Tricking and Tripping Analysis

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Miss Claire E. Sterk, writer of “Tricking and Tripping,” has shed a serious light on the world of prostitution. Her work revealed the true nature of not just the “workers” but also the men in charge and everyone in between. Unfortunately for this writer, the process of attaining this knowledge and insight was not nearly as cut and dry as asking for interviews on the street. This woman had struggles with getting involved with a taboo group, a need display cultural relativism, and communication problems just to start. This paper will dive deeper into the motivations and question Ms. Sterk’s methods in an attempt to see if they were fruitful.

In order to understand Sterk’s struggles, one would first have to understand her motive. For what reason would someone wish to get mixed up in the world of prostitution? One could say that the answer lies in the title itself, “Tricking and Tripping: Fieldwork on Prostitution in the Era of AIDS.” It’s the “Era of AIDS” so naturally the most effected people would be those working in sexual fields. Her concern must have stemmed from the thought of people who are just trying to make a living being infected with a life-changing virus. With that out of the way, this leaves one of the primary dilemmas with entering the world of hookers. As the writer tried to slide herself into this entirely new environment, the environment itself initially rejected her. Sterk herself said, “I realized that gaining entrée into the prostitution world was not going to be as easy as I imagined it.” This was proven by her several appearances in neighborhoods known to harbor working women with only catcalls from potential customers to show for it. A bit after this, however, she was confronted by one of the women she was hoping to get in contact with. This sparked the flame that allowed her to see through their eyes just at least just a bit. Despite her ability to communicate with the hookers improving, there was a wall that prevented conversation on occasion. That wall was the pimp. In fact, after communicating with one of a pimp’s workers, he sent some muscle to rough her up. Fortunately, she only came out of it with a few bruises.

Keeping a sense of “cultural relativism” must have been much harder for her than she had written. Cultural relativism is essentially keeping judgments of others’ culture to yourself to better help you understand them. In this day and age, keeping an open mind is not hard but keeping an open mind about hookers and pimps of all things seems….unlikely. It’d take more than a while for people to become accepting of the working women. With this in mind, it was certainly a challenge for Sterk to keep to herself when it came to cultural and moral differences. However, she did keep herself restrained when moral dilemmas came up and treated the women working the corners and crack-houses like what they were. Humans. Because of her relativism, those who worked both men and women, saw her and accepted her as one of them.

As stated before, entering this world was not a perfect assimilation. Sterk was obviously a different person not suited for this line of duty. This made people suspicious of her, thinking she was a cop or worked for the cops. After a few conversations, she was able to clear this misconception up but this was not the end of the communication snafus. Once while conversing with one of the women, she said she “felt sorry” for them, meaning she was feeling “genuine concern for her”. This was misconstrued by the woman to mean that she was sorry that she was a failure and didn’t speak to Sterk for quite some time. Eventually, she apologized to the woman but had to do favors for her to make up for the fact. Lastly, she had on occasion hung around people with less than likable statuses in the community. This association with them closed several doors for her, preventing the in-depth interview she desired.

Towards the end of the article, Sterk had come to develop six different themes. One such theme seems to beam and gleam with a light of truth that the others could not redeem. This theme was the violence and abuse in the women’s lives. The author herself was subject to such abuse a number of times, so she can especially relate. Miss Sterk was assaulted by thugs, catcalled by customers, and harassed by pimps. This was only her experience though. She also knew for a fact that the workers were sexually abused by customers that they refused to serve, beaten by their own pimps, and mistreated when they were working. People in this business seem to believe the women to be more akin to objects than humans.

This paper has done exactly as promised, delving deeper into some of the meanings behind the article presented and explaining some of the author’s experiences to supply context. There only lies one last thing to do and that is determining the next American subcultural group to get researched. Perhaps the homeless community should be looked into, seeing as they’re constantly seen on the street but nobody ever asks their stories. It seems appropriate. This could be difficult because some people are certainly homeless but others simply like to beg for money to mooch off of the wealth of others. Some homeless may not wish to talk. Some may not be able to. The rewards could possibly be putting a bit more recognition into the homeless community, driving others to acknowledge and help them.

Works Cited

Sterk, C. E. (2000). *Tricking and tripping: Prostitution in the era of AIDS*. Putnam Valley, NY: Social Change Press.