

Guest column

Fox network televises legalized prostitution

It looked like any other beauty pageant. Impossibly tall white women wearing dresses of questionable taste, their smiles beaming out from heavily made-up faces, made their way across the stage on precariously high heels as millions eyed their bodies.

Women as young as 19 endured cheesy introductions, then an elimination round, followed by a question-and-answer period and a swimsuit competition, another elimination round, and then the Final Interview. But these women were not competing for scholarships, or even a chance at the harsh world of modeling. These women were competing for a husband. Who wants to marry a multimillionaire? Maybe the question should be, "How much dignity would you sacrifice for money?"

Yes, we, as a society, have sunk to an all time low. Last Tuesday's, "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire" showcased everything that is wrong with our society in a two-hour Fox special, and celebrated it. But I have to appreciate Fox for its honesty. I mean, no one wants to admit that our culture is so materialistic and sexist that human dignity and marriage, an institution that is supposed to be an expression of spiritual connection between two people, are both expendable in exchange for cold, hard cash.

But Fox has, cashing in on the "American Greed" (I refuse to use the euphemism "American Dream") that fueled the popularity of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" and all its knockoffs, such as the sadistic, often misogynist voyeurism present in such fine programs as "The Jerry Springer Show," "The Howard Stern

Show" and all of the pseudo-documentaries like "The Real World" and "Blind Date."

Feeling inspired, programming genius Mike Darnell came up with this gem of a show. Now he can add to his impressive résumé, which includes "Getting Away with Murder: The Jon-Benet Ramsey Story." And how ironic that Mike Fleiss, cousin of infamous Hollywood madam Heidi Fleiss, produced the show, since the result was televised, legalized prostitution. Guess it's good that the show took place in Vegas.

The similarities to the old tradition of mail-order brides was striking: the groom, real estate success Rick Rockwell, was not seen by the bride until he decided to marry her, a decision made by watching each woman from his own private screening room as they bared their bodies and (shallow) souls to a live studio audience. And though the 50 women (allegedly chosen from thousands) and Rockwell are equally culpable in their stupidity and emptiness, I still feel the whole premise packaged old patriarchal institutions into a glitzy, "Millennium" package — the man was still on top.

Sure, Rockwell was prostituting himself too in that he was allowing himself to be used for his money, as men have for centuries, but he called all the shots. The money kept him in control, and kept tradition alive.

Fifty women were clamoring to share their wedding bed with a man they had never met, tempted by the promises of the week-long "bachelorette party," complete with fitted designer wedding gowns for each contestant. They were also hooked by the messages they have

heard from Barbies to *Cosmopolitan*: You, too, can be a princess, and that white gown will ensure a life of happiness and completeness.

It is painfully ironic that with all the complaints and musings over the lack of women appearing on such shows as "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," this is the archaic solution television executives come up with: If you want to be rich, little girl, marry rich.

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Who wants to marry a millionaire? I bet there are a lot of men who do, and plenty of women who are actually working to become one. What a radical concept. Not to mention another question I want to ask Fox: Who wants to marry a Plumber? Nah, that probably wouldn't do too well with ratings.

Hell, this program did so well that it will be featured during sweeps. So now a new slew of contestants can perpetuate the myth that all women are gold-diggers, that men can objectify women if they can pay the price, and that a lasting marriage is about diamonds and a strong prenuptial agreement. God bless America.

Las Vegas, the "Wedding Capital of the World," and the only city in the good ol' U.S. of A with legalized prostitution, has found a solution to the whole whore/Madonna complex: a prostitute you can take home to your mother.

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