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female sex work as deviance

Ronald Weitzer

Sex work (in this case, involving female workers) refers to sexual services or performances provided in return for material compensation. Examples include pornography, prostitution, stripping, and telephone sex. The most common forms of sex work involve female workers and male customers – which reflects larger, traditional gender relations between men and women. Objectification of women is taken to the extreme in sex work, where the workers are valued almost exclusively for sexual purposes. The existence of commercial sex also provides men with an avenue for reaffirming their masculinity, by satisfying their “need” for sexual stimulation and fantasy or their desire for a certain type of sex with a certain type of woman. The gendered character of the sex industry is also evident in its power structure: most managers are men who exercise control over female workers and reap much of the profit. In general, power is largely concentrated in the hands of pimps, traffickers, and those who run brothels, strip clubs, and companies that produce and distribute.

Many people view sex work as deviant behavior. The opinion polls presented in Table 1 reveal that the majority of Americans see both prostitution and pornography as immoral;

three-quarters believe that we need “stricter laws” to control pornography; and a substantial number want prostitution to remain illegal, strip clubs and massage parlors closed, and pornographic magazines/videos banned.

Over the past three decades some cities and suburbs have indeed banned or restricted massage parlors, strip clubs, and X-rated video stores. During the Reagan administration the Justice Department launched a massive campaign against distributors of adult pornography, prosecuting them for obscenity in conservative areas of the country (“obscenity” is determined by local “community standards” as determined by a jury). The campaign was successful in putting a significant number of distributors out of business. Under President Clinton the Justice Department shifted its attention away from adult pornography and intensified enforcement against child pornography (Weitzer 2000: 11–12). Prostitution is illegal throughout the US, with the exception of rural counties in Nevada, where legal brothels have existed since 1971.

Americans are less tolerant of the sex industry than citizens in several other western societies. Certain types of prostitution, for example, are legal or tolerated in some European nations (e.g., the Netherlands, Germany), and opinion polls indicate that a majority of the population in Britain, Canada, France, and Portugal favor legalizing prostitution (Weitzer 2000: 166).

Some types of sex work are more heavily stigmatized than others. As Table 1 shows, stripping is less widely condemned than work

Table 1 Public opinion on sex work

	% Agreeing
Pornography leads to a “breakdown of morals”	62
Internet porn is a “major cause of the decline in moral values” in US	62
Looking at pornographic magazines is morally wrong	58
Pornography “degrades women because it portrays them as sex objects”	72
Need “stricter laws” to control pornography	77
Telephone-sex numbers should be illegal	76
Strip clubs should be illegal	46
Morally wrong for a “man to spend an evening with a prostitute”	61
Prostitution should be illegal	70
Media should publish names and photos of men convicted of soliciting prostitutes	50
Close massage parlors and porn shops that “might permit casual sex”	70

Sources: Opinion polls of Americans conducted between 1977 and 1996 (Weitzer 2000).

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es and Kings: Reflec- l Boundaries. In: Nes- Desire: *A Femme-Butch*

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that involves direct sexual contact (prostitution, pornography). In general, sex workers are more stigmatized than their customers. This is because, first, the former engage in disreputable activity more regularly, whereas the customers typically participate occasionally and, second, a cultural double standard exists, whereby the sexual behavior of female sex workers is more circumscribed than the sexual behavior of their male clients. One reason for this disparity is that female sex workers break gender norms for women – by being sexually aggressive and promiscuous – whereas male customers' behavior is consistent with traditional male sexual socialization, which puts a premium on sexual titillation and valorizes sexual conquest as evidence of masculinity. Many men are willing to pay for sexual titillation in the form of pornography, exotic dancing, and Internet and telephone sex, and a minority has had contact with a prostitute. One-third of American men report that they have watched an X-rated video in the past year, 11 percent have been to a strip club in the past year, and 18 percent admit to having paid for sex at some time in their lives (Weitzer 2000: 1–2).

Because they are stigmatized, female sex workers typically attempt to deflect the stigma. They compartmentalize or separate their deviant work persona from their “real identity”; conceal their work from family and friends; describe their work in neutral or professional terms (“dancer” or “entertainer” instead of “stripper”; “actress” instead of “porn star”); and they may see themselves as performing a useful service (keeping marriages intact, engaging in sex therapy, providing emotional support to customers).

