

Sponsorship: a form of prostitution or a form of traditional gender relations?

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Abstract

This chapter reviews data from earlier empirical research to consider the boundaries between the social position of women as indicated by their personal, family and sexual relationship. The monogamous or “good” woman has long been distinguished from the women who profit from sexual relationships often labelled as “prostitutes”. But there are new groups emerging at the borderlines of sexwork, in particular “sponsoring” whereby a man may provide a woman with full financial security in return not only for sex but for companionship in various activities related to work or entertainment. This paper asks how this role is perceived, as it includes elements of traditional marriage as well as traditional sexwork.

Key words

Sponsorship; marriage; gender

Resumen

Este artículo revisa datos de investigaciones empíricas anteriores para reflexionar sobre los límites de la posición social de las mujeres según sus relaciones personales, familiares y sexuales. Siempre se ha diferenciado a la mujer monógama o “buena” de las mujeres que obtienen beneficio de sus relaciones sexuales y que han sido etiquetadas como “prostitutas”. Pero hay nuevos grupos que están emergiendo en las líneas fronterizas del trabajo sexual; en particular, el “patrocinio”, mediante el cual un hombre proporciona una seguridad financiera a una mujer a cambio no sólo de sexo, sino también de compañía en actividades varias relacionadas con negocios o placer. Este artículo se pregunta cómo se percibe este rol, ya que incluye elementos del matrimonio tradicional y del trabajo sexual tradicional.

Palabras clave

Patrocinio; matrimonio; género

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1. Introduction

For a few years now, the Polish press has been publishing articles on “sponsorship” (or sponsoring). This phenomenon arouses curiosity and interest for several reasons. It consists of an exchange of money and sex, i.e. two goods which are always mentioned when prostitution is studied, described and analysed. However, sponsorship is much more than just a simple exchange of this kind. In fact, it is a sort of interpersonal relationship, and attention is given to the two fairly unusual parties involved in it. On the one hand, these are mainly women who are mostly well-educated, still at universities, sometimes also working, who are partly or wholly maintained by men they are intimate with. Male payers also seem unusual: many are not simply well-off but also well-educated and attractive. According to the women involved, those men could enter into regular relationships where they would not need to pay. Well, what then is the essence of such relationships? What do both parties have to offer to each other? Is it a form of prostitution or, rather, a redefined form of a traditional relationship where the man is obliged to pay the bills while the woman needs to satisfy his sexual needs? Empirical data on this subject are very scarce because women are reluctant to take part in any research.¹ However, the sparse academic studies, press reports, popular coverage and information posted online nevertheless encourage reflection on this phenomenon and, more broadly, reflection on the transformation of intimate relationships in the modern world.

This paper consists of two parts. In the first, I will present the key components of the phenomenon in question. In the second part, I will return to the question posed in the title, i.e. how we can define sponsorship in the modern world, where ‘liquid modernity’ also means the fluidity of interpersonal relations, and many forms of paid work require people to ‘sell emotions’ and create the impression of a personal relationship between the working person and the customer.

2. Sponsorship: compulsion or a lifestyle choice?

Sponsorship is even more difficult to define than prostitution. It is a kind of arrangement between two people, where one agrees to a relationship with sex as a mandatory element whereas the other one agrees to fully support the other financially. As in prostitution, this relationship involves an exchange of sex and money. However, it is not the case that one party only offers ‘sexual services’ whereas the other one offers only money in return. Those people often accompany each other in everyday life, travel, leisure and conversations. “We’ve struck a deal of sorts. I give him my company, he gives me money. In fact, that’s not the only thing he gives me. He gives me a lot more (...) we talk. That’s not trivial.” (Aga, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 104); “I go out with someone just because I want to go out. To have someone to go to the cinema with, go to a museum, go shopping, have a laugh and not feel lonely.” (Kamila, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 117); “I didn’t know anyone here (...) I needed someone I could talk to. I felt really lonely.” (Klaudia, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 118). Thus, much like in many other intimate relationships, an important motivation for seeking a partner lies in the sense of loneliness, the desire to spend time in someone’s company and experience closeness, to have the possibility to engage in an interesting conversation: “We often talk to each other. We have some beer or champagne. He usually tells me about his travels. Sometimes we talk like

¹ The interviews quoted in this paper are taken from two empirical studies: one by Renata Gardian (2007), *Zjawisko sponsoringu jako forma prostytucji kobiecej* [The phenomenon of sponsorship as a form of female prostitution] and the other one by Katarzyna Charkowska (2012) *Zjawisko prostytucji w doświadczeniach prostytuujących się kobiet* [The phenomenon of prostitution in the experience of prostituting women]. Katarzyna Charkowska conducted 19 interviews with women, most of whom work in escort agencies and some are, or were, kept by one sponsor. Renata Gardian conducted eight interviews with women supported by sponsors. In addition, she also posted an announcement about looking for a sponsor. Within 11 days, she received 239 responses to her announcement from 239 men, 64 of whom offered her money for sex. All quotes from the research material are used here with the study author’s consent.

that for eight hours, when he comes back from a trip, without getting physically close." (Kinga, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 112).

