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WOMEN OF EASY LIVING? TIME, PLEASURE AND SUFFERING IN THE WORK OF PROSTITUTES

Mulheres de vida fácil? Tempo, prazer e sofrimento no trabalho de prostitutas

¿Mujeres de Vida Fácil? Tiempo, placer y sufrimiento en el trabajo de prostitutas

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how temporal perceptions influence pleasure and suffering in the work of prostitutes in Belo Horizonte (MG). A descriptive and qualitative case study was carried out. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 professionals from places known as "battle hotels" and analyzed using content analysis. The interviewed prostitutes associated time as a resource, and this was linked to experiences of pleasure and suffering, in the sense that the effective management of time generated money which was the main source of pleasure from their work. The working time of the prostitutes was also a source of suffering because they normalized or accepted discomfort from their work and the consequences that it entailed.

KEYWORDS | Pleasure and suffering, job, temporal perceptions, prostitutes, prostitution.

RESUMO

Este estudo se propõe a analisar como percepções temporais influenciam vivências de prazer e sofrimento no trabalho de prostitutas, em Belo Horizonte (MG). Foi realizado um estudo de caso, de natureza qualitativa descritiva. A coleta de dados deu-se por meio de entrevistas com roteiro semiestruturado. Foram abordadas 15 profissionais dos chamados "hotéis de batalha", e os dados coletados foram tratados por meio de análise de conteúdo. As prostitutas entrevistadas associam o tempo a um recurso, e isso se vincula a vivências de prazer e sofrimento, no sentido de que a administração adequada do tempo gera, para elas, o dinheiro, que é a principal fonte de prazer do seu trabalho. Contudo, esse tempo de trabalho é também fonte de vivências de sofrimento, uma vez que as prostitutas naturalizam ou aceitam incômodos em relação ao trabalho e às consequências que ele acarreta.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE | Prazer e sofrimento, trabalho, percepções temporais, prostitutas, prostituição.

RESUMEN

Este estudio se propone analizar cómo percepciones temporales influyen en las vivencias de placer y sufrimiento en el trabajo de prostitutas, en Belo Horizonte (MG). Se realizó un estudio de caso, de naturaleza descriptiva y abordaje cualitativo. La recolección de datos se dio a través de entrevistas con un itinerario semiestructurado, con participación de 15 profesionales de los llamados "hoteles de batalla", y los datos colectados fueron tratados por medio de la técnica de análisis de contenido. Las prostitutas asocian el tiempo a un recurso y esto se vincula a vivencias de placer y sufrimiento, en el sentido de que la administración adecuada del tiempo genera para ellas el dinero que es la principal fuente de placer de su trabajo. El tiempo de trabajo de las prostitutas es también fuente de vivencias de sufrimiento, ya que las prostitutas naturalizan o aceptan los inconvenientes con relación al trabajo y a las consecuencias que él acarrea.

PALABRAS CLAVE | Placer y sufrimiento, trabajo, percepciones temporales, prostitutas, prostitución.

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INTRODUCTION

The figure of the prostitute permeates human history. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the perception about these individuals, once regarded as sacred and divine, changed to something morally reprehensible and charged with potential social corruption (Roberts, 1992). This is how the demoralization and stigmatization of prostitutes began, as they came to be perceived as “wandering beings,” embodiments of sin, who are marginalized and compared to bandits and murderers (Fanganiello, 2008; Pereira, Paiva, Santos, & Sousa, 2018). Therefore, prostitution gradually came to be associated with two deadly sins: lust and sloth. The notion that prostitutes are individuals who do not like to work has been consolidated and is currently expressed by colloquial terms that label these women as “easy-living women” (Lobo & Sampaio, 2016), which, in turn, has helped to foster the “whore” stereotype (Leite, 2008).

On the other hand, understanding prostitution as a mere process of service exchange or as a form of paid sex seems to be a rather limited view. A comprehensive view should consider that the social identity of prostitutes is based on the fact that these women have sexual relations with countless men, promoting carnal pleasures without the purpose of procreation, which, in turn, defies the socially established rules of morality (Cunha, 2014).

Despite the view of prostitution as a veiled reality, or as an occupation rendered invisible by society, it has an impressive number of practitioners worldwide, reaching 40 million. Among these, about 75% are women aged between 13 and 25 years (Meihy, 2015). Despite the associated difficulties and stigmas, the degree of autonomy, the prospect of high income, the immediate payments, the free time, and the flexibility to merge this occupational activity with others are some of the factors that contribute to the abundant supply of sex workers in urban and rural environments around the globe (Lainez, 2019). Besides, such service can only exist because there is demand, mainly by men, who pay for sex for various and complex reasons (Durant & Couch, 2019).

