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Extracting value from their environment: some observations on pimping and prostitution as entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

There has been an upsurge in academic studies relating to the underclass as a marginalized group. Notwithstanding this, the literature seldom represents the underclass as an economically active grouping. This study counters this stance by considering street prostitutes and pimps as economically active members of an entrepreneurial underclass. Although previous studies have wrapped the prostitute (and particularly the Madame) in the mantle of entrepreneurship none have sought to do so in relation to the pimp who traditionally has been portrayed as a swaggering, flamboyant, violent, ruthless, calculating individual existing at the margins of society. In reality they remain an elusive and difficult to research genre. Few ever publicly accept the persona. Indeed, pimping runs contrary to accepted masculine doxa of what it means to be a man, making it deeply shameful to live off the immoral earnings of women. This paper, based upon the observations of the authors, adopts a semiotic perspective to re-focus these elusive characters in the entrepreneurial and criminological gaze. By concentrating upon prostitution and pimping as an entrepreneurial behaviour, and not on the prostitutes and pimps as entrepreneurial types, the paper contributes to extant knowledge by developing an appreciation of entrepreneurial strategies employed by them to create and extract value from their environment. The methodology circumvented the issues of access allowing a wider sociological discussion to develop, as well as highlighting other ethical issues of researching street level entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally the underclasses have been viewed as an economically surplus and thus marginalized social grouping. This paper examines street level entrepreneurship practiced in an underclass environment, concentrating primarily upon the thriving Scottish City of Aberdeen, but using research material gathered in other British cities. In Criminology, of late several academic studies have (re)constructed the underclass (Hayward and Yar, 2006 and Johnson *et al*, 2006). Mention of social constructionism brings wider socio-cultural issues into play as in popular culture being of the underclass is synonymous with being streetwise. In entrepreneurial mythology much is made of the streetwise nature of many entrepreneurs. In this paper we therefore consider street level prostitutes and pimps as entrepreneurial types.

At the outset, this work was conceived as a study of “*The pimp as entrepreneur*”. Although existing studies such as those of Heyl (1978) and Francis (1986) have wrapped the prostitute in the mantle of entrepreneurship, traditionally, the pimp has been portrayed as a swaggering, flamboyant, violent, ruthless, calculating, cowardly, individual existing at the margins of society. We found it ironic that these words are also commonly used to describe entrepreneurial behaviour. By logical extension we felt that it was perhaps plausible (in some cases) to socially re-construct the pimp as an entrepreneur figure than the prostitute. However, as the study progressed we found that concentrating upon the ideal type of pimp and prostitute as discussed in this paper obscured appreciation of the entrepreneurial strategies used by many street level prostitutes and pimps to extract value from their environment. The fact that Alistair Anderson (Anderson, 1995, 2000) defines entrepreneurship as “*the creation and extraction of value from an environment*” was not lost on us either. Thus in seeking to establish whether the pimp (as an ideal type) could be found on the streets of a British city we initially fixated upon floating social constructions of the pimp and the entrepreneur. We found many parallels between the pimp and entrepreneur in both the constructs and literature, however, it was not until we adopted a more holistic view of the pimp and their prostitutes by observing them in action in their environment that we came to appreciate the true extent of prostitution and its many facets as an example of entrepreneurship enacted at the margins.

This paper resulted from a chance encounter between the authors at a Criminology Conference. During the ensuing discussions the subject of pimps arose and an area of mutual research interest developed. The author / researcher B (author obscured) recounted her research activities into prostitution articulating that researching prostitution is both ethically and physically dangerous. She told an intriguing tale of the field (in the manner of Van Maannen, 1988) of how when conducting street research she had been physically assaulted and verbally abused by a pimp and his entourage who were annoyed that she would not pay him for using up his girls time. These aspects and other ethical issues will be further developed in the methodology section.

The author A, being an entrepreneurship researcher and Criminologist realised the potential to study the pimp as a street level entrepreneur. As experienced researchers, the authors appreciated that gaining research access to an actual pimp would be difficult to negotiate because few would publicly acknowledge this stigmatised label. From this standpoint emerged the idea of conducting a study using observations gathered in the field. The authors initially discussed the possibility of concentrating upon the semiotics of the genre to situate the pimp in the visual hierarchy of street criminals and entrepreneurs. This was made possible by the extent of the empirical street research conducted by author B in American and British cities over a number of years. This idea was later dropped in favour of a discursive approach based upon observations from the street. The initial concentration upon the semiotics of pimping did however, enrich the authors understanding of its socially constructed nature. Furthermore, it enabled the illegal activity of pimping to be viewed as an entrepreneurial strategy for extracting value from an environment. The methodology also circumvented the problem of gaining research access, thus allowing a wider sociological discussion to develop.

This paper has four sections. The first relates to a literature review of the entrepreneurship – prostitution nexus setting up a theoretical underpinning enabling comparisons to be drawn between the pimp and the entrepreneur. Section two discusses important methodological and ethical issues, whilst section three presents the empirical research. A google image search was used to obtain socially constructed visual data associated with pimps from which an ideal type can be constructed. This visio-ideal typology was used as a gauge to compare and measure observations gathered during the actual research. Section four discusses the implications of the research, which stands at the margins of Entrepreneurship and Criminology.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP – PROSTITUTION NEXUS

According to Ringdal (1997) and Gibbs Van Brunschot *et al*, (1999: 47) the practice of prostitution has been labeled “*the world’s oldest profession*”. Academic appreciation of the

entrepreneurship – prostitution nexus is not a new phenomenon and a limited number of studies have sought to portray prostitutes and Madame’s as entrepreneurs. Studies that emphasise the entrepreneurial nature of prostitution include those of Heyl (1978) and Francis (1986). However, these early studies tended to concentrate upon the female control of prostitution as opposed to the male domination of vulnerable women by pimps.