As in many other relationships between men and women, there is no doubt that intimate contacts and sex are among the ingredients of the relationship but not the only ingredient. In fact, the two people have much more in common: they provide company to each other, they are conversation partners, they share impressions, hobbies or everyday problems. However, in this kind of relationship the rules of contact are not equal for both parties, and the possibility to take advantage of the partner's company is not the same for both. It is the payee who usually meets the needs of the payer in this regard: "Sometimes I meet him, I accompany him in his various needs (...). There are sexual needs, too, but there's also socialising (...). I keep him company at banquets, business dinners and discos." (Aga, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 104). Therefore, the sponsored person accompanies her partner during his trips, at parties and in his daily life, and this happens at his initiative, at his request and usually (though not always) without reciprocity. Keeping company during activities such as business dinners, travel or banquets is not the payee's initiative or choice but, in fact, part of her commitment to the other party. Many of these activities are probably pleasant but the situation also involves constant readiness to commit her time when, and only when, it is convenient for the payer.

A sponsorship-based arrangement may start in a variety of ways. It may begin much like many other relationships: "At first, he suggested we should meet without sex (...). Despite paying, he is my friend. I know that sounds absurd but that's the way things are. During the four years since I met him, I slept with him maybe fifteen times or less." (Klaudia, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 81). Sponsorship may also begin as a clear agreement where the rights and obligations of both parties are defined and the rules are negotiated: "He wanted to stay together for about five years, during my entire university time. I didn't want to be bound for so long (...) but then again, there must be an exchange (...) he made me an offer I couldn't reject, he said he'd pay for everything and that I won't need to worry about my subsistence (...). He suggested a meeting, just like that, to discuss all the details and dispel my doubts. We agreed to meet for coffee, developed a so-called 'contract' and ended up in bed." (Iwona, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 104–105).

Motivations for entering into such a relationship vary. While financial motivations prevail, this does not mean that the women were previously living in misery. Rather, their situation was difficult, both financially and socially. The respondents say they came to an unfamiliar city, with no friends or money, taking up odd jobs for low pay, having to give up a lot of things. Their situation changed dramatically after they found a sponsor: "I wanted to buy so many things, and thanks to this I was able to have everything, without sacrifices. I bought a new armchair for my mom because her old one was tattered, and old wreck. I was glad that I could give my mom more than some small things because I had never been able to afford anything else before." (Iwona, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 106). The motive of loneliness after moving to a big city, as well as the desire to help a poor family are mentioned quite often in the statements made by sponsored women. However, these are not the only motives. Other important reasons for entering into such a relationship include inferiority complexes, with the arrangement as a way to get rid of them. This mechanism works on both sides, the payer and the payee. In the latter case, boosting their self-esteem by getting paid for sex is highlighted not only by sponsored women but also by those who work in the sex industry. One woman working in an escort agency said: "Beforehand, it was all about financial things, but what came later was a great boost to my self-esteem, acceptance of my body; my complexes were gone when I saw a guy staring at me, almost devouring me with his eyes, but he'd get me only if he paid a lot." (Tatiana, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 118).

Women talk about the men who support them in a similar way: "he is an interesting but very lonely man" (Kinga, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 108); "They are full of

complexes, I think. They have no one to listen to them. They are busy with work, no time for a regular relationship." (Klaudia, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 109).

Male payers also appreciate the advantage of having a younger partner. Importantly, this is not always and not only about the benefits of sex: "One of the sponsors once told me something I remembered, he said 'I'm just living your youth, I suck it out of you in exchange for the right amount of money, I can feel young and handsome again'." (Tatiana, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 118).

Thus, a relationship where money is exchanged for sex is often a way to maintain social and intimate contacts. It prevents a sense of loneliness and lack of partner, boosts self-esteem and enables people to feel close to someone. Incidentally, many sex workers, also those working for escort agencies, talk about paid encounters where someone is looking for a listening ear rather than a sexual intercourse: "I don't consider myself a prostitute, but you're right, sex for money is prostitution, but then again, what do you call it when someone comes over to my place and wants to drink champagne and talk to me... I used to have a man who would come for three hours, he'd drink whisky and complain about his leukaemia and I would just listen to him... He paid me; what I do is a kind of social work, I have a bit of fun and I make money..." (Ola, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 144). It may be surprising that people who have such needs pay money to sex workers rather than psychotherapists but there are probably many social reasons why, paradoxically, those men find it easier to visit a woman and theoretically pay for sex, confide in her and seek closeness during that paid time rather than to see a psychotherapist because the latter would clearly define them as a man with a problem that he cannot handle by himself.

