



Make the Grade or Hear the Laughter

GERHARD AMENDT



Up to the present time, female prostitution has been labelled among feminist gender relation theorists and advocates as one of the bleakest symptoms of male domination and thus violence against women in the history of mankind. It stands as one of the most striking, enduring examples of female victimhood and male perpetration. Ongoing discussions hardly ever allow for any differentiation between forms of prostitution, such as prostitution due to dire poverty, the abuse of love relations, malicious seduction, forced labour, or personal lifestyle choices. It is all the more surprising that the well-known labour market analyst and lecturer at the London School of Economics and Social Sciences, Catherine Hakim, proposes a total departure from this feminist position, which seemed to be written in stone. As a self-proclaimed feminist, she introduces a “veraciously feminist model” that proposes that women of all social classes and formal education use their erotic capital, i.e., selling sexual favours, as a basic means of primary money making, status acquisition, social advancement, and a means to finally establish a society in which equality can be achieved and women can rise to the very top. This sexualized model of professional relationships requires abandoning all cultural traditions, such as the develop-

ment of emotions, self-respect and privacy, submitting everything to mechanisms of the market. If men were to respond to this market approach to intimate relations, then it would follow that they could do precisely what most of them deplore: demand sex from women for privileges that men grant. It would be permissible to do what feminism traditionally blames men for practicing.

Keywords: feminism, prostitution, Catherine Hakim, gender studies, male studies

This text is the slightly revised version of Chapter 5 of *Höllenhunde und Himmelswesen* [*Hell Hounds and Heavenly Creatures*], Frankfurt: Ikaru Verlag, 2013.

It was the 1950s, and I was working as a trainee at an international firm that built chemical plants. Male employees were allowed to learn just enough typing so that they weren't helpless if their secretary called in sick or went on vacation. Consequently, the touch-typing system has always remained foreign to me, while the female trainees learned it to perfection. The more keystrokes per minute, the greater their chances of moving up into the outer office of an executive. Yet they were not allowed to learn much more than typing, nor had they any desire to do so. Additionally, the office functioned as a pulsating marriage market which determined the point at which young women bailed out for house and hearth. This explains why most of the female trainees let their fashionable bullet bras speak for themselves, thereby providing a single conspicuous focal point for everything that really mattered. This produced results: reports of in-house marriages arrived in a steady stream. If the women became pregnant they disappeared, never to be seen again. Returning to the workplace was the exception. Many things have changed since then, but much has remained the same. The majority of women, but men as well, no longer wish to return to conditions as they were. Employers have no desire whatsoever because today, even more than in the 1950s, not only every qualified employee but every *qualifiable* employee is needed.

Consequently, over the years men have gradually begun to face competition in fields where they had previously been required to prove their mettle only among themselves. The question of who achieves professional success and to what degree is nevertheless still determined on the basis of individual performance. In order to whet women's appetite for the workplace, and above all to ensure their success, new approaches are being sought that go beyond achievement and knowledge.

In 2011, Catherine Hakim, an English labor market economist, published one such modernization plan. Its noteworthy feature is that it promises women money and status for the most part irrespective of their professional performance. It is a matter, she promises, of securing plenty of money and unlimited opportunity for advancement for all women. It is not about a short-term but rather a long-term perspective that will provide ongoing enrichment for women regardless of their qualifications, self-confidence, or intelligence. A woman's maxim should be: appearance, sex appeal, and sex itself, are the ever-present elevator to the top. Or, as Coco Chanel put it, "Beauty, what a weapon!" It is not the conservatives or even cynical, offended men who are suggesting that women return to eroticism and the power of their genitals. Surprisingly, it is a feminist who seeks to gain an advantage for all women through the systematic deployment of their beauty, eroticism, and genitality by propagating *pussy power*. This is meant to finally make women the architects of their own fortune. Then there will be no more need for accommodation by men, no pro-feminist softies, or males who

reproach themselves for their own machismo and pledge improvement. And even less need for government that promotes women in an effort to deliver them from their rumored lack of independence. What women want, they can achieve on their own. Full of optimism, Catherine Hakim ascribes them the ability to capitalize on their nature-given erotic capital, with which she augments human and financial capital. Hakim believes that women's erotic capital will change the world in a revolutionary way. She has confidence in women's self-reliance, as did the quondam women's movement.

