

Digital Desire: Commercial, Moral, And Political Economies Of Sex Work And The Internet

By

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the relationships among changing public attitudes toward sexuality, the rise of the Internet as a site of commercial sex production and consumption, and public opinion toward and media portrayals of sex workers. In light of increased cultural acceptance of changing sexual practices and identities, I ask, has there been increased acceptance of commercial sex work and sex workers as measured in public opinion, sex workers' experiences, popular films, and news media portrayals? In order to answer this question, I reviewed and interacted with more than 100 sex work bloggers on Tumblr.com, and conducted interviews with 36 sex workers, to determine the effect of the Internet on their work and their experience of acceptance or stigmatization in their personal and professional lives; attended two commercial sex industry conferences to observe the impact of the Internet on different aspects of the industry; conducted content analysis of the top 50 films annually from 1990-2013 to examine changes in the depictions of sex workers from the beginning of the Digital Age to the present; and analyzed 353 English-language newspaper articles on prostitution and sex work during the period October 21, 2012-December 5, 2012 to determine how sex work was portrayed in the news – as criminal or commercial activity. I found that sex work and sex workers remain deeply stigmatized in American society. This is despite sex worker activism and increased availability of pornography and other commercial sex products. I conclude that the persistent stigmatization of the commercial sex industry and those who work within it results from occupational structures within the commercial sex industry, continued criminalization of sex work, the entertainment industry's negative depiction of sex workers, and news media reports of sex workers as criminals, especially the conflation of "sex trafficking" and sex work.

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Dedicated to sex workers and their allies.

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## Introduction: Changes in U.S. Sexuality and Sex Work

Accounts of sexuality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century agree one of the most remarkable changes in nationwide cultural attitudes towards sexuality has been increased acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans, queer, and intersex identities (LGBTQI).<sup>1</sup> Nationwide 2015 opinion polls on same-sex marriage show 60% of respondents favored legalization (McCarthy 2015). The LGBTQI acronym reflects a radical expansion of the longstanding gay/straight binary. During the last 50 years, researchers have documented dramatic increases in acceptance rates of divorce, cohabitation, and childbearing outside marriage (Pleck 2012, Yodanis 2005, Bock 2000). Researchers also have reported relaxing public attitudes towards the consumption of pornography (especially online), strip clubs, and pole dancing (Price 2008, Trautner 2005, Barton 2002, Frank 2002, Wood 2000, Brooks 1997). This scholarship parallels an increase in non-academic memoirs, magazine articles, and movies that more casually depict stripping and exotic dance. Increased public acceptance of diverse sexual orientations can be understood, in part, as a result of gay rights organizational activism and lobbying. More tolerant attitudes towards exotic dance more likely reflect a trend in popular culture, than organized campaigning, and are part of a larger landscape of increased acceptance of variation in sexual identities, practices, and consumption.

### What is sex work?

Of the seven major areas of sexual social life in which researchers find increased tolerance, acceptance, or participation (LGBTQI identities, divorce, cohabitation, childrearing outside of marriage, pornography, pole dancing, and stripping) three are part of the nationwide commercial sex industry<sup>2</sup> (pornography, pole dancing, and stripping), part of the larger set of sexual commerce known as "sex work." I define sex work as sexual activity or provocation for

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersexed.

<sup>2</sup> The commercial sex industry has also been termed the erotic labor market (Social Science Research Center 2014).