Does this mean that women who are sponsored do not consider themselves prostitutes? Do women who describe their job as "a reciprocal exchange" of goods that are valuable for the other party fully accept this job without attaching any negative perceptions to it? There are at least three arguments against this claim. Firstly, women in sponsorship-based relations often do not openly tell others where they get money from. Even if their friends know it, the family members, especially the parents, hardly ever find out. Those women do realise that their parents would clearly condemn this way of making money, and some even anticipate very radical reactions: "If they [parents] found out, they'd probably swipe me across the face." (Kamila, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 96); "It's best not to say anything" (Jola, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 96); "If they found out, they'd make quite a row about it! Of course they don't know... They have no idea and I think they'll never find out." (Aga, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 96). All the interviewees live away from their family homes. Their families do not control them but often expect that an adult woman would get ahead on the difficult job market by combining a job with university education. Young women often help their families financially but they are very embarrassed when admired by parents for being independent and earning good money when parents are unaware of how they make money: "My parents tell one of my big sisters to follow my example because I became independent quickly and she could manage without them if she really wanted to. Then I feel very awkward because they don't know the truth and finding a job is not that easy." (Jola, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 97).

Thus, it is obvious that this way of making money is not an "ordinary job" which can be openly communicated to others, especially to relatives, even though the interviewees present it as an exchange of goods and a contract. The interviewed women are aware that this source of income is condemned by others and that other people see it as prostitution and that women who practice it are viewed very negatively. This fact was confirmed, among others, by the results of online research, where the author posted an announcement about looking for a sponsor. Although most responses came from men who wanted to get in touch with her, there were also a number of responses expressing condemnation, aggression, and even threats: "That's not very nice. My opinion is that you could get financial support from a guy

who loves you and is close to you." (Gardian 2007, 123); "It's impossible for such a beautiful girl to earn her living with her ass. You made me depressed." (Gardian 2007, 123); "And do you think that pleasure for money is okay?" (Gardian 2007:123); 'I'll find you and I'll kill you.' (Gardian 2007:123). In this situation, it is hardly possible to defend the claim that this gainful occupation is similar to all other jobs and perceived by other people as such.

Another argument is related to the reluctance that many young women initially experience when accepting money from their partner. At the beginning, many of them found it difficult to view payment for sex as "normal". One of them recalled the first such situation, which was also her sexual initiation, by saying: "I cried a lot because money ruined everything." (Klaudia, quoted in Gardian 2007, 81). Those who decided to make money in this way were convinced by the sums they could earn: "When I looked at the money I earned so quickly in those three hours, my qualms of conscience quickly faded away. I had never made so much money in such a short time before." (Iwona, quoted in Gardian 2007, 105).

Finally, the sponsored women's ambivalent attitude to their own situation is reflected in the statements made by those who have stopped getting money in intimate relationships. Particularly notable is a comment made by a woman whose arrangement with the sponsor turned into a close relationship, where the physical closeness remained but payment disappeared: "[T]he fact that I don't get any money from him is really, really good. Now I feel much better about it. You know, it's strange, but I'd like to have a husband like that." (Klaudia, quoted in Gardian 2007, 81). Thus, accepting money from a sexual partner is considered by some women as possibly embarrassing and hard to accept.

The liquidity of the boundaries between a partner supporting a woman he feels close to and a sponsorship-based relationship is also reflected in a statement where an interviewee describes the start of her relationship: "... I was unemployed and depended on him for subsistence, but I did my best to compensate him for that somehow." (Cecylia, quoted in Gardian 2007, 118). She treated that man as her partner rather than a sponsor, even though he supported her financially. She did the cooking, ran the house and was his sexual partner. However, the man left her and got close with her friend, while she entered into a sponsorship deal with another man.

Sponsors use many techniques to dispel the doubts and criticism about this kind of relationship. Most commonly, sponsors present it as work. Sometimes, sponsorship begins with a woman responding to a job ad in a newspaper. In other cases women meet the sponsor at a disco, a restaurant or at a bus stop. Before making an offer, the man gets a chance to find out that the woman is short of money and looking for work: "[W]e talked [over coffee] (...) about my dreams. He wrote everything on a piece of paper, what my dreams were (...) [he said] 'I'll get you a job if you want one. You will have a business flat, a company car, you will have whatever you want to. This will be our business'. And I asked: 'What will I need to do in return?' And he says: 'You will be my lover'." (Kamila, quoted in Gardian 2007, 102) "[He asked] if I was a student and what I was doing in general. I told him that I couldn't afford to pursue my interests (...). And, step by step, he made me an offer... He'd say he'd pay for everything and I wouldn't need to worry about my living expenses. He gave me his business card saying: 'Think it over and then call me back'." (Iwona, quoted in Gardian 2007, 102).