Therefore, prostitution has been studied worldwide based on various biases and points of view, encompassing the perceptions of the sex workers themselves as well as their customers’ (Durant & Couch, 2019). This has demystified and “devictimized” both actors involved in this type of trade, which goes far beyond the mere exchange of sex for money. Numerous studies have addressed the stigma associated with sex work (Sanders, 2018; Weitzer, 2018), guided by the purpose of developing ways of dealing, as well as reducing social stigmas,

pragmatically and deliberately (Weitzer, 2018). To this end, research has pointed to the importance of mobilizing different spheres of society around mass media, decriminalization, the erotic product markets, the activism of sex workers themselves, and the academic communities (Weitzer, 2018). To these are added other audiences and spaces, including governments and States and their respective public health policies, the legal spheres, and even families, whose discussions “around the table” may foster basic education against discrimination (Sanders, 2018). Other reflections address the importance of dealing with the intersectionality that prostitution can encompass, by including issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, or skin color (Sanders, 2018). Prostitution has also been approached as “dirty work,” that is, as something that carries stigma (Blithe & Wolfe, 2017) and forces its practitioners to make decisions every day at a frantic pace (Lainez, 2019) and abnegate their personal life at present to save it for the future. This, in turn, implies harmful psychic dislocations for individuals (Blithe & Wolfe, 2017) and relates to the differences in temporal perception (Carvalho, 2018; Güell & Yopo, 2016), directly connecting the central themes of this study to a broader research agenda.

In Brazil, prostitution was recognized as a profession in 2002, and the nomenclature “sex workers” was made official by the State in its Brazilian Classification of Occupations (Ministry of Labor and Employment – MTE, 2008); although, this has not been acknowledged by society or even by the prostitutes themselves (Pereira et al., 2018).

This profession can be configured either as a source of pleasure or suffering, or both (Dejours, 1996; Martins & Honório, 2014). As revealed by studies conducted abroad, this dyad can be influenced by time-related issues, given that, in the context of prostitution, time is perceived and negotiated as a commodity, that is, as a resource that should not be wasted. Occupational experiences are based on a system of intensive control of time and space to generate profit, reinforcing the notion that “time is money” (Harvey & Sobral, 1994).

Given the above, the following guiding question emerges: How do temporal perceptions influence the experiences of pleasure and suffering in prostitution?

The prostitution zone specifically addressed herein was the Guaicurus Street red-light district, located in the city of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, and popularly known as “rua do sobe e desce” (“up and down street”) due to the intense movement of men going up and down the stairs of the brothels. The region comprises numerous “hotéis de batalha” (“battle hotels”), usually three-story buildings in which the first floor houses ordinary commercial establishments, such

as snack bars and auto parts stores, in an attempt to disguise the doors of the prostitution hotels in their dynamics, hiding the “shamelessness” and separating them from the rest of the urban landscape (Barreto & Prado, 2010). On the other floors, the spaces are subdivided into several small rooms that are rented at daily rates for prostitutes to provide their services (Pereira et al., 2018).

Pleasure and suffering in the workplace

Work configures a human need, as we are social beings, and plays an increasingly significant role in the lives of subjects, characterized by the challenge of facing a given reality creatively (Forno, 2015). In Brazilian society, in particular, being “hardworking” is a fundamental value that distinguishes the “good citizens” from the “bums” (Veriguine, Basso, & Soares, 2014).

However, work is a locus that involves the paradox of being sources of pleasure and health mediators as well as sources of human suffering simultaneously (Dejours, 1996). Therefore, it may represent a foundation for balance for some and a reason for fatigue for others (Dejours, 1994). Pleasure and suffering experiences relate to three interconnected and coexisting dimensions: the subjectivity of workers, considering their life history and particular desires; the organization of labor, given the imposed norms and standards; and collectivity, which involves hierarchical and social relationships at work (Castro & Cançado, 2009).

In this sense, what is perceived as “healthy” results from the relationship between suffering and coping strategies (Hoffmann, Traverso, & Zanini, 2014), which are the subjects’ defenses to alleviate or deal with suffering in the workplace (Dejours, 1996). In the struggle against suffering, individuals can devise solutions that favor production (in the scope of their relationship with the company to which they provide services) and health (that is, their health), using the problem as a sort of driving force, in a phenomenon that can be referred to as creative suffering. Inversely, they can also develop unfavorable solutions to the same aspects, characterizing pathogenic suffering, in which individuals will focus solely on difficulties and frustrations.

Therefore, suffering is not necessarily contrary to health nor does it imply pathology (Castro & Cançado, 2009). However, subjects who are not recognized for what they do (and consequently cannot find purpose and meaning in their relationship with work) turn to suffering (Dario & Lourenço, 2018). Indeed, suffering is “the space of struggle that covers the field between, on the one hand, ‘well-being’, and on the other, mental illness or madness” (Dejours, 1996, p. 153). There are two dimensions associated with

individuals who suffer—the diachronic, which refers to singular suffering, inherited from the psychic history of each person, and is more closely related to the subject’s past; and the synchronic, which concerns current suffering, derived from the subject’s encounters with work situations, and is therefore, more linked to the present. In other words, experiences of pleasure and suffering related to the temporal dimension (Dejours, 1996).

Furthermore, stigmatization at work can lead to suffering. It is caused by the disrepute and inferiorization associated with a given activity, as well as the consequences on the lives of those who experience it. In the specific case of sex workers, they deal with problems involving their morals, the concealment of identity and, sometimes, the need to lead a double life to alleviate discrimination (Weitzer, 2018). In addition, the stigma rooted in society can lead sex workers to isolate themselves and become passive to be accepted, in addition to triggering feelings of guilt and shame (Sanders, 2018).