commercial gain. Concurrent to the relaxation of attitudes toward sexual identities and practices, there has been an expansion in the types of commercial sex work. This umbrella definition of sex work refers to the following fourteen trades: cam play for pay, escorting, fetish modeling, nude modeling, nude dancing, phone sex, pornographic acting, power play for pay, sensual message, sex surrogacy, street prostitution, stripping, sugaring, and writing erotica. Cam-play-for-pay also known as camming is the act of operating a webcam, often from home, and selling time on the webcam for private sex shows. Escorting is the act of selling time for sexual acts indoors, and can be in-call (at the escort's place of business) or out-call, at the client's choice of location (Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2005). Fetish modeling is the act of selling photos of oneself in fetish gear or activities, such as leather, bondage, age play, etc. Nude modeling involves selling photos of oneself in sexually suggestive poses and sexual acts, such as in adult magazines, and on the Internet (Ray 2007). Nude dancing occurs at peepshows and strip clubs where one or more naked women dance in a sexually suggestive manner for a paying live audience. Phone sex involves selling time at a telephone number for sexually suggestive conversation. Pornographic acting is performing sexual acts usually recorded for sale, sometimes in the context of a film with plot, sometimes without, and sometimes live on a stage (Vannier et al. 2014). Power-play-for-pay is the act of dominating or submitting to a client in a sexual manner (Lindeman 2012). Sensual massage usually occurs in a massage parlor and involves somewhat similar services to a therapeutic massage, but with the inclusion of sexual acts. Sex surrogacy is a form of therapy involving sexual acts with a paying client who has special needs due to impairment of some kind. Street prostitution is the act of selling time for sexual acts in a public location, such as a street corner or parking lot (Rosen and Venkatesh 2008). Stripping is the act of dancing and undressing in a sexually suggestive manner for a paying live audience (Brooks 1997). Sugaring involves the sale of sexual acts in exchange for gifts, and/or money to a limited clientele, sometimes only one client, known as a sugar daddy or sugar mommy. Writing erotica is the practice of crafting stories with the intent to provoke a

sexual response from a paying clientele, often via a publication or website. Those who exchange sex for money have variously been labeled call girls, escorts, hookers, “ho’s,” prostitutes, and whores. Each of these terms connotes certain times and places through the long history of this kind of exchange. For the purposes of this dissertation I limit the variance in terminology to simply: escorting to refer to indoor exchanges of sex for money, and street prostitution to refer to the exchange of sex for money in a public location.

### The Internet Sexual Revolution

Most of the above-catalogued sex trades are well-established and long-standing (e.g., street prostitution or sugaring, in an earlier era, “being kept”) (Clement 2006, Long 2005, Best 1998, Chauncey 1995, Peiss 1986). Other trades are so new that they don’t really seem to register in the culturally familiar repertoire of sex work, for example, phone sex and cam-play-for-pay (Brents et al. 2009, Ray 2007). Some have legitimacy conferred by incorporation in other industries, e.g., writing erotica within the publishing industry or sex surrogacy within clinical psychology. Some have been granted leniency through legal battles, which successfully argued the sexual performances of actors were an exercise in free speech (Edelman 2009, Wu and McCaghy 1993).

Just as researchers have linked the sexual revolution to technological gains in the 1960s (i.e., advances in contraception and the birth control pill), the expansion of commercial sexual practices in the last two decades can be traced to another technological revolution – the rise of the Internet and the dawning of the Digital Age. The Digital Age is the period of increased use and dependence on digital, specifically Internet and World Wide Web technology (also referred to by scholars as the Information Age, see Alberts and Papp 1997).

This dissertation research is motivated by researchers’ recognition of the increased influence of digital technology in everyday social life and the expansion of the production and consumption of commercial sex trades, much of which is online. In the chapters that follow, I ask the following questions: What is the effect of the Internet on sex work and the sex industry?

What effect, if any has the Internet-driven sexual revolution had on attitudes toward sex workers—in films and news accounts?

Chapter 1 of this dissertation presents a short summary of the historical context for sex work in the United States. Chapter 2 focuses in on the 20-year and counting relationship (1990 - 2013) between the Digital Age and the sex industry, with data on Internet websites that serve a variety of functions for sex workers, including advertising, community participation, skill-building, health and welfare protection, and sales. In Chapter 3 I provide findings from in-depth interviews with current and former sex workers to understand their about perceptions of their work, the lived experience of sex work stigma, and the changing relationship between sex work and the Internet. In Chapter 4 I analyze popular culture representations of sex work in top grossing films annually from 1990 - 2013, documenting consistency in stereotypes and types of representations throughout the Digital Age. In Chapter 5 I provide prostitution arrest statistics, and analyze news media representations of sex work, the sex industry, and the degree to which sex workers continued or ceased to be viewed as stigmatized and/or criminal activities. In the Conclusion I discuss the need for a reconsideration of the criminalization of sex work and its effects on the sex workforce. I also analyze the social forces benefitting from slow or no change in treatment and portrayals of sex work and the sex industry. Lastly, I suggest some avenues for this marginalized population to attain social change.