Another technique used by men is to offer care in a difficult life situation: "My mom passed away when I was 18 (...). [A man I knew] suggested that I could move in with him because I had no means of subsistence anyway and that I could at least finish school." (Cecylia, quoted in Gardian 2007, 83). The young woman initially accepted his help gratefully and it was only after some time that she realised that the help was not offered selflessly but, rather, as a way of taking advantage of her difficult situation, to make her "dependent on him, so that he could have an ass ready to

fuck, and I was stupid back then, I thought he was doing it out of love." (Cecylia, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 84).

Negative perceptions are weakened by emphasising that the parties are simply bound by a contract where each party offers something valuable to the other party. The negative perceptions can also be softened by depreciating the contribution that one makes, by presenting it as something that is effortless and requires no sacrifice. The woman who posted a job search ad but then decided to accept a sponsor's offer said: "What I found was not a job but a guy who offered me good money for nothing special, that's what sex is, after all." (Cecylia, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 103). Male sponsors view their contributions in similar light. One of the sponsored women described her benefits as follows: "It's not just the money, but he rents a studio flat for me, I get very expensive presents from him but he thinks they are trifles." (Cecylia, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 106).

After Chapkis (1997), who analysed statements of prostitutes, one can say that consent to a sponsorship arrangement cannot be clearly seen as a "free choice" but, rather, it is a "rational choice" for everyone involved.

Another way to soften the negative perceptions is to make easy comparisons with other women, especially in two respects which are crucial when it comes to exchanging sex and money. First of all, women invoke the traditional model of gender roles where men are supposed to pay the bills: "I always thought that it's the guy who should pay for the movies, theatre, or going out to a pub. It looks nice. Does he have to be called a sponsor right away, which he is, to some extent, but then again, not quite so..." (Jola, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 77). The respondent's hesitation as to whether it is sufficient for the man to pay the bills to call this arrangement "sponsorship" is understandable when we recall that the gendered division of roles known in sociology is based on the breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy. As highlighted in literature, this division is a source of the labour market organisation in a way where people of one gender (men) can devote their time and effort primarily to work. However, according to many ideas and expectations his pay is supposed to be "a family wage", which means, in practice, that a man receives money also for his wife, which gives him, as the money manager, an obvious economic advantage over a woman (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003, pp. 21–22). Such an economic advantage is one dimension of "hegemonic masculinity", which "can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 2005, 77). Research has demonstrated that this definition of a man/husband is often accepted in the Polish society even today. Most married women and married men define a good husband as a breadwinner: "[A good husband] is able to keep a family" (the woman's statement), "he earns a living for the household" (a man's statement). A good wife is viewed as a woman who takes care of the house, performs housework, takes care of her looks and her husband's needs, and is often subordinated to him to some degree: "[A good wife] listens to her husband, cleans the house, cooks well, takes care of her husband, of her looks" (a man's statement); "[she makes sure] that everything is on time, like food, or clean clothes" (a woman's statement) [Duch-Krzyszczek 2007, 133]. This division of roles does not differ significantly from that applicable to women and men in arrangements known as "sponsorship". One can even say that a woman in a sponsorship-based relationship has fewer household chores than a wife and is less likely to perform free housework. She also often has more freedom in spending money received from the sponsor and the sponsor does not check how she spends it.

The second important similarity between sponsored women and other women is a consequence of modern-day sexual and moral freedom: "I am not a prostitute who works in an escort agency. I am (...) a sponsorette. I've had one partner for a long time and he gives me money. I don't sleep with a few people at the same time and I

am the one who chooses who I go to bed with (...). Contrary to what people think, I don't have more lovers than some sexually liberated women do." (Meliana, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 124).

Since the arrangement between a sponsor and a sponsored woman is, in many respects, similar to other relationships between men and women, a question arises as to whether all sex workers would like to be in such relationships. Many of them probably would, as pointed out by the women who first worked in escort agencies and then decided to go for a sponsorship arrangement suggested by a client. This is also reflected in statements made by other women working in escort agencies. "If I can find one particular sponsor who will pay for all my university education and a language school, I'd definitely go for such one man (...). I'd rather have one sponsor but it is hard to find one." (Misia, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 152). However, some women working for escort agencies would not like to live in such an arrangement. Above all, they believe that this would limit their freedom, give too many rights to the man and subordinate them to this one man. "For me, it would be boring and I would be imprisoned because he'd like me to be there for him whenever he calls me, I'd have to go everywhere with him (...). He would limit me too much and claim that I'm his own, and I don't really like that. I mean, I've never liked it, even many years ago." (Jola, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 155). Women who consciously choose to work for an escort agency stress that a sponsorship relationship is too much of a mix between paid work and private life, and this is dangerous for the woman because the arrangement is asymmetrical, with an unequal distribution of power and control. The danger is that the woman might begin to view such a deal as a relationship whereas the man will see it as a deal where he buys what he wants, with emotional attachment not being part of that deal. As a result, those women prefer working for an escort agency: "For many reasons. First of all, I won't get attached to a client (...). I avoid pretending that there is some sort of relationship. It's easier for me to separate work from the rest of my life." (Niki, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 156).

