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### Movie Review: 'Concussion' combines a sense of style with sex

**Amid a home renovation and high-priced prostitution, Robin Weigert's exploration of identity infuses film with mystery.**

By Sheri Linden

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Stacie Passon's assured first feature is a stylish affair. Home decorating is the chief means advertisement of self-expression for the stay-at-home mom at the center of "Concussion" — until she combines her fixer-upper flair with the unexpected emotional rewards of high-end sex work.

Beneath the Restoration Hardware surface is a keenly observed update on the suburban-emptiness milieu, a midlife lesbian variation on Luis Buñuel's "Belle de Jour," and a riveting performance by Robin Weigert.

She plays Abby, a 42-year-old living in tony New Jersey suburbia with her lawyer wife and their two young kids. Bored and sexually neglected by self-described overachiever Kate (Julie Fain Lawrence, quite good), Abby kick-starts her life after suffering a concussion in a playground accident.

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The trauma triggers something: In headlong fashion, she's back at work outside the home, buying a Manhattan loft to renovate and seeking sexual experiences outside the marriage. Turned on by the city and egged on by her contractor (Johnathan Tchaikovsky), she becomes Eleanor, a high-priced prostitute entertaining female clients in the work-in-progress apartment.

Like Catherine Deneuve's character in "Belle de Jour," Abby isn't in it for the money. Her work as Eleanor frees something in her and connects her with a power she didn't know she had. Writer-director Passon uses a series of tastefully explicit encounters with clients — some less telling than others — to examine aspects of her protagonist's personality: maternal, adventurous, take-charge.

Abby/Eleanor's unorthodox insistence on meeting the women for coffee before their first session makes clear that, even though she never knows their names, it's never just business for her. Still, she's unprepared for the feelings that arise when the woman at the cafe table turns out to be someone from her neighborhood (Maggie Siff, commanding). It's one of several developments blurring the surgical split that Abby has carefully maintained, threatening her sense of order and control.

From the spinning classes to the small talk about probiotics and the competitive conspicuous consumption, "Concussion" offers an incisive look at a particular kind of affluence. It bores in on the illusion of choice that keeps middle-aged disenchantment at arm's length.

But it is Weigert's performance that gives the film its mystery and charge. Playing seriously with identity, she draws the viewer ever closer. The way she never reveals everything is electrifying.

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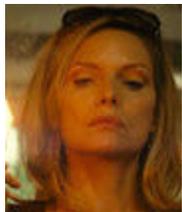
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'Concussion'

**Rating:** R for strong sexual content and some language

**Running time:** 1 hour, 37 minutes

**Playing:** Sundance Sunset Cinema, Los Angeles. Also on VOD.

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