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, it provides a literature review of the entrepreneurship – prostitution nexus concentrating upon the dearth of literature in relation to the pimp as a criminological genre. Secondly, building upon the literature review the authors discuss the pimp as but one iconic figure in the visual hierarchy of criminal imagery. A discussion of the nuances and finer points of entrepreneurship is out-with the remit of this paper. The authors nevertheless adopt the definition posited by Anderson (1995) and (2000). For Anderson, entrepreneurship can be articulated as the “*creation and extraction of value from an environment*”. This definition has merit in relation to our analysis of prostitution as entrepreneurship because by its very nature the concept of value remains vague and elusive. Also Anderson (2000) applies this definition in relation to the notion of periphery, which is also of interest because the periphery is traditionally seen as a poor environment. Prostitutes work on the periphery of legality but still manage to extract value from their environment. However, it is necessary to stress three class-based themes that run through the literature of entrepreneurship (author obscured, 2006). These are (1) The focus on the entrepreneurial middle classes; (2) the near mythical thesis of the working class entrepreneur and its associated storyline of the poor-boy-made-good; and (3) the hagiography of the peasant entrepreneur. It should be stressed that the peasant entrepreneur is generally portrayed as being of the respectable variety. These three theoretical frameworks make lead us to consider the possibility of underclass entrepreneurship.

1.1 - Considering the possibility of an entrepreneurial underclass

Emergence, ethnicity and marginality are all hallowed and recurrent themes in entrepreneurial narrative. Nevertheless, it is a valid observation that despite Societies fascination with the Algeresque (and clichéd) storyline of the poor-boy-made-good the equally powerful constructions of the entrepreneur as hero and entrepreneurship as a morally delineated activity serve to exclude the underclass from a permanent position in entrepreneurship theory. The themes of overcoming poverty, discrimination and blighted education are merely starting points in the epic story that is entrepreneurship. Indeed, entrepreneurship is billed as an escape from such an impoverished environment. The entrepreneur is cast as somehow being special, as being different. Seldom is consideration given to the possibility that entrepreneurship (albeit of subsistence and / or criminal varieties) may be an integral part in the fabric of underclass existence. Thus the working and middle classes have the entrepreneur as a role model and the underclasses the criminal. As one respondent recently articulated “*The very fabric of Society is woven from individual acts of entrepreneurship*”. So why should the underclass be excluded from this rich tapestry? Particularly when eminent economists such as Baumol (1990) accept that entrepreneurship can be productive, unproductive and destructive. For us, prostitution is, at best, an unproductive, and, at worst, a potentially destructive form of entrepreneurship.

Prostitution can be viewed as a deviant behaviour, nevertheless Cloward & Ohlin (1960) argued that some manifestations of deviance are attributable to the presence, or absence, of institutionalised opportunities to achieve culturally preferable results compliant with the “*American dream of material success and being your own boss*”. Moreover, Claster (1992: 130) describes the emergence of criminal sub-cultures where legitimate means for achieving success are inadequate, but illegitimate avenues of prosperity exist such as prostitution, gambling, and illegal drugs. Cloward & Ohlin (1960) argue that the absence of illegal avenues of wealth creation make society worse because the displaced energy is channeled into retreatist (drugs) or conflict (violence) sub-cultures. Cloward & Ohlin’s good versus evil model is built on the premise that

“young American men, even those from the humblest origin aspire at the outset to success as defined by the dominant majority and only resort to delinquent behaviour as barriers arise”.

These arguments are the criminological equivalent to Baumol’s argument that entrepreneurs emerge from all strata’s of society and that entrepreneurs and criminals come from the same societal pool. These arguments permit those who live off immoral earnings of prostitutes to be considered entrepreneurs. Notwithstanding this, there are issues of social constructionism to be dealt with before such a transformation is possible.

1.2 – Dealing with the issue of social constructionism

Various conflicting social constructions combine to make consideration of the prostitute and pimp as entrepreneur problematic. These are the socially constructed nature of

- Entrepreneurship (Chell *et al*, 2000);
- The underclass (Morris, 2002);
- Urban space (Baker, 2006);
- Sexuality (Brison, 2001);
- Prostitution and Pimping (Brunschot *et al*, 1999).

These, often conflicting, constructions set up competing narratives, ideologies and social imageries, which are difficult to reconcile. We have already touched upon the predominant social constructions of the entrepreneur as hero and saint and also noted that the underclass (as a genre) are generally not regarded as being entrepreneurial *per se*. Prostitution is generally regarded as a problem associated with urbanity. Indeed, Baker (2006) makes reference to the social construction of urban space where whores and pimps make a living. Whilst sexuality is a taboo subject as are prostitution and pimping. The prostitute is commonly portrayed in the media as “*a morally depraved woman*” (Gibbs Van Brunschot *et al*, 1999: 56). This particularly gendered social construction is tempered by the caveat that she has been led astray. In the folklore of America, the prostitute is allowed a place alongside the entrepreneur as a folk hero as evidenced

by such ballads as ‘*Hickory Hollers Tramp*’ (Smith, O. C) where the woman is wronged by a philandering, alcoholic husband who leaves her to raise 14 hungry children. She does this by turning to prostitution but remains an all American mom to be proud of. In a similar manner, Boje (2001: 202) in researching the striptease business in America tells of the “*rags to riches story told by big business to attract labor*” and of the lure of easy money, citing the movies *Showgirls* and *Gypsy* as examples. Boje (2001: 205) eloquently narrates the stories of showgirls selling us the “*spectacle of rags to riches, the American Dream realized in the career move from Strip Club to Showgirl, from strip tease to Big Bucks Casino Shows*”. These examples illustrate how prostitution like deviance and criminality can be linked to the American Dream and thus entrepreneurship. However, Gibbs Van Brunshot *et al* (1999), also highlight another social construction, visible in contemporary discourse – namely the prostitute as a deviant and morally depraved junky. The overall tone of prostitution as socially constructed is that of moral disapproval.