The vast majority of sponsored women have a relatively high status: nearly all of them have graduated or are soon to graduate from a university, some of them getting sought-after degrees, e.g. in pharmacy. They have ambitious plans for the future, always for career but very often also for family life. They plan to: "finish my degree, find a good job, maybe go abroad." (Aga, quoted in Gardian 2007, 113); "I want to become a businesswoman. I want to earn enough to buy my own flat and a car." (Kamila, quoted in Gardian 2007, 114). Most of them (though not all) have plans for a family life (husband, children): "I want to have a normal family, normal kids and a normal life. Contrary to what it may seem, I'm a normal person, I have the same needs and feelings as any normal person." (Kinga, quoted in Gardian 2007, 113). They are more likely than women working in sex agencies to speak of distrust towards men, something they learned on the job. However, there are also women in this group who doubt the possibility of achieving happiness in a relationship with another person: "And who I am supposed to live with? A husband who will cheat on me and go whoring? I no longer believe in love, that's a thing for teen girls, not for women who know what they want." (Cecylia, quoted in Gardian 2007, 114). Such observations and disappointments are much more commonly expressed by women working in escort agencies: "All in all, the clients come from different backgrounds (...) most foreigners are single and busy with their work, while Poles are husbands, most of them are like that, and there are also actors, politicians, doctors, policemen, priests (...). Looking at them, I don't feel like having someone in the house again and wondering if he is also like that or not (...). It is enough for me to see how they deceive their partners, you wouldn't believe what kind of men come here (...) husbands, doctors, actors." (Ola, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 124–125); "Most of them say they have wonderful wives but they aren't any good in bed (...). In fact, when I listen to those guys and see them, I'm really upset to see what guys can be like." (Tatiana, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 159). As some sponsored women point out, money is supposed to take off the burden of cheating from a relationship: "The

money seems to clear his conscience. In a strange way, though." (Jola, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 110). Sponsored women are often surprised that despite the fact that sponsors or clients of escort agencies certainly love their wives or partners, they nevertheless cheat on them with women they pay money to. Those women often have doubts as to whether a relationship with a man would make sense, since their job has taught them to distrust men. They fear that they might get cheated on as well. The respondents often view themselves and their conduct as superior because they act openly, without cheating on their partners. In their opinion, sex working is not the same as cheating but, instead, a way to make money. As one of the sex workers commented on cheating men: "I had never cheated on anyone. When I met my child's father, I quit my job right away." (Ola, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 125).

3. Definitional ambiguities and their consequences in defining "the difference"

Is sponsorship a kind of prostitution? The answer to this question seems simple and affirmative if we adopt a narrow definition whereby prostitution occurs whenever sex is exchanged for money. While contemporary scholarly studies on prostitution often provide no definitions at all, the ones that do always contain this element of exchange: "'prostitution' generally means the commission by a person of any natural or unnatural sexual act, deviate sexual intercourse, or sexual contact for monetary consideration or other thing of value" (<https://definitions.uslegal.com/p/prostitution/>). Some authors consider this definition to be too narrow, and they add other elements to it, such as sexual promiscuity: "the act or practice of engaging in promiscuous sexual relations, especially for money" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prostitution/>). They may also include the fact that partners are not spouses or friends: "Prostitution, the practice of engaging in relatively indiscriminate sexual activity, in general with someone who is not a spouse or a friend, in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/prostitution/>). Does this mean that people who "only" exchange sex and money are involved in prostitution, but once they make friends this relationship transforms into a different kind of relationship despite the continued exchange of money and sex? Is the relationship between one woman and one man, where one person is willing to offer sex while the other offers money, not prostitution because there is no promiscuity? In view of these questions, the initial idea to call sponsorship a form of prostitution begins to raise doubts. This is reflected in the self-definitions provided by women involved in such relationships. Some of them say firmly that this is prostitution: "Sponsorship is a softer form of prostitution" (Kinga, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 77), while others emphasise that in relationships between a woman and a man the richer person often pays the bills and it is the man in most cases: "[People] tend to forget about one thing, sometimes there is love between an older and a younger partner, and it is difficult nowadays to have a partnership without money." (Jola, quoted in *Gardian* 2007, 77). This latter definition brings "sponsorettes" closer to "ordinary women" involved in a relationship with a richer partner. However, the borderline between "ordinary women" and "prostitutes" is not clearly drawn and there is no consensus as to which criteria put a woman on one side or the other. This is pointed out by sex workers from escort agencies, who often refuse to define themselves as prostitutes. A prostitute is always "another woman, not me". It is someone who can be defined with attributes implicating a negative perception: "I don't consider myself a prostitute. To me, a prostitute is a woman who sells herself for pennies with just anybody, but I have self-respect, I know how much I am worth, I am the one to choose my clients and I only do what I like." (Tatiana, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 145). The respondents at least have some doubts about this self-definition: "Not sure, I can't admit I'm a prostitute (...) because, in my opinion, prostitutes stand along the road in pathetic looking boots, mini skirts, heavy makeup." (Ola, quoted in Charkowska 2012, 144).