## Sex Work and Public Opinion

So much of the research into sex work ultimately grapples with whether or not prostitution should be legal. This is because the effects of incarceration on the life course and for society in the United States are known to be largely negative (Schnittker et al. 2015, Pager and Western 2012, Pettit 2012), and since prostitution is illegal in the vast majority of the United States, since the different trades within sex work are interconnected, and since as my research will show many sex workers work within more than one industry trade, analysis of the population of sex workers is affected by the effects of criminalization on certain types of the work.

Here is what we know about public opinion and legalizing prostitution. The last systematic, nationwide poll was completed in 1995 by the Social Science Research Center and it asked whether respondents thought prostitution should be legal. 19% of respondents were pro legal prostitution; 81% were con. Men were more likely to be in favor of legalization than women, single people were more likely to be in favor than married, middle-aged people were more likely to be in favor than any other age group, and those with a college degree or higher education were more likely to be pro legalizing prostitution than those with some college, high school graduates or less than a high school education. A separate poll by Louis Harris Associates, fielded in 1990 and also employing a nationwide sample, found 23% of respondents felt engaging in prostitution should be left to the individual, 33% found it should be allowed but regulated by law, 44% felt it should be totally forbidden by law, and under 1% were not sure (procon.org 2013). What we know about public opinion and legalizing prostitution is that the research is becoming dated, and no new social science initiatives have been published to update these numbers.

My research is specifically focused on the influence of the Internet – a technology that has grown dramatically since the 1990s after the last nationwide opinion poll dealing with prostitution was published. Since researchers cannot rely on opinion polls to track changes in public opinion of sex work in the 21st century Digital Age, we must develop other ways of

accounting for trends in social perceptions of sex workers. My dissertation uses three strategies. I ask sex workers how they think their work is perceived (Chapters 2 and 3). I examine how their work is portrayed in fictionalized representations (Chapter 4). Finally I analyze portrayals of sex work and workers in the news media, prostitution arrest rates, and sex workers narratives about law enforcement (Chapter 5). None of these methods is as direct as an opinion poll. These methods do, however, shed light on social perceptions of sex work through a particularly cultural lens. Digital technology, the effects of which are the focus of this dissertation, is affecting nearly all U.S. residents in a multitude of ways. Since I perceive this society's adoption of digital technology to be a cultural phenomenon, I am also drawn to cultural forms of measurement about sex work, the sex industry, and stigma.

I take a feminist empirical<sup>3</sup> approach to research methods, which is to say that I prioritized the perspective of those who were not in positions of power first as I formulated my research plan. In the case of this dissertation this philosophy has meant setting up the research question from the perspective of workers, sexual minorities, and women, and following a research strategy that was empirical: it began with a question, I collected data, and those data formed the basis of my conclusions. While there are certainly many empirical questions to consider concerning the Internet and the commercial sex industry, I leave those premised on the perspective of corporate executives, critics, and consumers to researchers other than myself.

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<sup>3</sup> Thank you Dr. Hannah Britton for lending me this turn of phrase.

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## **Chapter 1: Constructing Deviance: A History of Sexual and Digital Revolutions**

I began my dissertation research by accounting for historical social forces contextualizing the research questions: what is the Internet's effect on sex work, and the sex industry? How has sex work stigma been affected, if at all, in the Digital Age? I first sought to understand which social movements in U.S. history have had direct relationships with the research questions. Since for this project I have defined sex work as the commercial exchange of sex or sexual provocation for money, I have examined the project from the perspective that the work involves being sexually available and likely also detached from the process of reproduction. The construction of meaning around a sexually available woman has been impacted by historical movements such as the white slave crusades of the Prohibition Era so I began by exploring historical research about prostitution in the United States from 1880 to 1920 and activism that led to current prohibitions against prostitution. If commercial sexual exchange depends on the detachment of sexuality from reproduction, I theorized the advent of the birth control pill in the 1950s was also an important historical milestone affecting my dissertation research questions. As a feminist scholar, and because many (though certainly not all) sex workers are women, I recognize too the response from the women's movement to myths and ideas about the birth control pill are of fundamental importance to this research. Following a historical description of prostitution in the United States, and the birth control pill as a reproductive technology, in this chapter I discuss the response of the U.S. Women's Movement. I also discuss society's ongoing adoption of digital technology, specifically the advent of the Internet, as well as changes in Internet usage over time. In this chapter you will read about these historical events and social movements, which contextualize the findings of my dissertation research.