The pimp is another stigmatised social construction (Baker, 2006). Pimping runs contrary to accepted masculine doxa of what it means to be a man, making it deeply shameful to live off the immoral earnings of women. Indeed, Paoli (2003: 70) stresses that the Italian Cosa Nostra initially forbade the organization of prostitution as being dishonourable. In a similar vein, Volkov (2002: 104) writing of the Russian Mafiya stresses “*Although quite profitable, prostitution, was regarded as an inferior business, capable of downgrading the relative status of the group, since it lived off women’s income*”. This ingrained stigma may also account for the dearth of studies in relation to pimps *per se* and may be an artefact of the difficulty in negotiating research access, as few men ever publicly accept the persona. Psychologically, this stigma may run deeper in that Tsang (1996) argues that prostitution is not consistent with dominant Protestant or Catholic values. Ideologically, this makes prostitution incompatible with entrepreneurial ideology with its espousal of morality and reverence of traditional values. Thus in western societies a number of related factors obviously conspire to drive the entrepreneurial in the sex trade underground, or into red-light areas where they are more difficult to research. This further restricts the opportunity

of researchers to study prostitutes and pimps as predatory street actors. However, in popular culture, the pimp is commonly portrayed in the media as a pantomime figure, a stereotypical representation of an archetypal figure embedded in the social consciousness. Such misleading ideal typifications, steeped as they are in the semiotics of American street culture, result from a body of socially constructed imagery perpetuated in the media. Such images are misleading because the symbolism and meanings associated with class based semiotics associated with individual ethnic groupings and their cultures do not always transfer across cultures. Such stereotypes may indeed obscure from view the fact that as underclass actors prostitutes and pimps are economically active and form part of a wider alternative street economy.

However, at an abstract level, these apparently disparate constructs can be linked by the notion of deviance. Nevertheless, theories of entrepreneurship are primarily focused on the individual, their attributes and behaviours and not on the concept of place and environment. As will be seen the environment is an important element in the social construction of underclass entrepreneurship.

1.3 - Repositioning the prostitute within the entrepreneurial underclass

Perhaps the most widely known study of the entrepreneurship – prostitution nexus was that of Heyl (1978) in her seminal study “*The Madam as Entrepreneur*”. However, Heyl had preceded this study with a similar one in 1977 entitled “*The Madame as Teacher*” (Heyl, 1977). This is a significant distinction because it acknowledges the divisions of practice and takes cognizance of the different roles the Madame performs in separating the craft side of prostitution from its practice as a business. Both activities are examples of co-terminus social organization. The Madame and the brothel play a central role in the organization of prostitution primarily because it creates a different more controlled dynamic from the street prostitutes surveyed in this study. The presence of a Madame and the semi-legitimacy of the brothel reconstruct the sexual experience in a more civilized manner. The women to women engagement literarily takes the ‘Man’ out of Management and the girls away from the domination and violence of the pimp. An appreciation

of the Madame as an entrepreneur also has other historical precedents. Indeed, Hudson (2002) discusses the remarkable life story of Mary Ellen Pleasant, born a slave but as a free woman achieved entrepreneurial success. She developed the trusting persona of “*Mammy*” and transformed prostitution in San Francisco, becoming an entrepreneur and literate abolitionist.

Other academics have sought to reconstruct prostitution as entrepreneurship. Francis (1986) researched “*The street queen as a sexual entrepreneur*”, and Phillip and Dann (1998) describe the bar girls / prostitutes in Central Bangkok as being entrepreneurs. To continue this theme, Hershatter (1989) discusses the role of the petty entrepreneur in a historical perspective in the hierarchy of Shanghai prostitution between 1870 and 1949. Sun (2002) discussed Anhui women as invisible entrepreneurs because of their gender in a patriarchal China classing those in domestic servitude; and those engaged in prostitution as being entrepreneurs without an enterprise. This is significant from the perspective of underclass entrepreneurship because Arlacchi (1986) in researching the Italian peasant also considered this possibility. This point introduces the concept of subsistence entrepreneurship. Indeed, Valenzuela (2001) argued with some conviction that the literature of entrepreneurship is primarily elitist, concentrating upon proprietorship and does not engage with the activities of the underclasses. Valenzuela (2001) classified these workers under the disadvantages rubric of survivalist entrepreneurs. This label could equally apply to the street prostitute and the pimp. The idea that prostitution is a form of entrepreneurship is fast gaining momentum as evidenced by three recent studies by Della Giusta *et al* (2007, forthcoming and forthcoming) who seek to explore prostitution from an economic and thus entrepreneurial perspective. Indeed, Della Giusta *et al* (2007) refer to prostitution as a denied industry and interestingly talk of feminist economics. This is relevant because entrepreneurship is written from the perspective of masculine economics.

MacDonnell (Undated) stresses that the type of work offered to women who lack education often pay significantly less than a man would make as a laborer therefore making prostitution a viable proposition. This example illustrates the disparity between feminist and

masculine economics. MacDonnell introduces the concept of social capital into the argument by the use of the phrase “*Her body, His Capital*”. This begs the question of whose capital one has to consider in assessing entrepreneurial proclivity? Bourdieu (1986) posited different categories of capital – financial, social, and human. Pimping spans all three and because of street encounters involve an unwritten triadic contract and often a clash of capitals. Emotional capital may also come into play in the relationship if a love interest is involved between the pimp and prostitute.