It is also obvious to a researcher that there is a difference between sponsored women and women working for an escort agency. Sponsored women are in a situation of "financial independence" in terms of income. Unlike in agencies, they do not pay money to any intermediaries, they are safer because they know their partner, his needs and fantasies. If both situations are to be viewed as sex working, then sponsored women are more likely to work only on their own account.

Self-definitions or attempts at defining others in the case of a job that is so heavily burdened with social perceptions (prostitution or sponsorship) necessitate the effort to seek differences between different categories or people. In this case, we are dealing with comparisons and definitions produced by the surrounding people, who divide women into different categories: "decent" and "indecent", "virtuous" and "debauched", financially "dependent" and "independent". As Martha Minow (1990) shows, this also involves treating oneself and one's situation as the norm: "The name of the difference is produced by those with the power to name and the power to treat themselves as the norm" (Minow 1990, 11). A non-working woman who is sexually involved with a man supporting her, who performs housework and is not bound by a clear contract never calls herself a sponsored woman and is never considered as such. A high-status woman who derives benefits from sex with one or more carefully selected partners does not call herself a prostitute. She uses this term to refer to other, mostly poorer women who are dependent on others and do not get to choose their clients. However, self-definitions are not created freely: socially developed definitions also influence the boundaries between oneself and others: "[T]he efforts to rename oneself may be circumscribed by the attitudes and authority of those who have defined the difference" (Minow 1990, 6). In European culture, a woman who is kept by a man for some time is not called "the second wife" and does not enter into a "trial marriage". In various contexts, she may bear different labels, such as a wife, a partner, a sponsored woman or a prostitute. Each of these labels entails social perceptions, often extreme ones: from full respect to condemnation.

According to Minow, the difference is based on five unspoken assumptions that are crucial for creating the "difference". The first two assumptions are particularly relevant for the case discussed in this text. Above all, a silent assumption is made that that "difference is intrinsic, not a comparison" whereas in reality the difference is always constructed on the basis of a comparison. Worth recalling is that many years ago, such "intrinsic" characteristics and differentiations were sought to draw a clear line between prostitutes and other women. C. Lombroso, the most famous representative of this kind of thinking, argued that much like there were "naturally born criminals", there were also "natural born prostitutes" who had particular characteristics of personality and body, making them different from "normal" women. This view is reflected in the title of his work *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman* (Lombroso and Ferrere 1893/2004). Scientists who were influenced by this way of thinking were surprised when anatomical studies proved that prostitutes did not exhibit any bodily features that would differentiate them from other women. Since there is no such intrinsic difference, the differences must be socially created, primarily by delineating a border between "decent" women and those defined as prostitutes. In order to generate the category of prostitutes, we must identify some "norm". In some definitions, it is the lack of any financial gain from sexual encounters. In others, such benefits are acceptable but the lack of sexual promiscuity is a distinctive feature. Yet others mention the emotional involvement or freedom in choosing a partner. However, one might wonder about the basis of this division. In the past, the rule was that the man was responsible for paying the bills and it is often also the case nowadays, whereas the woman is fully or partly supported by the man, which is a simple consequence of women's lower earnings. As Hochschild (2003) emphasises: "[L]acking other resources, women make a resource out of feeling and offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack. (For example, in 1980 only 6 percent of women but 50 percent of men earned over \$15,000 a year.) Thus their capacity to manage feeling and to do "relational"

work is for them a more important resource". In this context, it becomes even more legitimate to ask whether the fact that the man pays the bills in an intimate relationship with a woman is sufficient to define her as a prostitute and him as a client? A consistent affirmative answer would lead us to the Engelsian description of marriage. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State*, Engels wrote about marriages contracted in his times for material gain:

In both cases, this marriage of convenience often enough turns into the crassest prostitution – sometimes on both sides, but much more generally on the part of the wife, who differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage-worker, on piecework, but sells it into slavery once for all. (Engels 2004, p. 78)

Most probably, in order to avoid the trap of viewing all marriages between people of unequal financial status as prostitution, some definitions explicitly exclude marriages or friendships, even though money and sex are involved in them as well.