There are some major differences between street prostitution and indoor sex work (escorts, call girls, strippers, telephone sex workers, workers in brothels and massage parlors). First, street prostitutes are more heavily stigmatized than indoor workers. Some popular cultural depictions romanticize call girls while denigrating women who work the streets. Second, risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases varies between street and indoor workers. HIV infection rates vary markedly among street prostitutes (with the highest incidence among street workers who inject drugs or smoke crack cocaine), but HIV infection is rare among call

girls and other indoor workers. Third, indoor workers, and especially call girls and escorts, generally exercise more control over working conditions, express greater job satisfaction, and have higher self-esteem than do street workers (Weitzer 2005). Fourth, street prostitutes are much more likely to be victimized. Street workers are more vulnerable to being assaulted, robbed, and raped by customers, pimps, and other men, and some have been kidnapped and killed. Indoor workers are much less vulnerable to such victimization, as several comparative studies show (Weitzer 2005). There is one important exception: women and girls who are recruited by force or fraud and trafficked to work in indoor venues (brothels, massage parlors, etc.) in another country (Kempadoo 2005). Such individuals are victimized from the very outset, and they differ dramatically from other types of indoor workers who make a conscious choice to enter the trade and have more control over their working conditions.

In sum, workers in different sectors of the sex trade have different kinds of work experiences – that is, varying degrees of stigma, victimization, exploitation, and freedom. The type of sex work makes a significant difference, and grand generalizations about “sex work” should be avoided.

Traditionally, the authorities in the US and elsewhere paid fairly little attention to customers involved in the purchase of illegal sex services or products. Until recently the criminal justice system targeted workers almost exclusively, all but ignoring the customers of prostitutes (or “johns”). Laws in the US and other societies continue to punish patronizing less severely than prostitution, and in most jurisdictions arrests of prostitutes far exceed those of customers. Customers who are prosecuted and convicted typically receive lower fines and are less likely to receive custodial sentences than prostitutes. This, despite the fact that arrested johns are much less likely to recidivate than arrested prostitutes. Only recently have the authorities in some cities begun to arrest customers in substantial numbers, but this is exceptional. But a substantial number of Americans want customers sanctioned: in a representative poll conducted in 1995 for *Newsweek*, half the population favored

workers. Third, indoor call girls and escorts, have more control over working conditions, greater job satisfaction, and higher self-esteem than do street prostitutes. Fourth, street prostitutes are more likely to be victimized. Street prostitutes are vulnerable to being raped by customers, and some have been sexually abused. Indoor workers are much less likely to be victimized, as several studies show (Weitzer 2005). One notable exception: women who are recruited by force or fraud to work in indoor venues (brothels, etc.) in another country (Weitzer 2005). Such individuals are at very high risk, and they are often not a conscious choice to enter the industry and have little control over their

working conditions in different sectors of the industry. There are different kinds of work experiences, degrees of stigma, vicarious trauma, and freedom. The type of work varies significantly, and there is a clear difference, and a clear distinction, between "sex work" should

be distinguished from other activities in the US and elsewhere. Little attention to customer choice and purchase of illegal sex work until recently the criminally targeted workers almost always bring the customers of the industry. Laws in the US and elsewhere to punish patronizing prostitution, and in most countries prostitutes far exceed the number of customers who are prosecuted. Customers who are prosecuted receive lower rates of custody and are much less likely to be victimized. Only in some cities are there substantial numbers of customers in substantial numbers. But a substantial number of customers sanctioned by a poll conducted in the population favored

a policy of displaying in the media the names and photos of men convicted of soliciting a prostitute (see also Table 1). The one area where law enforcement has intensified the most is against those who possess child pornography. This development is a fairly recent trend in the social control of persons involved in sexual exploitation of minors.

Customers have attracted far less research than sex workers, but some recent studies do focus on the clients. Many johns are middle aged, middle class, and married, but we are only beginning to understand their motivations, attitudes, and behavior patterns. A few studies suggest that customers patronize prostitutes for the following reasons: they desire certain types of sexual experiences (e.g., oral sex); they desire sex with a person with a certain image (e.g., sexy, raunchy, etc.) or with specific physical attributes (e.g., racial, transgender); they find this illicit and risky conduct thrilling; they wish to avoid the obligations or emotional attachment involved in a conventional relationship; they have difficulty finding someone for a conventional relationship (Jordan 1997; Morito 2000).

In the largest study yet conducted, 43 percent of customers reported that they "want a different kind of sex than my regular partner" provides; 47 percent said that they were "excited by the idea of approaching a prostitute"; 33 percent said they did not have the time for a conventional relationship; and 30 percent said they did not want the responsibilities of a conventional relationship (Morito 2000). Men who patronize call girls or escorts are often looking for companionship and emotional support, in addition to sex. Lever and Dolnick's (2000) comparison of call girls and street prostitutes in Los Angeles found that customers expected and received much more emotional support from the call girls, and Prince (1986) found that 89 percent of call girls in California and 74 percent of Nevada's brothel workers believed that "the average customer wants affection or love as well as sex" – the view of only one-third of streetwalkers.