However, the Madame and pimp are not the only entrepreneurial typologies available to those engaged in the sex industry. Indeed, Poel (1992) stresses that male prostitution is generally regarded as a deviant, challenging activity and argues that this is so because researchers concentrate upon problematic categories and have avoided studying successful male prostitutes who may naturally be more enterprising. Poel studied male prostitution in Amsterdam, as a career choice, a rational commercial service orientated business with economic and social characteristics in common with other small and medium sized business. The successful Gigolo can also be socially re-constructed as a predatory entrepreneurial type albeit male prostitution lies out-with the remit of this study.

1.4 - Considering the pimp as entrepreneur

Although, men do not appear to willingly accept the title of pimp other acceptable masculine labels exists, namely the labels ‘Hustler’ and ‘Player’. These labels are also commonly used to describe entrepreneurs. Academic studies of hustling abound (Steward, 1991; Wright and Colhoun, 2001; and Gates, 2004). Wright and Calhoun (2001) using an ethnographic approach profile the activities of Tyrone a hoodlum who is a part-time pimp and hustler and of Oscar who describes himself as being kind of an entrepreneur who both operate out of a barber shop in a Southern American City. The shop provides three levels of underground activity, namely - legal, quasi-legal and illegal services. Indeed, Gates (2004) writes of young black kids having a new entrepreneurial spirit. Desman (undated) discusses the socio-pathology of entrepreneurs and

criminals and states that prostitution, bootlegging, black marketing, and illicit gambling are common delinquent threads running through both genres. Furthermore, Kloosterman (2001) describes prostitution as an easy market for immigrant entrepreneurs to engage in because of its ease of accessibility and lack of start up capital required. Prostitution enables entrepreneurs to extract large profits from the work of women under their control thereby accumulating a considerable amount of capital quickly. Furthermore, Butkevich and Storr (2001) discuss entrepreneurs as cultural characters noting how in hostile environments they adapt to the opportunities available even if that entails pimping or thieving. This again resonates with the work of Baumol (1999).

1.5 - On the importance of place

Place is important because it links in with social constructionism. Moreover, as this study takes place at a street level it makes it incumbent upon us to understand the influence of place. Rojeck and Urry (1997: 7) discuss how traditionally, since Victorian times, the street has been reconstructed as a dangerous playground for the rich and for the middle classes – a ‘fantasy land’ where one can engage with prostitutes. The street scenario is enacted as a socially constructed script in which the pimp, prostitute and the punter know their place. There is a symbiotic element present whereby all accrue benefit in the manner of a relation of exchange as envisaged by Volkov (2002: 25). This concept lies at the very core of this paper and is central to understanding prostitution and pimping as entrepreneurship because Volkov (2002: 15) talks of the “*city as a market place for needs*” and of “*free economies of exchange*”. For entrepreneurship to occur there must be a taking between and an exchange of value. Furthermore, Volkov (2002: 21) refers to “*Predatory man*”. Thus phraseology is relevant because it encompasses the pimp as entrepreneur and the customer as punter. The prostitute is also a predator because customers are merely £ notes or \$ bills, “*Mugs*” and “*Punters*” as envisaged by Hobbs (1986) who populate the lowest level of his entrepreneurial scale. Nor does the social constructionism end there because a form of living

street theatre ensues whereby all three have to look and act the part. The pimp has to be recognisable as such to act as a visual deterrent; the prostitute has to look risqué; and the punter knows that he will fare better if he is mild mannered and well dressed. The pimp and prostitute scan the environment looking for deviations from this well rehearsed social script in case their quarry are undercover police or other predators. The pimp must project an aura of latent violence; the prostitute must exude a halo of dangerous sexuality; and the punter must project a suitably subdued and ashamed persona. If all stick to the script then the three actors collectively create and extract value from the environment (as envisaged by Anderson, 1995).

As this study is set in a British context it is necessary to consider entrepreneurship, prostitution and pimping from a cultural perspective because so far many of the studies of prostitution as entrepreneurship encountered have been American or Asian. Sociologists writing about class in a British context have long appreciated that prostitution allowed many poor married working class women and widows an avenue out of poverty. Indeed, Bourke (1994: 38) reminds us that many working class women “*sought social mobility through prostitution, using the job to save money to buy a tobacconist shop or simply to live at a higher standard of luxury*”. Nevertheless, other historical studies shed light on the issue of underclass enterprise and particularly those who engage in prostitution or live of immoral earnings. One classic study is that of Quennel (1960) who presented selected sections of the original works of the Victorian researcher Henry Mayhew. In this work, Quennell (1960: 103) discusses the roles of such enterprising street actors as procuresses, pimps, bullies, clandestine prostitutes, fancy men and panderers and in doing so paints a vivid word picture of self- enterprise on the streets. Interestingly, Mayhew (no doubt influenced by his exposure to Victorian masculine doxa and the socially constructed nature of Victorian sexuality) had little to say about the subject of pimps. Despite acknowledging that they were frequently spoken about, he preferred to doubt that many actually existed in reality. Mayhew preferred to believe that women were more likely to act as a pimp than men. We believe that this was merely an early example of how social constructionism

combined with masculine doxa influenced the research gaze because professional Victorian Middle Class men could not envisage men acting in such an ungentlemanly manner. Like Mayhew before us we went in search of the elusive pimp. In seeking to reconstruct the Pimp as an entrepreneur it is necessary to stipulate that there is no one all defining definition of entrepreneurship, nor one all encompassing iconography. In the literature, particularly in British context, one senses a pejorative attitude towards the entrepreneur articulated so succinctly by Baker (in Chapman, 1968: 9) who describes “*the petty entrepreneurs and the slick smart Alec’s of Grab Street who thrive on the society who spawns them*”.

Having considered the entrepreneurship-prostitution nexus and issues of social constructionism and class it is now necessary, in section 3 to redirect attention towards the pimp as a visible manifestation of predatory entrepreneurial underclass? However, it is helpful to discuss some methodological, theoretical and ethical issues that impinge upon this research.