She gained no friends in mainstream feminism, however, becoming *persona non grata* for not adopting the fundamental view that women are victims and men perpetrators.¹ In contrast to the feminist victim mentality, Hakim views the situation of women in the labor market as an indication of a choice they themselves have expressed. For her, the status of women is not a fate imposed by men. If women want to change the circumstances in which they find themselves, they simply have to make better choices than they have until now. Hakim wants to return women's subject-ness. Feminism deprived them of this, teaching them instead to place their trust in a state modeled on feminist principles.

How would an awareness of possessing erotic capital be different from the way things were in the past? Young women would no longer go to bed with their superiors in the hope that at some point it would help them to advance in the firm. According to Hakim's model, a promotion would have to be granted *before* the executive would be allowed to consummate his desire for sexual intercourse. This opens up an entirely new world of interactions on the swap market. But such unequivocal commodification entails a disadvantage for any manager making the decision about the promotion, as well as the young woman seeking advancement. Both of them draw their particular power from their strengths, she from her attractiveness and youthfulness, he from the authority he wields in the workplace. Yet he is buying the young woman just as little as she is selling herself. Each of them makes a swap under the assumption that the other party also values and admires them as a person—quite aside from their particular attributes—and feels at least a certain degree of fondness for them. If that were not the case, then their relationship would clearly be that of whore and client as in the business of prostitution. Common parlance has it that power makes you horny. Hakim has convincingly formulated the political insight that desirability, likewise, leads to power over others. She advises young women in particular to eliminate the poorly defined ambivalence between expedient affection and advantage and convert it into a commodified exchange.

Of course, this instrumentalization of the female body for the purpose of earning money and advancement places Hakim in stark conflict with all feminist traditions, which condemn prostitution as the work of a male devil, an expression of his power and above all his violence.

Hakim therefore views the introduction of the swap principle—sex only in exchange for money and advancement—as a battleground in which women must still prove themselves. She claims that the "*patriarchal value system cannot be dissuaded that female attractiveness is by nature a part of life and not something that men should have to pay for.*"² What was once free of charge is now to become subject to fee, which will not be achieved without a fight!

This perspective presupposes a determination among women that gives them everything they haven't had at their disposal until now because they didn't want it. The innovation does not consist of a romantic construct but is based instead on the application of market economics to the most intimate relations between men and women.

Women's Desire Isn't Passionate Enough

Nevertheless, where is this cultural rupture between men and women to derive its dormant energy? Hakim bases this new perspective on all manner of studies supposedly proving that men want sex much more frequently than women.³ She claims that this represents a hidden and untapped goldmine for the emancipation of all womankind. Men always want that “one thing,” at all hours and with ever greater adulterous variety, standing fast until they reach an advanced age. Meanwhile, the somewhat vague “other thing” that women want is left unexamined. For an explanation, Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz can be enlisted. She describes the liberalization of sexuality as a great blaze from which women have emerged somewhat burned and deeply disappointed. She casts women as the great losers of the era of reform and men as the big winners. Not only because it is now easier for men to have women, but also to access them across class boundaries without difficulty. She claims that men are simply the “emotional capitalists,” in other words, the exploiters in the realm of emotional relationships. It is precisely the women of the middle class who could exercise control over their bodies and feelings and enjoy them with the utmost self-confidence, but are nevertheless dominated by privileged men who “*can choose from an enormous pool of female partners who want to have children and must therefore enter commitments at an earlier age*”⁴ To protect oneself against risk, Illouz suggests separating romantic love from the desire to have children. The creation of offspring should no longer involve a lover, but an emotionally neutral stranger. Homosexual arrangements such as sperm donation are the recommended models. In this way, single parenthood as well is transformed into a strategy to protect oneself from narcissistic injury. Illouz does not discuss the needs of children. Thus, what's good for children is also what's good for women. Children are understood as stationary satellites in their mothers' gravitational field.