The way customers behave when looking for services offered by sex workers also tells us something about the dichotomous feelings of pleasure and suffering that they may experience when serving them. In line with Durant and Couch (2019), some studies justify the purchase of sex. For instance, a man may identify a “type of business” in that service, similar to a sexual economic transaction, and decide to address the woman commercially. A variation involves the establishment of a “romantic friendship” with sex workers, which may go beyond mere commercial issues. That is, these men wish to establish some form of affective relationship and break the economic-sexual barrier. Finally, there is the misogynist type, that is, the man who wants to look down on women and finds in the purchase of sex a way to fulfill his wish. This alternative may involve moral and sometimes physical violence (Durant & Couch, 2019).

One can affirm that a range of factors influence pleasure and suffering situations in sex work. This study highlights the experiences and perceptions concerning time, and this topic will be addressed in the next section.

TIME AND TEMPORAL PERCEPTIONS

Studies addressing time have been conducted by scholars in the fields of religion, art, philosophy, physics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and biology among others. Yet, the fields of physics and philosophy have proven to be the most fruitful (Elias, 1998; Franco, Paiva, & Dutra, 2018). In administration, time is a more recent concern (Paiva & Souza, 2016), although it permeates and interferes with work reality, either through a collective ideal of

immediacy or when aiming at its optimization (Koeber, 2017). In addition, time and temporality involve important ramifications for workers whose occupations are characterized by precariousness, insecurity, and uncertainty (Pitts, 2015).

Empirical studies in social sciences commonly focus on the objective measurement of time, conceiving it as a natural, preexisting, and objective resource, represented by clocks and calendars and whose meaning is reduced to its quantification (Güell & Yopo, 2016). This perspective relegates the fact that despite being a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Elias, 1998), time is also individual, heterogeneous, and subjective and results from the overlapping and interdependence between nature, society, and individuals (Carvalho, 2018).

In this sense, Mello and Tonelli (2002) underline “the importance of a deep reflection on temporality in administration, whether through qualitative or quantitative studies and critical or pragmatic approaches” (p. 12), as studies focusing on time may reveal new ways of perceiving the world and understanding phenomena from different perspectives (Lana, Gama, Bandeira-de-Melo, & Marcon, 2018). Therefore, the notion that time is not unique and consensual among individuals is reiterated; instead, it is perceived and experienced in diverse ways (Bluedorn & Jaussi, 2007).

According to Thompson (1991), the control of time and the remuneration based on it have reinforced the association between time and money. This rendered time quantifiable, measurable, and controllable in the capitalist system, changing, in turn, the very labor relations. Indeed, this perception is shared by Hassard (2001), in the scope of the commodification of time.

When discussing time, Bluedorn and Jaussi (2007) drew attention to the different preferences that subjects may have regarding time to deal with life and work. The authors list five temporal dimensions: (1) polychronicity, which refers to the individual preference to engage in one or more tasks simultaneously; (2) speed, which relates to the number of activities performed in a unit of social time; (3) punctuality, which is to be on time; (4) temporal depth, which is linked to the perceived temporal distance between past, present, and future; and (5) entrainment, which is the adjustment of the pace of an activity to synchronize with that of other activities or individuals.

These temporal dimensions can affect the relationships between workers in terms of the duration and quality of such relationships, in addition to possibly impacting their attitudes and beliefs regarding themselves and their occupations (Bluedorn & Jaussi, 2007).

We emphasize the spatiotemporal compression experienced in postmodernity, which represents an era of

insecurity and uncertainty. In this period, traditions have been gradually abandoned, and the past has been repudiated for the establishment of the modern spirit (Bauman, 2007). Several factors have turned the era of spatiotemporal compression into a period that gives rise to different impressions, sufferings, and uncertainties (Frezza, Grisci, & Kessler, 2009). They include the influence of information and communication technologies, which have given subjects the notion that they are always connected anytime and anywhere; the fragility of the boundaries between time and the workspace and time and family space/leisure; and the self-management standards imposed by the contemporary mode of working.

Spatiotemporal compression involves several categories of workers, including women who work in brothels and get involved in prostitution in the short term to facilitate better living conditions in the future. The quest for a balance between life and work (which is often not achieved) describes the occupational ideology called “work now, life later” (Blithe & Wolfe, 2018).

Given these concepts and connections, and considering the specificities of prostitution, we conducted a survey along the following lines.

METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as qualitative and was grounded on the technique called interpretational analysis (Vergara & Caldas, 2005). As for its means, the investigation constituted a case study, preserving holistic and significant characteristics of the researched environment (Yin, 2005). As for the objectives, the research has a descriptive nature (Vergara, 2011), focused on detailing the reality portrayed by the participating subjects and what was observed in loco, through non-participant observation.

The units of analysis were the brothels located on Guaicurus Street, in downtown Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, which is considered to be a low-class prostitution zone. Therefore, the prostitution hotels in this area constitute the units of observation, as they are composed of the prostitutes that “struggle” in that space. The research subjects were the prostitutes who agreed to be interviewed.

We emphasize that this city area was chosen according to the criteria of intentionality and accessibility (Vergara, 2011), as it concentrates a large number of study subjects and its reputation is culturally associated with prostitution, not only in Belo Horizonte but throughout Brazil, after it was popularized by the Minas Gerais writer Roberto Drummond in his novel *Hilda*

Furacão, published in 1991. The prostitutes participating in this study were also selected through intentionality and accessibility (Vergara, 2011) and interviewed in loco, during their working hours, as they formally agreed to participate.