2. METHODOLOGICAL, THEORETICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

The purpose of this section is to discuss methodological, theoretical and ethical issues relating to this research and to develop the semiotic and aesthetic appreciation of street level entrepreneurship. Author A is an entrepreneurship academic (with 24 years experience as a police officer), whilst author B is a criminologist.

2.1 - Methodological and Theoretical Issues

This study was conceived as a semiotic analysis of images associated with pimping. Although this standpoint was dropped in favour of an empirical study the initial collection and analysis of material provided a rich backcloth of theoretical underpinning. This process permitted a visual ordering of images, clothing and artefacts informing the social construction of pimping in their cultural settings enabling the authors to build up an ideal type, a mediated social construction.

Volkov (2002: 59) used the semiotics of stereotype to describe the entrepreneurs of violence he encountered by painting a vivid word picture of their appearance. He described their physical athletic, muscular appearance, their propensity to wear leather jackets with guns visible and their preference for BMW's and Mercedes. It is a similar method used by Mayhew a century ago to describe criminal and social stigma of the London Underworld to a readership with no prior exposure to the poverty and social conditions of the streets. In this manner we hoped to re-focus the elusive pimp in the criminological and entrepreneurial gaze. Researching ideal type was necessary as it was considered too dangerous to use camera's to record the semiotics of street level pimping and the interaction between pimp, prostitute and punter.

2.2 -Ethical Issues

This research raises a number of ethical issues of interest to other researchers. The first relates to issues of access. As stated in researching elusive social groups, such as pimps, it can be difficult to gain research access. The author / researcher B (author obscured) has conducted numerous research forays into areas where street prostitution is carried out, both in the U.S and in major cities in the U.K. Such research can lead to conflict with other street stakeholders. One simply cannot just turn up and start asking questions of pimps without becoming an accepted part of the street scene because street-girls are adept at telling people what they want to hear. One has to earn their respect by talking to them and demonstrating that as a researcher you know what you are speaking about. Confidences are not developed instantly. It can take many evenings.

It is also a dangerous activity. On one occasion when conducting research author B (author obscured) became involved in an altercation with a pimp who was annoyed that she was taking up the time of his girls. He demanded payment and when this was refused he assaulted her. It is simply not ethical to offer payment for research access. This led to author B taking the unusual step of hiring the services of a bodyguard to protect her. When conducting research it is easy to lose focus of everything but one's respondent. However, this also has the effect of

changing the street dynamic because the bodyguard can be mistaken for a 'Minder'. It would be easy for other street actors to misread the signs. The consequences could have serious ramifications because they could be mistaken for competition by other firms of villains. Yet, there is simply no other way. The arrangement allows author B to undertake her research unmolested and more importantly ethically.

On several occasions author B has encountered hostility from street cops who cannot understand her presence on their streets. This is despite having a policy of writing to the individual forces expressing her intentions. She has been threatened with arrest and has had to stand her ground when told in no uncertain terms to leave the area. This takes dedication and courage. As a result the prostitutes and pimps now treat her with a wary respect. However, if her bodyguard was attacked and had to defend himself she could find herself in court having to defend her actions. This makes the research all the more ethically and physically dangerous. Understandably, her research practices, bold as they are do not ingratiate her with the pimps.

By being a constant presence in the street author B is engaging in action research, shadowing and participant observation. From this multi-methodological platform she has been able to witness first hand prostitutes pimps acting at street level. Having conducted research in most British cities author B is in a position to comment upon the differing behavioural patterns and semiotics presented by the pimps. Ultimately the authors rejected semiotic analysis in its traditional sense because they appreciated that the presentation of their observations and vignettes of research experience gathered in the field were valid research techniques. This methodology permits other academics and readers to vicariously enter into an otherwise closed world – a voyeuristic world where examples of illegal entrepreneurship abound.

2.3 – Reading the semiotics of in/exclusion

Stereotypical imagery associated with pimping is an artifact of American street culture. It is congruent that Bourgois (1995) who conducted an ethnographic study of a Puerto Rican Street

Gang in New York reconstructed the gang's activities as being entrepreneurial. Bourgois highlighted the powerful symbolism displayed by the gang who wore "*fly clothes*" (1995: 57). Fly clothing is also a term used for pimp style clothing and impinges upon the phenomenon of gangsta-entrepreneurship. Sewell (2006) cites the gangsta-entrepreneur as a serious role model for black youth - a new model of achievement rooted in their street histories of hustling. Underclass youth have a choice in which version of the entrepreneurial dream to pursue. For Catano (2001: 5) these variant forms of the masculine myth and entrepreneurial dreams provide alternative masculinities and doxas to be enacted.

Pimp imagery¹ has been legitimized by the advent of 'Hip Hop' and 'Gangsta Rap' music bringing Americanized images of underclass, criminality and ethnicity into mainstream youth culture. Flamboyantly dressed men smoking cigars and wearing 'bling' symbolizing wealth and hedonism – Diamond encrusted dollar (\$) signs in silver or gold hung on a large heavy chain synonymous with pimp style predominate Hayward and Yar (2006: 17) discuss the concept of 'bling' in relation to consumer culture and the creation of a street (fabulous) identity. Rehn and Sköld (2003) refer to a ghetto fabulous aesthetic which shows off classical status attributes such as expensive cars, fancy milieus, exclusive clothing, sparkling colors, drinks, helicopters, and similar accessories in a most extravagant manner via (myopic) capitalist imagery which narrate a story of rags to riches. Rehn and Sköld (2003) define 'Bling' as a particular fashion of ostentatious displays of wealth where oversize jewelry is the norm. The iconology is that of the street and of pimping and the social psychology of bragging. Bragging is essential to establish a hierarchy based upon shared values. Conversely the 'Chav' aesthetic in Britain is more about claiming one's place in the reality of street life. It is about fitting in, not standing out. Hayward and Yar (2006) discuss the 'Chav' phenomenon in the context of the current reawakening of the debate on the underclasses. For Hayward and Yar (2006: 10) the Chav is a reconfiguration of the

¹ Those interested in the semiotics and the imagery should either conduct their own google search or visit the websites <http://www.pimpdaddy.com/> ; <http://www.icedoutgear.com/sterling-silver-chains.php> ; <http://www.pimphats.com/>

underclass as surveyed by Mayhew. It is a repackaging of the notions of poverty, marginality and ethnicity associated with pariah groups².