Given the increasing sexual freedom, the boundaries between the categories are becoming ever more fluid, enabling the emergence of many "intermediate forms" that may give rise to similar doubts as in the case of sponsorship, i.e. as to whether they can be classified as prostitution or not. The Internet is a place where other forms of exchange are offered, based on rules identical to those of sponsorship, although their providers make explicit caveats saying that this is not prostitution but, instead, a voluntary choice of a lifestyle in the modern world. One of them is the SugarDaters dating site, which claims: "In a relationship between a Sugar Daddy and a Sugar Babe, the gender roles are often more defined and old-fashioned. It's the man, who spoils, takes care of and sweetens the life of his woman. The woman can in return concentrate on being a woman and spoiling the man, with whom she's together with (...). It is of course also possible to switch the roles so that the woman is the Sugar Mama and the man is the Sugar Boy" (<https://sugardaters.com/>). Although one side expects sex while the other seeks money, the portal developers explain what SugarDating is: "SugarDating is about mutual respect, love and attraction". They repeatedly emphasise that this is not prostitution: "Selling nude pictures or sex is not Sugar Dating! (...) SugarDaters and Sugar Dating are NOT about sex for money and it's not allowed to use SugarDaters to promote escort or similar services".

Another form of similar exchange can be called "sex for rent", presented by one of the participants as follows: "You agree sort of like a couple of times a week, pop into my room sort of thing, but as far as the apartment's concerned, it's like completely as if we're flatmates. It's all the bills, the rent, free". "I am the last type of person who'd like to take advantage. Both sides have something the other person wants. I see it as a win-win situation" (BBC News 2017).

The fluidity of boundaries also entails a change in language, but this change results from a different content of the relationship rather than being a purely linguistic issue. As one of the former escort women emphasises: "[T]oday men are paying for high-priced escorts who are willing to kiss them, 'date' them, and be their pretend girlfriends. It's called the 'girlfriend experience', and escorts are no longer called hookers, prostitutes, whores or hos; they are now called 'providers'. Customers, previously known as punters, or Johns, or dirty old men now refer to themselves as 'hobbyists'". Veronica Monet (<https://veronicamonet.wordpress.com/>), a former escort who wrote a book called *Sex Secrets of Escorts*, says that the girlfriend experience is popular because the men requesting it "want an intellectual and emotional connection" (Monet, quoted in Radakovich 2012).

The fluidity of borderlines is also noticeable in self-definitions because women who derive profits from sex can often point to "another woman" who, unlike them, is "a real prostitute". For instance, prostitutes could be defined as women who cannot choose a partner, who have many partners or are used by others. This leads us to the second assumption mentioned by Minow (1990) when discussing the differentiation process. It involves a comparison against a "norm", which entails the

existence of a norm that a phenomenon can be compared against. Minow recalls Lakoff's stating that any generic category (e.g. a mother) has many subcategories (a working mother, an unwed mother etc.). Depending on what we consider to be "the norm" (e.g. marriage, lack of promiscuity, refusing to accept money), the boundary between prostitutes and "other women" will look differently. Drawing such a boundary is difficult, especially in the context of another silent assumption, which, in Minow's view, accompanies the differentiation. It is the belief that the difference is obvious to everyone because it is based on an easily distinguishable feature, noticeable to anyone regardless of context: "The observer can see without perspective". However, since the perspectives of people who make judgments may differ, the problem is solved by making another assumption in differentiation, enabling us to omit the different perspectives. As Minow claims, differentiation takes the power away from other perspectives and recognises them as irrelevant since one's own perspective is considered to be the only true one. As a result, in the case of prostitution: "Legally and socially, prostitutes were defined as 'others', as a separate and lower class of women. They represented a threat to gender norms and were understood to be a danger to the moral order" (Caslin 2010, 11).

However, the ambiguity of the status of "sponsorship" and similar relationships have their roots not only in the changes occurring in modern intimate relationships, but also in the changes that occur in the labour market. As Hochschild emphasises, today's services market requires employees to "sell" their personal traits, emotions and behaviours which were previously manifested only in private relationships. She terms it "emotional labour" and estimates that about one third of jobs in the US now require this kind of engagement. Nowadays, it is not enough to provide services: they must be provided in a way that makes the customer comfortable, and makes them feel that the service provider is interested in the customer, recognises their needs and expectations and tries to address them. The meaningful title of Hochschild's work, *The Outsourced Self* (Hochschild 2013), highlights two phenomena. The first one involves hiring paid workers to perform a variety of domestic chores that are considered "very personal", such as caring for loved ones, taking care of a home, and similar jobs that require emotional involvement. On the part of the workers, this is matched by "selling" their personal qualities and traits as well as emotional commitment. Like many symbolic interactionists, the author invokes the concept of a game, distinguishing between "deep acting" and "surface acting" after Stanislawski. By performing "emotional labour", workers use "surface acting" during which "[t]he actor does not really experience the world from an imperial viewpoint, but he works at seeming to" (Hochschild 2003, 38). The same behaviours are invoked by sponsored women, who know that showing interest, emotions, and sharing the payer's passions is part of their role, yet "deep acting" could be dangerous since it could evoke real feelings, and genuine emotional commitment but only on their part. This situation also evokes other threats, described the author as "emotive dissonance":

A principle of emotive dissonance, analogous to the principle of cognitive dissonance, is at work. Maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning over the long run leads to strain. We try to reduce this strain by pulling the two closer together either by changing what we feel or by changing what we feign. When display is required by the job, it is usually feeling that has to change; and when conditions estrange us from our face, they sometimes estrange us from feeling as change; and when conditions estrange us from our face, they sometimes estrange us from feeling as well. (Hochschild 2003, 90)

Hochschild emphasises that women specialise in "emotional labour" and one important reason is that they depend on men financially.