Data were collected through a survey with semi-structured interviews, conducted with 15 prostitutes, from September 2016 to April 2017, to unveil the subjective experiences of these women. In addition to demographic data, the script included questions about pleasure and suffering interrelated to time, to clarify the different ways by which these experiences emerge as well as the strategies for coping with situations that are regarded as relevant

by prostitutes. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using content analysis (Bardin, 2006).

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The respondents who participated in this study are identified by their *noms de guerre*, that is, the pseudonyms and aliases they go by in their work environment. Exhibit 1 presents information on the respondents' profile.

Exhibit 1. Respondents' profile

Name	Age	Marital status	Children	Birthplace	Level of education	Time in prostitution	Religion
Ana	36	Separated	2	Mato Grosso do Sul	High school graduate	4 years	Does not have
Bianca	30	Single	3	Ipatinga (MG)	High school graduate	5 years	Evangelical
Carla	39	Single	5	Belo Horizonte (MG)	Some elementary school	10 years	Spiritualist
Carol	23	Single	-	Ilhéus (BA)	Elementary school	5 years	Does not have
Fernanda	20	Single	-	Rio de Janeiro	High school graduate	2 years	<i>Candomblé</i>
Gi	46	Separated	4	Goiás	Some high school	4 years	Evangelical
Helen	22	Single	1	São Paulo	High school graduate	3 years	Evangelical
Lorena	23	Single	2	Rio de Janeiro	High school graduate	5 years	Catholic
Malu	42	Separated	1	Almenara (MG)	Some college	6 years	Does not have
Paloma	26	Single	1	Mato Grosso	Some College	6 years	Evangelical
Patrícia	32	Single	-	Salvador (BA)	High school graduate	5 years	Evangelical
Sabrina	28	Single	-	Belo Horizonte (MG)	Some college	4 years	Spiritualist
Samara	26	Single	2	Belo Horizonte (MG)	Elementary school	2 years	Evangelical
Suelen	23	Committed	1	Rio de Janeiro	Some college	4 years	<i>Candomblé</i>
Vitória	32	Married	2	Asunción, Paraguay	Doing college	7 years	Evangelical

Exhibit 1 shows that most of the participants in this study (12) come from other cities, despite practicing prostitution in the city of Belo Horizonte. Among them, two came from cities in the inlands of Minas Gerais, nine came from other Brazilian states, and one came from another country (Paraguay). As for the educational level, four attended college, three attended or

completed elementary school, and eight attended or completed high school.

Regarding their marital status, most participants had no consensual marriage or cohabitation (14), and only one was married. In this case, her husband was not aware that she worked as a prostitute. An important aspect to be highlighted is

that eight of the prostitutes interviewed in this study fell into the International Labor Organization classification of young workers, that is, aged between 15 and 29 years (OIT, 2015).

Further, it is interesting to underline that the *noms de guerre* adopted by the respondents reflect issues of a personal and symbolic nature. These are representations that portray important moments in their lives, such as childhood, or denote feelings and identities that these women intend to transmit while hiding their true self. These representations can be seen in some speeches, such as the following:

I chose this name because of a teacher whom I loved as a child. (Bianca)

My name is Patricia because I dreamed to be one of the girls in *Clueless*. (Patricia)¹

According to this perspective, the attempt to hide one's identity can embed different meanings. Among them, we highlight the fact that this strategy is commonly adopted by female prostitutes to reduce personal and intimate contact with their work (Pereira, Palhares, & Silva, 2018; Weitzer, 2018), given that the social identity of prostitutes is associated with stigmas that demean them as individuals (Cunha, 2014), thus becoming a source of suffering.

Notably, most of the respondents (11) had children, and they invariably mentioned this fact as the main reason for having such profession. In some cases, they also referred to other relatives who depended on them, such as mother, father, and siblings. Such characteristics are also present in the study by Barros (2005), according to which prostitution, like any other work activity, has the ultimate purpose of meeting needs that are intrinsic to human survival. However, when it comes to prostitution, the logic does not operate identically, as the relationships established in this activity are intertwined with dominant cultural, moral, and behavioral elements. In other words, due to social stigma, the basic needs of a prostitute are usually perceived differently when compared to the basic needs of individuals working in other professions.

Time is money: temporal perceptions in prostitution

To understand the pleasure and suffering experiences arising from prostitution, we must consider, in the first instance, the aspects

¹ TN: "Patricinha" is a derogatory term in Brazilian Portuguese referring to rich, consumerist teenage girls.

related to this activity and how it relates to time. Accordingly, this study has identified what Bauman (2007) has called "non-civil spaces," the central feature of which is the transformation of individuals into consumers, as can be seen in the following excerpts.

I try to hide here, you know? It's like that... I try not to get involved. Here, I am a commodity, nothing else. My body is a commodity. (Ana)

They [the customers] walk through the bedroom doors and evaluate the material. If they like it, they ask about the price, and whether or not I do the "complete" trick [a sex service that includes anal intercourse]. Sometimes they come in, do the trick, but won't even ask your name. (Vitória)

In this environment, bodies are deprived of their subjectivities and become commodities to be traded and consumed. However, these spaces do not encourage interaction, as the socialization process is not expected to go beyond the mere commercialization of the body. As for pleasure and suffering at work, in a society where labor is perceived as a factor that distinguishes the "good citizens" from the "bums" (Veriguine et al., 2014), the work of prostitutes does not qualify them as citizens, socially speaking. On the contrary, their occupation stigmatizes and marginalizes them, constituting a source of suffering for these women. Such stigmatization can be identified in the perceptions that some respondents hold about their profession.