We now turn to (re)presentations of socially constructed imagery as located on the internet.

2.4 - Internet images of pimp style as socially constructed

This section permits us to make a visual assessment of the stereotypical and ideal typical imagery associated with the pimp to act as a control for the visual typologies encountered in the research. In trying to establish the socially constructed nature of any visual modern social phenomenon the first port of call for a contemporary researcher is a google image search. A cursory search revealed hundreds of images, associated with pimping. The prevailing collective imagery is of ethnicity, with Black's and Latino's predominating. Images of gaudy lime green, purple, gold or white suits; large floppy hats with feathers; shades; extensive jewellery (Bling); cigars and fancy cars predominate.

From the google search four images typify the social construction of pimping. The images are not reproduced. The first image presents a bearded white male wearing a black business suit, polished black shoes with an open necked white shirt and silvery, pearl coloured waistcoat set off by a large white coloured knee length fur coat. The second image shows a black male with shaven head, shades, and earrings; wearing a white business suit, black shirt with white (silk) tie; a black overcoat is draped over his shoulders; gold chains and jewellery, a swagger cane and a champagne glass complete the visage. The third image depicts a white male with a wide brimmed white coloured hat, shades and goatee beard, open necked black shirt with ubiquitous heavy silver jewellery and a silver lame suit with black collars and cuffs. A swagger cane and champagne bottle complete the picture. As an image it fails to convince because the semiotic simply do not cross ethnic divides (being pantomime and parody rolled into one). The fourth image is that of a 'pimped up' Mercedes motor car in metallic pink with gull wing doors and

² Interestingly, they also used a google search on the internet.

alloy wheels. The motorcar takes pride of place in the artifacts associated with pimping because irrespective of whether it is a standard production model or not it is the fact that the pimp can afford to customize and personalize their ride which makes a powerful statement. Pimps and hustlers do not buy off the shelf.

These images are important because to paraphrase Rojeck (1997: 52-53) the social processes of indexing and dragging play an important part in the social reconstruction of images associated with sex tourism. By indexing and dragging Rojeck refer to the human propensity to reconstruct mental images based upon their mental map of a subject created from diverse images. Such images will be indexed and dragged into play when the word pimp is encountered. Having reconstructed the ideal typical pimp as portrayed in the media it is now time to present the findings of the research.

3. THE PIMP AS ENCOUNTERED IN REALITY

This section reports on the empirical research conducted by author B. We are aware that in choosing to research street level prostitution we may have limited our chances of encountering examples of entrepreneurship because of the stratified nature of the organization of prostitution. Gutauskas *et al* (2004:213) who studied prostitution in Lithuania stress that it is conducted on three distinct levels. Namely,

- The lowest tier being drug addicts and the homeless:
- The second tier being those who prostitute themselves in bars, restaurants, and hotels without a pimp:
- The third and most profitable form of prostitution is organised and conducted by pimps.

Gutauskas *et al* (2004:213-214) stress that most Lithuanian pimps supervise from seven to ten prostitutes and can take from 50 to 70% of the money generated by the prostitute. This model is almost universal in western countries.

Although the research is set in Aberdeen, author B has conducted research in London, Manchester, Hull, Edinburgh (Leith), Glasgow and Edinburgh. This underpins the findings in relation to Aberdeen. Leith is the least accommodating alongside Manchester to research because both are major cities with extreme drug related problems. Manchester, however, is mainly more problematic because of the obvious presence of the pimps who are more than willing to show the girls precisely who is in charge. Author B has been 'boxed in' on two occasions, by a pimp and his 'gang' – five men of varying sizes circling menacingly as a warning to leave the area. Nosy researchers are bad for business. Glasgow girls also appear to be more willing to risk their safety whereas Edinburgh ladies use networking and converse with each other using mobile phones and texts to warn each other of problem customers or perverts. This example of entrepreneurial cooperation does reduce the need for an individual minder/pimp and obviously increases their earning power by cutting out the middleman.

Aberdeen is a major city and is the third largest in Scotland, after Glasgow and Edinburgh. It has a population of 202,370. It is a relatively wealthy city being the Oil Capital of Europe. It has a large thriving seaport and vibrant industries. As is the case in many major cities the prostitution is stratified. There are several lap dancing bars, which comprise the legal side of the sex industry. According to one respondent there is a street trade in rent-boys and male prostitutes carried out discretely in city centre. There are also several brothels in the West End of the City owned and organised by a local businessmen. These tend to service a wealthy middle class clientele and the prostitutes are more up-market, often students paying their selves through university. The businessman acts as a father figure and mentor to them. Anecdotally, there is a suggestion that Eastern European organized crime groups have set up brothels run by pimps (along the lines of those described by Gutauskas *et al*, 2004). The authors had no research access to these brothels but one interesting anecdote is that for an additional fee the proprietors of the brothels video the encounter and hand the customers with a CD or video to take home and watch later. This is clear

evidence of entrepreneurial strategies in action. Aberdeen has a tolerance zone / red light district situated (where the trade had traditionally been operated) in the harbour area. Other Scottish cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh had tolerance zones but abandoned them. The tolerance zone makes researching prostitution easier and less dangerous.

