us to have sex, I'm not a prostitute. You don't have to pay me up-front. I have nothing against prostitutes, but there is a difference. We can talk about that later.

Reacting to this, her client apologizes saying "I'm sorry." The conversation went further:

Sex Surrogate: The other thing is, there is a limit to the number of sessions we can have. Did Laura mention that when you saw her?

Client: I am sorry, I don't remember.

Sex Surrogate: The limit is six. That gives us plenty of opportunity to explore.

This is really interesting. Having six sexual intercourse sessions with only one client is way beyond prostitution. In prostitution, a sex provider may meet with his/her client only once, unless and except on contract which in most cases is on business grounds – for the pecuniary gains. But in sex surrogacy, more intimacy and emotions are built up which could gravitate to another level of intimate relationship, if not properly handled. Little wonder that Cheryl Cohen Greene, a grandmother, revealed in an interview uploaded by CNN (January 24, 2020) that she has been married to her former client for 30 years. She has been in the profession for 38 years and has served 950 clients.

It is important to note that sex surrogate help others work through their own sexual problems but the challenge it may cause in the future remains to be seen.

Findings

1. Prostitution does not include only those in the commercial sex work but anyone who deliberately exchanges sex for personal gains.
2. Sex surrogate therapy can be detrimental as well as helpful to a spouse's sexual relationship
3. Sex surrogacy involves more intimacy and emotional attachment than prostitution
4. Sex surrogates are professionally trained; this is not the case with prostitution.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has thoroughly examined two subject matters viz: prostitution and sex surrogacy and has succinctly discussed the nature of the two different and yet similar professions.

- i. This study adopted the radical and morality feminism for its theoretical framework.
- ii. This study throws light on the challenges associated with one spouse employing the services of a sex surrogate and the threat to the future status of their relationship.

This study has successfully addressed the set objectives raised for this research thus:

1. It is very obvious that the patriarchal structures in our society only consider the female as a prostitute and the male, a client.
2. This research has proven that the sex surrogacy therapy, though helpful as it may seem, yet can dismantle or threaten a healthy relationship that has been in existence between partners.
3. This study reveals that there is the need for a conscious and deliberate effort by a sex surrogate to work within limits of the profession to be able to control straying emotions.

Recommendations

With regards to the findings from this research, this study therefore recommends the following:

1. Caution and proper consultation be exhaustively deployed by couples before delving into sex surrogacy therapy.
2. There is the need for the adoption of a feminist approach towards addressing the lopsidedness and gender inequality associated with sexual narratives that undermine women's leadership and intellectual skills that will aid the development of our society.
3. Much attention should be paid to how women can develop entrepreneurial skills to divert the attention of the younger generation from their bodies.

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