Damn (laughs), being a whore is the worst job of all. Being a prostitute is worse than being a drug dealer because dealers are famous, but prostitutes are not. They're infamous, unfortunately. (Carol)

Oh, I don't see it as an occupation, really. Selling your body, I don't think so, you can't get pleasure from that. This is not a job, there's nothing worthy about it. (Helen)

It is easy to notice that the respondents' speeches are filled with ambiguities and ambivalences that directly influence the process of signifying their profession. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between remaining in prostitution (temporal aspects) and suffering. From their perspective, their work as prostitutes cannot be assimilated as an important part of life;

therefore, they try to separate the time dedicated to work and that to their personal life as much as possible (Blithe & Wolfe, 2017).

It is important to point out that given the capitalist logic that states that “time is money,” interaction in such environments can be detrimental to professionals if it goes beyond what is agreed for the sexual service. Such logic can be easily identified in the following excerpts.

As for my time, I try to do it pretty fast. It's like I always say to my customers, time is money. If you want more, you'll have to pay more, so I say “honey, time is money, this is a brothel time is money.” [...] If I talk to you for five minutes in the room, I'm wasting time I could be spending with another guy who wants to come through my door. I've got to be fast.” (Ana)

When time is almost up, I go ahead and say: “Get off me, come fast, come on!” (laughs). I go ahead and say it, “Oh, come on, come fast, I mean it!” [Aren't your customers bothered by that?] I don't give a fuck if it bothers them. They either pay more to stick around for half an hour, or else it has to be a “quicke.” (Carol)

Therefore, the previous discourse fragments highlight the significance of time in prostitution. In this context, time is perceived as a commodity, or something that can be traded, as highlighted by Thompson (1991) and Hassard (2001), and it is used as a form of controlling the relationships established from bodies in that specific environment. The saying “time is money,” frequently used by the respondents, seems to reflect the idea, disseminated by Harvey and Sobral (1994), that money can be used as an instrument to control time.

We highlight the presence of three of the five temporal dimensions defined by Bluedorn and Jaussi (2007). The first is entrainment, identified in the previous fragments, given that prostitutes have the power to control and negotiate time, demanding that the client take a stand before that. The second dimension is speed, that is, the number of activities performed in each unit of time. In the specific case of this study, the participants claimed to serve an average of 30 customers on regular days and approximately 45 on busy days. However, this number can reach 80 bookings near the fifth working day of each month, when most Brazilian workers receive their salaries. In the context of prostitution, this dimension can be explained because the increase in profit is directly related to the increase in the speed

of the performed activity, as stipulated by the capitalist system (Harvey & Sobral, 1994). In other words, the more customers a prostitute serves, the higher will be the earnings from her workday. Consequently, we identified the adoption of certain strategies by these women to increase their profits:

I'm tired of having sex with guys while imagining that I'm having sex with my boyfriend, just as I'm tired of being silent and then remembering that I must moan for the guys to come, you know? (Laughs) “Let me moan, or else he won't come.” [Is that a strategy?] Yes, because it helps men to come faster. So, this is why when we walk the halls and hear people moaning aloud, [we know that] the guy will come out earlier. It sounds as if the girl was dying of pleasure, but it's all fake. (Bianca)

I don't rush, but I'm not stupid either! (Laughs). I mean, I'll say: “Honey, time's up, do you want to go on or stop?” [Can you give an example?] Well, sometimes a customer will say: “Let's do it for one hour.” So, I say, I mean, I dedicated myself to *performing* well, so that he'll come fast and finish before the booking hour is over. (Malu)

In this context, the pace and duration of the sexual act assume great relevance to understanding prostitution. Once again, there is evidence that time and temporality are important variables to consider when analyzing work contexts permeated by precariousness, insecurity, and uncertainty (Pitts, 2015).

You know, I came to spend a week and I've been here ever since. Prostitution is such a wrong thing, in my opinion, there's no way back, because the money comes fast, and I think it's highly addictive. It's not easy money. Everyone says it's easy money, but it's not, it's quick money actually, you know? I think it's highly addictive. (Malu)

It feels as if there was a bad thing in here, I don't know, like an evil spirit. Once you get in, it's very difficult to get out. I got here six years ago, and I've to quit several times but I couldn't. I think it's

because of the quick money, you may not have a lot of financial trouble, but you lose other things. At the end of the day, I think I lose more than I win. (Paloma)

As pointed out by Barros (2005), “making money” is directly related to serving the largest number of customers possible. In this sense, we perceive among the respondents a certain dependence on what Frezza et al. (2009) have called “the axis of capitalism,” which is distinguished by the loss of autonomy over their bodies and lives, in a context where everything can be bought, including life and time itself. This, in turn, can become a source of suffering.