Some other studies examine customers of legal sectors of the sex industry, such as men who watch pornography, who call telephone sex lines, and who visit strip clubs. Flowers (1998) found that some telephone sex callers

want to fulfill ordinary sexual scenarios while others fantasized about incest, rape, pedophilia, bestiality, and mutilation. (Some phone sex operators refuse to take part in these fantasies and even try to curb some of the more extreme interests of the caller.) Customers of strip clubs, as Frank (2002) found, seek not only sexual stimulation and fantasy, but also want the company of attractive women. They enjoy talking, flirting, and sharing details of their lives with the women, and regular customers try to become friends with the dancers. Frank's book is the only study to focus on the customers rather than the strippers.

A largely unexplored area is that of female customers of male prostitutes – a small but important fraction of the market. Some women tourists in the Caribbean and other vacation spots buy sex from young male prostitutes, whom they meet on the beaches and at clubs. Taylor's (2001) study of 75 female tourists in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic who reported that they had had sexual encounters with local men found that 60 percent of the women had paid the men with money, gifts, and/or meals. There are some basic similarities between female sex tourism and male sex tourism (e.g., economic inequality between buyer and seller), as well as some differences (e.g., female sex tourists rarely assault or rob male prostitutes).

The sex industry has grown in the past two decades and has spread into new markets. This trend began with the creation of video recorders, followed by the advent of pornography on cable television, the rise of telephone sex operations, the growth of escort agencies, and the opportunities afforded by the Internet. The Internet offers unprecedented access to every kind of pornography imaginable, and also facilitates cyber exchanges, information sharing, and subsequent face-to-face encounters between clients and strippers, escorts, and other female sex workers. Furthermore, Internet message boards and chat rooms allow customers and others to discuss personal experiences with providers and share more general opinions of the sex industry. Participants discuss where to locate certain kinds of workers or a massage parlor; what to expect in terms of prices and services; "reviews" of a specific worker's appearance and behavior; and warnings on

recent law enforcement activity in a particular city. The sites also provide unique insight into customer beliefs, expectations, justifications, and behavioral norms. Review of these sites confirms that many customers are looking for more than sex; they place a premium on the provider being friendly, conversational, kissing, cuddling, and providing what they call a "girlfriend experience" with a semblance of romance and intimacy (Weitzer 2005). Many of the cyber exchanges discuss appropriate and inappropriate client behavior toward sex workers, and errant individuals are chided for violating this emergent code of ethics. This normative order is a byproduct of discourse on Internet sites, something that did not exist previously.

Despite the proliferation of commercial sex over the past two decades, sex workers and their customers continue to be seen by many Americans as involved in disreputable, deviant behavior. In other words, it would be premature to say that any part of the sex industry has become "mainstream." Both the workers and their clients remain stigmatized.

SEE ALSO: Gender, Deviance and; Pornography and Erotica; Prostitution; Sex Tourism; Sexual Deviance

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femininities/ masculinities

Amy Lind

Femininities and masculinities are acquired social identities: as individuals become socialized they develop a gender identity, an understanding of what it means to be a "man" or a "woman" (Laurie et al. 1999). How individuals develop an understanding of their gender identity, including whether or not they fit into these prescribed gender roles, depends upon the context within which they are socialized and how they view themselves in relation to societal gender norms. Class, racial, ethnic, and national factors play heavily into how individuals construct their gender identities and how they are perceived externally (hooks 2004). Gender identities are often naturalized; that is, they rely on a notion of biological difference, "so that [natural] femininity [in a white, European, middle-class context] encompasses, for example, motherhood, being nurturing, a desire for pretty clothes and the exhibition of emotions" (Laurie et al. 1999: 3). "Natural" masculinity, in contrast, may encompass fatherhood, acting "tough," a desire for sports and competition, and hiding emotions (Connell

1997; Thompson 2000). These constructions of gender are often based on stereotypes that fall into binary, normative femininities and masculinities. Many sociologists have argued that individuals fit within these categories, as such, masculinity and femininity are recognized as social constructs that are changing, and historically differentiated (Connell 1997; Laurie et al. 1999).

Feminist scholars have argued that the social construction of gender is in the context of gender inequality (Lorber 1994). Early feminist scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir argued that women in western societies were socialized differently than to any essential male gender, as evidenced by the fact that "One is not born a woman." Many feminist scholars in Saxon and European countries have argued that social construction of gender is an explanation for the difference in being, acting, and feeling between men and women for their related gender roles (Lorber 1993). Some feminist scholars have argued that the social construction of gender is a way to explain why women's "feminization of production" and "feminization of labor," garment work, and family (Folbre 1994) were primarily composed of women's subordination where scholars would argue that aggression or power was emphasized. Femininities such that who did not fit into these roles were either marginalized or through the norm (Halberstam 1998).

Particularly in areas of research that have helped shift the masculinities: (1) emerged primarily and (2) queer studies