Hakim's “truly feminist manifesto,” therefore, is meant as a solution to both the difficulty of sexual emancipation *and* women's desire to have children. Women should simply play the part of suppliers to a market. They must simply grow accustomed to no longer refusing or postponing sex—which men constantly desire—but always agreeing, in exchange for a quid pro quo with monetary value. Feelings of aversion or fantasies of violence, self-degradation, or prostitution, which might creep in as relics of women's liberation or their own notions of self-respect, are merely a hindrance here. The stressful aspect of overcoming one's reluctance stands in contrast to the tantalizing benefits of granting access to the vagina, the career advancement, presents, cash, and preferential treatment by teachers, professors, and employers. This is said to be the inexhaustible capital of all women and the foundation of an approaching vaginally oriented, primitive accumulation of capital. The sporadic, unsystematic, and somewhat diffident hopes of the past that erotic concessions will be accompanied by ancillary benefits—marrying up, for example—are now to be replaced by fully conscious calculation. This would cause the old model, namely, that women marry up and men marry below their station, to lose its passive character. What formerly transpired on a preconscious level would now be elevated to a strategy women actively employ to optimize their lives. As a result, the difference between men and women in the intensity of their sexual desire would benefit women by becoming a building block for a new social order.

The second premise of Hakim's emancipation manifesto is that after the age of 30, hormones cause women to begin enjoying sex increasingly less, which automatically improves their market-dominating position as sex providers. On the other hand, stronger sexual desire in younger women favors men: as long as women want sex, they cannot sell what they themselves lustfully desire to consume. According to this model, women who are completely uninterested in sexuality and are particularly good-looking would be the strongest market participants. They can dictate their price

to sex-seeking men. “*Even if women, primarily during their younger years, enjoy having sex, as a rule men’s desire is even stronger.*” According to this calculation, women are at their most powerful if they are asexual, live the ascetic life of a nun, or suffer from a pathological libido disorder. Nevertheless, in Hakim’s view it holds true across the board that, “*The principle of least interest generally allows women to gain the upper hand in sexual barter.*”

Men’s Sexual Cravings Give All Women Power

This is the reason why all women, irrespective of origin, education, or ethnicity, have good chances of selling their sexuality at an optimal price. Men, supposedly, always want sex; it makes no difference whether the woman is uneducated or rich. Hakim does not claim that women have a monopoly on erotic capital, however. They simply command substantially more of it than men. According to the logic governing the exchange of goods in the market, the great abundance of male sexuality renders it practically worthless. Many women do not realize this because men have understood all along how to prevent them from exploiting their unique advantage—persuaded them, in fact, that their female erotic capital has no value at all.⁵

To be sure, Catherine Hakim already sees gathering resistance among men. She claims that men begrudge women the utilization of their erotic resources and are therefore attempting to transform women’s strength into a weakness. With the help of pharmaceuticals, in Western societies they are supposedly trying to pathologize women’s somewhat less pronounced libido. They are said to be working on a “Viagra for women” that will increase female sexual libido and thereby ensure unlimited access to free sexual acts for men. As mentioned earlier, women can no longer sell something they themselves want to experience frequently. For this reason, the female libido deficit should be preserved so that it can be turned into an erotic/capitalist coup d’état. Hakim identifies counselors, psychotherapists, and libido stimulating pharmaceuticals as the agents of this renewed sexual repression. She makes the case that women should masochistically reject pleasure. In this way, she, too, replays feminism’s most thoroughly developed fantasy, namely, that being a victim has to pay off.

Based on other considerations as well, she recommends that women begin adopting something similar to a prostitute mentality. By selling their bodies, Hakim explains, young women with little education can earn more in one night than they would in a month behind the cash register in a department store. Hakim does not focus on money alone, however. On top of that, she includes character training and acquiring assertiveness skills. Deficits in this area are one of the many causes for the income disparity between men and women; this, too, could be reduced by capitalizing on the genitals. “*Women who have consciously used their erotic capital for some time become [. . .] more self-confident. [. . .] their social skills are well developed, so that they can easily deal with a very wide range of situations and individuals. Even women who offer only telephone sex have mentally experienced the entire spectrum of sexual activities and have become [. . .] more tolerant and open-minded in their own lives.*”⁶ Hakim claims that this is even associated with gains in terms of tolerance and democracy.

Matters in everyday life that can only be settled through complicated conflict resolution, will be settled *en passant* in a neoliberal fashion by the market. Hakim’s interest does not lie in under-

standing power differentials and their gender-specific manifestations in partner relationships. For situations that would require people to have strenuous discussions of their conflicts, she relies on the market. The very thing that is increasingly proving to be a flawed economic regulator is supposed to help women come to power!