The third time dimension present in the reports is depth (Bluedorn & Jaussi, 2007), as there is a greater connection between respondents with the future when they base their actions on the present. This happens because most of them emphasize their intention to quit prostitution within a stipulated deadline. To this end, the respondents rely on the transience of work in the present time as a justification as well as a glimpse of a different future through the resources earned through their profession. This corroborates Pereira et al. (2018).

It’s not something I want [to do] for the rest of my life [...]. (Sabrina)

I’ve saved some money. When I have enough, in a few months, I’ll be out of here, by God’s will. I’m setting up a business outside. I don’t want it, I’m 36 now. It’s like I said, I’ll be 40, then 50 soon, so I don’t want to be in the red-light district. At 50, I want to have a nest egg, get out of here and chill out. [...] I set up a 10-month deadline, I want this. I decided that I’ll give up this life no later than 10 months from now, then I’m going to open a sweet shop, it’s almost set up now. (Ana)

The situations depicted in these fragments constitute a source of suffering: sometimes diachronic, as it refers to past events, that is, to the moment when these women started in prostitution; and sometimes synchronous, because they are still working as prostitutes at present and have not been able to “give up this life.” In this sense, Dejours (1996) argues that, in such cases, the consequences of suffering externalize the space in which the individual is inserted, thus reflecting in all spheres of their lives. Along these lines, the process of dissolving the

boundaries between working and personal time begins (Frezza et al., 2009; Pereira et al., 2018).

Another relevant point to be highlighted is the temporal compression as addressed by Bauman (2007), which is the process of accelerating the pace of life according to the dominant perspective of capital and can be identified in the interview fragments. This, in turn, constitutes another source of anguish and psychological suffering for the surveyed prostitutes. Furthermore, it is possible to perceive the excessive connection to chronological time, a fact that, allied to the characteristics of the prostitutes’ working environment (indoor environments illuminated by artificial, colored, and dim lights), makes it difficult to synchronize the prostitution activity with natural time.

I got lost as time passed, I can’t deal with it very well. I told you, my goal is to arrive early and leave early, but I can’t do it. So, if I say I’ll leave early, but a customer shows up, I end up coveting that and going on and on, it’s awful. It’s exhausting, you don’t see time going by, it’s really bad (Malu).

It feels as if time passed faster in here. Especially when you’re working. When you come to your senses, it’s time to go home. The rooms have no windows, the main door is downstairs, so you come in and you can’t see the world outside. You end up losing track of things, whether it’s day, afternoon or evening. And it’s like that, I come in here and I won’t leave until it’s time to call it a day (Lorena).

As pointed out by Blithe and Wolfe (2017), the occupational ideology “work now, life later” is verified in the case of these sex workers, confirming the existence of a concrete imbalance between time dedicated to working and that to pursuing other personal interests. In this sense, the temporal perceptions associated with the participants’ profession are presented as important variables to understand experiences of pleasure and suffering at work in greater depth.

Pleasure and suffering in prostitution

Initially, we emphasize that the primary argument mentioned by the respondents to justify their entry and permanence in prostitution is associated with income. Most of them (13) argue that their current occupation allows them to offer better living

conditions for their respective families and loved ones. Indeed, this is one of the primary sources of pleasure for these workers.

I'm sick of being a housekeeper, I got sick of going to people's houses and have the woman's/boss' husband hit on me. I mean, that's my boss' husband flirting with me. I got tired of doing things for other people and seeing my children struggling. I only do this for me and them these days. [...] They always ask me: "Why don't you work at a store? Or a bakery? Or as a housekeeper? This and that." But at least I... Fuck it... I'm living my life; I pay my bills. If I didn't want to take care of my family, I wouldn't. But I think it's my responsibility, I care for my children, they have more money now than when I was married to their father. Actually, their father didn't help at all. My mother-in-law died, but my children's family, they all know I'm a whore, every single one of them. (Carla)

There's something that pleases me, which is to be able to see my son well and to know that I did something to help him. [I like] to know that my son is doing fine where he is, knowing that his mother didn't let him down.

Therefore, in addition to "quick money," we highlight a latent process of empowerment through which these women, despite not being happy to work as prostitutes, pride themselves on having the courage to do so, for it allows them to change the course of their lives and, in particular, of their loved ones. Such feelings can be understood simultaneously as sources of pleasure, given that in a psychosocial system, they articulate these women's needs and desires with their work (Castro & Cançado, 2009), as well as a strategy to deal with the suffering imposed by their occupational experiences (Dejours, 1994), as they assign new meanings to the well-being of others (family, children, etc.).

As found by Pereira et al. (2018), there is a process of pleasure denial on the part of the respondents, given that personal pleasure in prostitution is perceived as something that can divert attention from what matters, that is, earning money. Therefore, in this particular context, the denial of one's pleasure is interpreted as something related to the maturity level of sex workers.

This is no place for whores to come, dude, this is a place to make money. (Fernanda)

A long time ago, at *Brilhante* [the most famous prostitution hotel on Guaicurus Street], there were many hot guys and all, it was like "orgasm land" (laughs). But today I think it's the opposite, I am mature now and can't do that anymore (Vitória).