3.1 – Prostitutes and street prostitution

The strata the authors had research access to were street prostitutes who operated in the tolerance zone. Prior to discussing the pimps themselves it is helpful to discuss the street based prostitutes. In relation to Scotland it is difficult to find the average street prostitute because of the different geographic areas and regional differences and socio-cultural settings. The most visible girls tend to be older than they look. A mean age in Glasgow is 23, whilst in Edinburgh it is 27. Almost all of the prostitutes surveyed were on drugs or alcohol, or both. This is in line with research that suggests that 97% of street prostitutes in Britain have drug misuse issues. Only two prostitutes claim never to have used drugs and hope to avoid it in the future. They acknowledge that they are exceptions. All but one in Aberdeen are white. In Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee they are all white. Most have poor communication skills though this is likely to be more attributable to their constant drug/alcohol use than any reflection on their intellectual capacity. One older and articulate prostitute (aged 47) displays remarkable business acumen but lacks the drive and/or funds to get started! Many prostitutes narrate a background of abuse both physical and sexual. The women surveyed come from different socio-economic backgrounds with middle classes and even upper classes being represented. Interestingly, drug use had brought them to the streets resulting in their families ignoring their existence. Glasgow in particular had a high proportion - in fact all the women spoken to had been sexually abused as children either by a relative, family friend or other person in authority. 75% of those in Glasgow had been raised in a local authority home and of those 75% had removed themselves and lived on the streets before they reached 16 years of age. In contrast, Edinburgh showed that only 25% had been subjected to

sexual abuse as a child whereas one third claimed to have had no abuse. Heroin was the most commonly used drugs, though cocaine was used in approximately 25% of all Scottish prostitutes surveyed. Other drugs, including prescription medication, were also used when available but particularly when their main choice was not obtainable through lack of funds or scarcity. There is thus no 'typical' street prostitute. Many common threads tie them together, but equally many keep them apart. Many choose not to disclose their history for various reasons and others tell different stories to different people / agencies. Alcohol and drug use are common, but again not every prostitute has an addiction; one or two have beaten their addiction (they claim) but still solicit because the money is better than benefits. Pathways into prostitution are complicated.

3.2 – The traditional pimp

The traditional pimp prostitute relationship is a coercive (predatory) relationships entailing luring vulnerable girls and women into relationships. The pimp acts as a lover and undermines the confidence of the girl generally through abusive, bullying and violent behaviour and coerces her into acting as a prostitute. The relationship may become that of entrepreneur – lover. In Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow there is not a culture of pimping in the traditional sense we understand exists in other countries. Thus the authors did not encounter the stereotypical pimp and certainly no flamboyant examples such as those discussed in section 2 above. Author B has encountered stereotypical representations of the pimp whilst researching in America. This is to be expected because it demonstrates the ideal typification of the pimp as socially constructed from media representations. Such images are caricatures, grotesque parodies of the American Dream. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that in its place within the culture that spawned it, does have a currency as street cred'. In Britain very few of the pimps observed fit this ideal typification.

In Britain, the vast majority of pimps observed tend to be more careful about flaunting their occupation for obvious reasons. No metallic pink Mercedes cars with alloys, no fur coats or

white suits. Such pretensions do not sit well with the British psyche and are bad for business because they attract unwanted police attention not to mention ridicule. Instead, the British pimp carefully cultivates the regional variation of their hard man image. This is evidence of the rationalisation of conduct to maximise the extraction of value (and thus entrepreneurship). At another level many pimps have other income streams such as drug dealing, smuggling contraband, extortion and so forth in which prostitution is but one part of their business portfolio. These illegal entrepreneurial activities qualify them for consideration of being criminal entrepreneurs. It could be argued that the traditional pimp provides an entrepreneurial service to their prostitutes if are engaged in a joint enterprise.

There are quite considerable regional variations (as one would expect). Those areas where the pimps are more overt in their actions and behaviour are places such as parts of London, Manchester, Hull and parts of Newcastle. Here their dress style and their behaviour patterns are quite different. They dress in a more obvious business style. Business suits worn with a somewhat crass style and jewellery (bling) is clearly evident. Their vehicles tend to be Range Rovers and other large style 4X4 vehicles. Occasionally, for those individuals who are less inclined to show their money, or because of financial constraints, cars that are made to look more 'high end' than they actually are - such as making the exhaust bigger/louder etc. The pimps also tend to work in groups of more than two in these areas. These are the most obvious entrepreneurial types - the top end of the entrepreneurial scale - boys doing business (Newburn & Stanko, 1995), controlling their assets. Team working is evident and the atmosphere is tense. In the larger cities in England such as Manchester, Liverpool Pimps it is apparent that many adopt a gangstery persona. This was not found to be the case in Aberdeen or other Scottish cities.

It may well be that the girls surveyed are reluctant to admit that their partner is a pimp. Those girls who do admit this (Primarily those from south of the border) who acknowledge working with pimps tend to be more warily resigned to their relationship as 'worker' though many still defend the pimp and his actions (e.g. they are violent, but - like many in domestic situations -

blame themselves for making their men angry). Also, the pimps - according to the girls - do a good job in protecting them but again they acknowledge that they work harder and longer than they probably would if they had no one there. They also admit that they are annoyed about giving their money away, but many feel there's no alternative or - more importantly - no escape. In the night-time economy the streets of our major cities can be dangerous places. Alcohol and drug fuelled violence is often unleashed as well as verbal abuse, taunts and disrespect. Thus it could be argued that some pimps do provide a service to the girls allowing them to work unmolested. However, in Scotland the predominance is for the consensual boyfriend - girlfriend variety.