Catherine Hakim set out to put an end to feminism's masochistic victim mentality. Her intention was to convert women's latent potential for power into manifest power, thereby showing them the royal road to achieving financial independence. They were meant to triumph over men in the way that men, she believes, have always wanted to triumph over women. What Goethe's *Faust* promised in terms of men "curing" women by addressing "one point," Hakim delivers through inversion. The vagina becomes the new point from which all power springs—albeit women's power this time. In fact, power could even shift entirely into the hands of women because men's sexual craving could turn itself into a disadvantage in the market. Early on, feminism vehemently opposed the notion of reducing women to their anatomy because this leaves women no options in the way they conduct their lives. Biology, they said, would then determine a woman's fate. Hakim's liberation model dismisses these feminist arguments and reasserts that a woman's fate is anchored in biology. By contending that the vagina is the body part that generates meaning and power, she relegates capability and intellectuality to the background. In this manner, feminists, of all people, re-enthroned the same biologism with which the famous German neurologist Paul Julius Möbius⁷ sought to exclude women from the modern professions more than a century ago.

What Men Must Learn from This, and Women Should not Overlook

It is somewhat surprising that a market economist can disregard the fact that the other market participants, namely, men, will react to the changes in the supply/demand relationship. Entirely in accordance with the market, they will continue their attempts—as Hakim alleges from her anti-relationship viewpoint—to obtain sex "free of charge."

Apparently, she has blind trust that misandrous discourse will continue to throw men into a state of voiceless shock. She is betting on the unbroken, guilt-driven silence so prevalent among many men. This would turn men's crippling silence, telling as it may be, into the actual guarantor for women's monopoly in the sexual marketplace. However, if the paralyzing shock brought on by a culture of condemnation should subside, the targeted monopoly would be doomed. To discount this possibility is to turn a blind eye to reality, for it may be expected that men will use their social and professional position to avoid drawing the short straw in the market. According to the laws of the market, everything men were accused of in the past would then suddenly become permissible, from "structural violence, patriarchal rule, hegemonic masculinity, and dominance behavior" to "violence against women." They would be virtually forced to assume that women are using sexual acts to advance their professional careers or their success at the secondary school or university levels. Thus, according to Catherine Hakim's "truly feminist model" men find themselves in a paradoxical situation. They are supposed to be what feminists, their voices trembling in rage, have accused them of—for the last 30 years and to this day. Free of moral scruples, men are now permitted to view the vagina as a barter item in all conceivable relationships. In the future, what was traditionally an "immoral offer" is to be reclassified as capitalism-friendly sexuality. Relationships are to become the playground of prostitution, although it will no longer be allowed to bear that name.

Footnotes

- ¹ Catherine Hakim: *Key Issues in Women`s Work. Female Diversity and the Polarization of Women`s Employment*, 2004 (2nd edition) p. 4 ff
- ² Hakim 2011, 265 Sexonomie
- ³ Hakim 2011, 267 Die Macht erotischen Kapitals/Sexonomie
- ⁴ Eva Illouz: Männer sind die emotionalen Kapitalisten. *Weltwoche* Nr. 9, 2012, S. 48 f
- ⁵ Hakim 2011, 90 Der zweite Bonus einer Frau
- ⁶ Hakim 2011, 221 Persönlicher Gewinn
- ⁷ Paul Julius Möbius: Der physiologische Schwachsinn des Weibes “On the Physiological Idiocy of Women” 1903



Gerhard Amendt is professor of sociology at the University of Bremen and was the founder of the Institute for Gender and Generation Research. He views relations between genders and generations as arrangements that are not by any means devoid of conflict but can ultimately be modernized. Gerhard Amendt is the author of numerous books including “*I didn’t divorce my kids!*” *How Fathers Deal with Family Break-Up*, *Vatersehnsucht* (Yearning for a Father), *Du oder delte Sie*, (“First Name or Formal”) *Wie Mütter ihre Söhne sehen* (How Mothers View Their Sons).

NEW MALE STUDIES: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (NMS) IS AN OPEN ACCESS ONLINE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING BOYS AND MEN WORLDWIDE. THIS JOURNAL USES OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS 2.3.4.0, WHICH IS OPEN SOURCE JOURNAL MANAGEMENT AND PUBLISHING SOFTWARE DEVELOPED, SUPPORTED, AND FREELY DISTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT UNDER THE GNU GENERAL PUBLIC LICENSE.

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM [HTTP://NEWMALESTUDIES.COM](http://newmalestudies.com).