Especially in the American middle class, women tend to manage feeling more because in general they depend on men for money, and one of the various ways of repaying their debt is to do extra emotion work-especially emotion work that affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others. (Hochschild 2003, 165)

Thus, it can be said that the care of the partner's emotions, emotional labour, and emotional management is most often performed by women, in different contexts, including career and private life. In this respect, sponsored women are also no different from other women, and also perform "emotional labour", which is not required (or required to a much lesser extent) from sex workers working in escort agencies.

One of the reasons to support marriage was its durability (if not indissolubility) and the effort involved in raising children. Worth noting is that if we look for a difference between sponsorship and a traditional marriage where the husband maintains his wife, the difference lies in these two elements: sponsored women are well aware that their relationship with the sponsor will last only for some time, and they have completely different plans for the future. These plans include the idea of becoming independent, starting their own business, and usually also finding a relationship with another man, based on principles other than sponsorship. Therefore, we can say that women invest very little in their relationship with the sponsor: they sell their time and attention, they care about the relationship with the sponsor and his needs during the encounters but nothing more than that. This model of a relationship is very similar to "trial marriages" proposed in the first half of the twentieth century. By definition, they were supposed to be temporary, and presupposed a limited time horizon, childlessness and separability. Bertrand Russell proposed them in 1928 in his work entitled *Marriage and Morals*. He anticipated that such relationships would be beneficial for students:

Stable relations with one partner are difficult for many people until they have had some experience of variety. If our outlook on sex were sane, we should expect university students to be temporarily married, though childless. They would in this way be freed from the obsession of sex which at present greatly interferes with work. They would acquire that experience of the other sex which is desirable as a prelude to the serious partnership of a marriage with children. And they would be free to experience love without the concomitants of subterfuge, concealment, and dread of disease, which at present poison youthful adventures. (Russell 1928/1976, 281)

Similar suggestions were put forward by Margaret Mead (1966), who wrote about two steps to contracting a stable marriage: the first relationship would last no more than seven years and would involve no children by definition, whereas the "real" marriage would only be contracted as the second step. If sponsored women, most of them students, could be viewed as "temporary wives" in Russell's sense, who fulfil the feminine roles in traditional relationships vis-à-vis the men who support them (as in many traditional relationships), their status would undoubtedly be different from their current one. Perhaps this is not entirely in line with Russell's idea since most students were male in his times whereas nowadays university students are mostly female so analogous solutions would need to be designed for women.

Finally, we should mention the last assumption which, according to Martha Minow, always accompanies the process of differentiation. In her opinion, it is the conviction that "The status quo is neutral, uncoerced, and good". The above-mentioned idea of "temporary marriage", proposed by Russell and Mead, is based on other assumptions, i.e. that reality may change because social institutions, including marriage, and the processes of differentiation and the division into different categories depend on social decisions. This is also reflected in the quest by people formerly called "prostitutes" who want to be seen and described as "sex workers". In many countries, this quest is now changing the status of this work (at least partially) and the status of people engaging in it. This shows that the latter assumption of differentiation can be challenged, which may lead to a change in social divisions, and remove, or at least weaken, negative perceptions of some groups. There are also other theoretical proposals that point to the fact that in times of impermanent intimate relationships no form of such relationships (not even marriage) should be of interest to the government and should not be supported, especially financially, e.g. through the tax system (Fineman 1995). The government should be interested in, and support, care-

based relationships where a dependent person (e.g. a child, a sick person) is in somebody's care, rather than intimate relationships between adults, whether marital or otherwise. Any relationships should be exclusively a private thing of adult people. With this assumption in place, relationships will not be distinguished into ones that were supported by some kind of ceremony and those where no ceremony was performed. Rather, they would be subdivided on the basis of another distinctive feature such as, for example, equality-based unions and those where one party is dependent on the other. If such a profound change were possible, then the perceptions of sponsorship would also change. The above-mentioned research findings on the differences between women and men in terms of wages, wealth and power (including power in the family) indicate that phenomena such as prostitution or sponsorship have structural rather than individual underpinnings. If we were able to transform social relations so as to eliminate the differences in earnings, incomes, promotion opportunities and job availability for men and women, and to eliminate other areas where men are privileged, women would most likely not make "rational choices" such as prostitution or sponsorship, or would make them far less commonly, in order to pay for education, help their family or get money for their needs. This is probably an idealistic vision, but there is no reason to assume that it is unrealistic in the long run.

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