3.3 – Pimp-prostitute partnerships

These are generally partners in life and in crime. The prostitution is merely another income stream to provide money for drugs and feeding the children. Such partnerships are usually in their mid twenties or slightly older. They are either generally from established criminal families or have gravitated from a criminal culture of drug abuse, alcohol dependency and usually both have criminal records for petty crime such as assault, theft by shoplifting, robbery, carrying weapons and basically any other street crime imaginable. The main point is that both couples are streetwise and come to the realization through life experience that selling sex is easier and less riskier than committing street crimes because the penalties are lesser. Those girls who work with 'boyfriends' are grateful for their presence as it makes them feel safer. These are exploitative but protective partners who use sex as a strategy to provide the wherewithal to obtain alcohol; and drugs money. The boyfriend acts as driver, minder and negotiator. Turning a few tricks to them is less immoral than robbing or stealing. This particular dynamic seems to be applicable in Aberdeen and Leith (Edinburgh), whereas Glasgow appears to have a mixture of consensual and non-consensual partnerships underway. The prostitution provides a stability of income in an otherwise chaotic lifestyle. It can break the vicious cycle of crime = court appearances = jail. Admittedly it is an illegal form of subsistence entrepreneurship. These low level street entrepreneurs are well

and truly entrenched in the underclass milieu and are unlikely to climb the entrepreneurial ladder to success. Such pimp-prostitute partnerships can be viewed as being co-preneurial couples. These couples are usually husbands and wives or long-term common law partners, although the authors are aware of a case study where a man was pimping a very young looking girl in Aberdeen. The girl looked well under sixteen and her protector was in fact a father-figure. Enquiry with police officers and other prostitutes confirmed that this was in fact her father who was exploiting the fact that the 17 year old looked much younger and therefore fetched a higher price. Leaving aside issues of morality it is evidence of entrepreneurial guile.

This is a very different dynamic because the boyfriend will not adopt the street persona of a pimp, nor engage in the visual semiotics of bragging associated with that genre. It also makes the prosecution of pimping very difficult from a policing perspective because it is difficult to prove that the boyfriend is living beyond their lifestyles – the ethos behind this genre of prostitutes is summed up by Sterk (undated) as “*Tricking and Tripping*”. Hunt (1990) argues that the links between drug taking and prostitution has turned prostitution into a more consensual crime and discusses how drugs lures female addicts into committing a battery of crimes such as prostitution, robbery shoplifting and burglary. Hunt also stresses that the street level drug dealer is often an individual entrepreneur who is in a position to use his often near monopoly to his advantage. The step from being a street level dealer to pimp in an urban environment is often a short one.

3.4 – The pimp as an entrepreneur of violence

The pimp can also be regarded as an entrepreneur of violence by extending Vladim Volkov’s (2002) concept of ‘*Violent entrepreneurship*’. Volkov coined the term in his study of the Russian Mafiya. For Volkov (2002: 25) Violent Entrepreneurship is a legitimate method of extracting income. The anthropologist Anton Blok (1972) also used the term to describe a particular genre of Italian Mafioso as - “*Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs*”. Volkov (2002: Preface xiii - xiv) refers

to an “*exclusively male world where male virtues associated with violent contest prevail*”. This aptly describes the violent underworld domain inhabited by the pimps in our study. The pimps observed could be described as entrepreneurs of violence because to them violence was merely another commodity to exploit as a form of exploitable social capital, which gives them leverage to extract value from their environment. The girls are commodities to be bought and sold. Violence, and threats are used to protect their property (the girls); their patch and to punish the girls if they step out of line. As entrepreneurs of violence the pimps use their reputations, social capital and social skills to dominate their environment. In doing so they shape their professional and personal identities both of which revolve around being “*the man*”. Thus the semiotics of gangsterism and machismo combine to present a culturally credible symbolism enabling and empowering them to control their environment physically, mentally and symbolically. These are thus techniques and stratagems for the maintenance of masculine dominance.

The Pimps observed during this study can be classified as entrepreneurs at so many different levels, as entrepreneurs of violence, or as enterprising individuals or couples capitalising on their specific socio-cultural capital. Alternatively they can be seen as businessmen or criminal entrepreneurs.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS....

The paper contributes to extant knowledge by developing an appreciation of street level entrepreneurs who operate in a shadow economy. There are limitations to the research practices of observing and street level interviewing because it does not bring one into contact with the pimp. Nor does it allow one to research the dynamics of mixed entrepreneurial income streams. Many questions remain unanswered. Is it their main income generation activity or do they have multiple income streams? Are these all illegal or do they bolster legal entrepreneurial incomes? Also how do pimps reinvest their earnings? Do they reinvest it in small businesses shops, taxi firms etc or is it their undeclared beer-money to reinvest in hedonistic lifestyles – partying, drug

misuse, gambling, betting, expensive restaurants. If this is the case then the illegal money re-circulates in the legal economy. Are all pimps men? Do women use violence to gain competitive entrepreneurial advantage? Do they make the girls work double shifts or in other avenues in the sex industry? The answer to these questions and others, require further research using different methodologies and techniques making it a legitimate field of research. Entrepreneurship is not merely found in legal commerce or in small and family businesses.

Another interesting avenue of research lies in exploring the *modus vivendi* of pimps and other street entrepreneurs have with street actors such as taxi drivers, pub owners, hotel concierges and even street cops. Is this space achieved via bribes, payments, or by the sheer force of personal magnetism? Or is it achieved by the projection of a hardman image and a reputation for extreme violence? It would be also beneficial to research the link between libido and entrepreneurial proclivity because the Pimp through the prostitute provides a basic human need.

We found little evidence of the archetypal pimp in Aberdeen and other Scottish cities. Such characters are indeed elusive. We cannot state categorically that they do not exist but they are certainly elusive. From our research it appears that the typical pimp in Scotland is more likely to be a boyfriend or father figure. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this our research also demonstrates that there is evidence of individual entrepreneurship manifested at a street level. Therefore, it can be argued with some justification that some pimps (but not all) are entrepreneurs. The pimps and prostitutes surveyed for this study make a living out of the exchange by extracting value from an environment and some even practice entrepreneurship as envisaged by Anderson (1995).

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