An important finding of this study resides in the prerogative that under the perspective of pleasure and suffering in low-class prostitution, professional maturity is directly associated with the denial of pleasure. This brings evidence that suffering experiences are more frequent than pleasant ones in the context of precarious and stigmatized occupations. Considering that in Brazil, work is perceived as a crucial element of distinction between "the good citizens" and the "bums" (Veriguine et al., 2014), being a prostitute is a basic condition for being a "bum," in the context of the stigma associated with this activity (Sanders, 2018). In this scenario, the experiences of suffering are more frequent and intense than the experiences of pleasure. Among the most frequent reasons, we highlight verbal or physical violence, prejudice, the clash with one's values, and the type of customer served.

Many men look down at us as if we were trash, you know? We can see in their eyes. We tell them how much the trick will cost, and they stare at us as if we were charging a lot of money. It's awful, I mean, 15 bucks is peanuts. (Bianca)

Fucking taxi driver. I ended up at the police station with him. I got into a taxicab and said: "Can you take me to Shopping Del Rey?" He turned back and looked straight into my eyes: "What do you do for a living?" "I work at the red-light district." "Then get out of my car now." "I won't get off, why am I supposed to get out? I'm going to pay the fare, man." "Get out of my car now." "I won't get out" and I didn't. So, the guy came out, grabbed me by my hair and dragged me out of the cab. I said: "Did you just grab my hair and drag me out of this car? Fine, then." Then I took my clog off and smashed his car window. Then the police came. I told the cop what had happened. The guy was furious, yelling and yelling, so when the officers left, he came at me and punched me.

Then I grabbed a bottle that was lying nearby and smashed it on his hand (Suelen).

As highlighted by other studies, violence and prejudice are some of the primary elements of the social stigma associated with prostitutes (Cunha, 2014; Leite, 2008; Lobo & Sampaio, 2016; Meihy, 2015; Pereira et al., 2018; Weitzer, 2018). These, in turn, derive from a social construction that marginalizes these “wandering beings” (Barreto, 2013; Roberts, 1992), through the dirt, impurity, and shamelessness commonly associated with prostitution. Similarly, it is possible to emphasize a process of psychological self-punishment that affects some prostitutes (Sanders, 2018), especially religious women, as their actions go against their values. In other words, their profession represents a form of diachronic suffering based on values established throughout their trajectory (Dejours, 1996), as can be verified in the following fragments.

The sin! The only thing I know is that I’m doing wrong, but... I do it but I know I can’t do it. [Does that make you suffer?] Hell yes! (Carol)

God’s hand is heavy, isn’t it? And I know the Word, but for some reason, I ended up here, some serious reasons. So, I ended up here, you know? I didn’t quit my church, but I had to quit the last supper and my Christian life because of this job. (Gi)

Such speeches corroborate Pereira et al. (2018), who point out that religiosity in prostitution is a source of not only psychic but physical suffering as well. This happens because the practice of self-mutilation is common among prostitutes as if self-punishment could “redeem them from the sins” derived from their occupational practices. Further, the authors point out that religiosity in prostitution is a source of ambivalence, crises, and identity fragmentations because it provides relief and comfort that sometimes materializes as a source of pleasure, and sometimes, of suffering.

It is important to highlight that for the purpose of this study, customers also constitute, although paradoxically, a source of suffering in prostitution (Durant & Couch, 2019). Despite being associated with the key source of pleasure reported by the respondents (money), they also cause suffering, as shown below.

For me, the downside is the drunks and junkies who come here. This is the hardest part to deal with in this place (Ana).

Some guys ask me to call them “dad.” “Sit on my lap, call me daddy.” I think they must be pedophiles, there can’t be another explanation. How can a person come in here and ask me to call him “dad” or “uncle”? “Hey, Daddy!” “Ask daddy to fuck you in the...,” I don’t even like to say it. (Suelen)

The emotional distress is huge. I can leave this place with 200 or 500 bucks, but I’m never happy. (Malu)

It’s difficult because these are not guys you like. Anyone can show up. So, you have to think about money first. (Samara)

To cope with their experiences of suffering, the prostitutes surveyed in this study rely on various strategies, their primary function being to mitigate or avoid the suffering derived from their work practices. Among the primary strategies identified, we highlight the use of legal or illegal drugs. Most prostitutes claim to have friends who use drugs, and others have confessed using them to help endure suffering.

I drink and smoke pot. I drink a lot, I like drinking, not when I come here, but when I go out, I like to drink. And I smoke pot when I’m stressed out. This morning I was so stressed out, so I had to smoke a joint because men suck. (Fernanda)

I’ll tell you the truth, I take controlled drugs to work here because it makes me calmer, you know? It’s a regular prescription medication, we can buy them over the counter (laughs). It’s normal stuff. We buy them over the counter, so I take it every day to make things more pleasant. (Sabrina)

In this context, the dimension of temporal depth (Bluedorn & Jaussi, 2007) is underlined by the way the surveyed prostitutes focus on the past time, which can be seen either as a source of suffering or as a coping strategy.

If I had listened to my mother, if I had gone to school instead of getting married, today I’d be in a quite different situation. The worst part is that I didn’t have time to apologize to her or tell her she was right. (Gi)

Look, I got into two college courses, but I couldn't finish them. I was looking at some of my friends who got in at the same time, I wasn't working here back then, and they've already graduated, you know? I don't know, this is a bit frustrating. Something is holding me here, I must stay here, I don't know what it is, you know? (Sabrina).

On the other hand, there are women whose temporal depth is linked to the future. That is, they focus on future opportunities and use this dimension as a coping strategy to deal with or mitigate the suffering derived from prostitution. In this sense, one can notice that the different dynamics and temporal regimes coexisting in capitalism compel subjects to act and think according to distinct temporal models at the same time (Lainez, 2019).

I can tell that time is passing very quickly, I'm trying to get out of here and finish college, you know? I have a... a better life (Malu).

I'm going to leave this place soon and set up my business, thank God. I managed to solve almost all my problems and even saved some money. My days here are numbered, thank God (Patricia).

In general terms, references of experiences of suffering in the daily lives of prostitutes predominated in their speeches, as the time dedicated to prostitution is a time of pain, humiliation, and anguish, in which chronological time reigns. This has consequences that go beyond working time and affect the free time of these women, who carry the scars and marks resulting from their occupation. In addition, they often need to confront their situation alone, as they often count on no social support from their families. Therefore, they stick to the saying "time is money," and this is the source of pleasure that keeps them in prostitution.

FINAL REMARKS

Regarded as the oldest profession in the world, prostitution is permeated by dilemmas, prejudices, stigmas, and other social constructions that nonetheless fail to prevent its realization in countless countries and regions worldwide. In the wake of academic and social issues, we highlighted the logics of capital on which prostitution is founded as well as the subjective aspects involving its practitioners, such as experiences of suffering and pleasure at work.

This study analyzed how temporal aspects influence the perceptions and experiences of pleasure and suffering among prostitutes, specifically those working in the red-light district of Guaicurus Street, in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The data analysis allowed to identify a process of commodification of time in which its units are offered in exchange for money, thus ratifying the idea that "time is money," a saying that permeates the relationships established between women prostitutes, their customers, and society. Consequently, the phenomenon of temporal compression was identified, implying that lifetime is pressured by working time, which, in turn, leads to physical and psychological suffering among prostitutes.

As a consequence of such paradox, which establishes that prostitutes must work to survive and ensure the survival of others, these women are oppressed and stigmatized due to their professional context, experiencing moments of pleasure and suffering. In the specific case of pleasure, it is basically associated with the financial sphere and the desire to "give up this life," leaving behind their past of prostitution. This fact attributes an idea of transience to prostitution, given that it is seen by its members as the means that will be justified by the ends.

As for the suffering derived from prostitution, the primary experiences discussed in this study reflect a social construction that establishes prostitution as something dirty, immoral, and sinful. This, in turn, fosters the notion that prostitutes are "easy-living women." However, this perception has been utterly rejected by the respondents, as their life stories seem to tell precisely the opposite. In this sense, we conclude that the experiences of suffering among prostitutes outnumber those of pleasure in quantity and intensity, thus refuting the argument that these individuals are "easy-living women."

Further, one must consider the inversion of the social logic that operates in the sphere of work when the occupation in question is prostitution. Work in contemporary society is used as a benchmark to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, and worthy and marginal. However, this study has identified that the fact that these women work as prostitutes to ensure their survival and that of their families turns them into impure and marginalized beings in the eyes of society. Notably, this inversion is the result of social and moral standards that dictate the subjective norms of societies, such as the Brazilian, which nonetheless have done extraordinarily little to mitigate the impacts of this stigma on these individuals. In this regard, this study questions the social structures that demean these women because of their occupation (although the same does not happen with their customers).

Finally, the analysis of the perceptions about female sex workers in the low-class red-light district has brought about questions concerning labor relations in the current Brazilian society, which have become increasingly precarious. In this sense, and as an example, studies focusing on luxury prostitutes may reveal other biases in terms of the perceptions of these professionals regarding the themes discussed here, as well as those focusing on male workers, transsexuals, etc. Similarly, most of the subjects who participated in this study were classified as young workers, which can motivate research contemplating other age groups for comparison purposes, while seeking to understand work-related issues and the impact of prostitution on their personal lives.

The theoretical contributions of this study can be summarized as follows. First, it has deepened the understanding of the ambiguities permeating prostitution in the context addressed. It focuses on the paradox centered on experiences of pleasure and suffering, in which the former is more associated with the work outcomes (survival and well-being of themselves and others) than work itself (risky, violent, stigmatized), and the consequences of which extend beyond the time dedicated to working as well as to other spaces frequented by the women surveyed. It has addressed issues concerning suffering at work that have been disregarded in organizational studies, as it focuses on a rather stigmatized profession and work environment, which are sometimes deemed unworthy of being research objects or even as possibilities to generate income and dignity (to some degree) for their practitioners. Finally, it questions the moral standards that solely comprise the marginalized side of prostitution, at the same time that it “closes its eyes” to the real needs of people, which may be solved through work in contemporary society.

As pragmatic contributions, we highlight the emphasis on the coping and resistance strategies developed by prostitutes, as they can serve as an inspiration or example for other women in similar situations. We identified that resignification of suffering has been constant in their everyday lives, allowing them to deal more effectively with the physical and psychic contradictions of their profession and optimize their productive time, for their benefit and of those who are dear to them.

As limitations, we highlight the difficulty to collect data, as the process was conducted in loco, at the very “prostitution hotels” of Guaicurus Street, during their respective opening hours. Access to such places is complex and involves reaching audiences other than the prostitutes themselves.

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