### **Social Movements and The "White Slave Crusades" 1880 - 1930**

Sociologists evaluate present change, in this dissertation change due to the relationship between the Digital Age and sex work, based on its uniqueness to the time period through

historical and cross-cultural comparison. A phenomenon can be considered completely unique and likely correlated with other variables of the present moment if there was no earlier time period of difference, or if there is no other culture experiencing it. There have been prior periods of legal prostitution in the United States, and past legality circa 1890 to 1930 will be explained in this section. The other type of comparison we commonly turn to is cross-cultural. Again with the case of prostitution there are International locations (New Zealand) and even counties within the United States at present where the most criminalized forms of sex work are legal. If the Internet's affect on sex work and the sex industry is unique in its ability to encourage sexual permissiveness, then we should find there are no other cultures and there has been no period in U.S. history with the same degree of permissiveness.

In the case of historical comparisons, at least three occurrences in U.S. history indicate prior periods of sexual permissiveness sharing similarities with, and in some ways greater liberty than the present period: the unregulated practice of “treating” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, regulation off and on through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries in the state of Nevada (Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2009), and regulation of “notorious behavior” prior to and between 1870 and the 1900s in cities across the U.S. “Treating” was a somewhat popular U.S. practice in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in which beautiful, manicured, and socially fun women would spend time in urban clubs and drinking houses in order to meet men that would “treat” them to dinner and the night out, or other consumable goods like clothing, in exchange for sexual acts. The practice was common in New York City from the turn of the Century through as late as 1945, though it became less so during the 1930’s (Clement 2006, Peiss 1986). For the contemporary audience it may be difficult to comprehend, but this practice was desirable for the women because it kept them fashionable and independent from their families, it gave them entrée into the evening leisure scene in the city, and perhaps most importantly permitted the women to maintain respectability in spite of the fact that they engaged in commercial sex.

Male commercial sex was also somewhat common in New York City and possibly other locations around the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Multiple scholars have documented the fluidity of human sexuality and desire by arguing that for many years it was common practice for some men to have both male and female lovers (Katz 2007, Chauncey 1995). So long as a man was the top in the arrangement, he continued to perceive of himself as straight, or perhaps more accurately normal. Like the case of “treating” described above, this was primarily an urban phenomenon where men looking to be picked up by other men could be found in city parks, near the seashore, and in nightclubs. This began to change in the 1930’s and 1940’s when the concept of heterosexuality was essentially invented, that is to say the sexual norm became defined as male/female sex, and all other types of sex came to be viewed as non-normative (Katz 2007, Chauncey 1995). Prior to that cultural shift however, it was not uncommon for men to “treat” both males and females (Chauncey 1995). Male commercial sex in urban areas was not uncommon in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In contrast, in rural areas and mining towns characteristic of the Western Frontier from the mid-1850’s to the early 1900’s open prostitution was a documented profession, so much so that some Nevada women listed it as their occupation during the 1910 U.S. Census (Brents, Jackson, Hausbeck 2009). From the 1860’s - 1880’s and again in the 1910’s – 1930’s in mining towns like Virginia City, NV, Reno, NV, Goldfield, NV, Deadwood, South Dakota, Leadville, CO, etc. the town or city hub was the saloon. The saloon served a variety of purposes: those that might be expected, such as hosting gambling, providing alcoholic beverages, and harboring prostitutes, as well as many others such as post office and hotel (Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2009). In fact, prostitution was so common in the state of Nevada during its early years in the union that it became firmly embedded in the Nevada state identity. This frontier state was where people could go for gambling, alcohol, and prostitution. Prostitution was disallowed for only the brief period of 1940 to 1960 in the state and it has been legal in some Nevada counties at all other times through the present day. It could be argued Nevada fulfills

both comparisons for establishing uniqueness of present-day permissiveness since it has a historical record of regulated commercial sexuality and serves as a kind of cross-cultural comparison for many regions in the United States.

At the turn of the Century in the U.S. there was an urban/rural divide in the forms of commercial sexuality; in New York City a person could find an attractive other to “treat” in many popular social venues, while in the frontier towns women self-identified as prostitutes were available in multiple venues, most notably the local saloon. There was also a third form of commercial sex labor found in multiple U.S. urban areas, which may have been the most common and established as a social institution. Brothels were sometimes illegal (houses of notorious behavior) and other times legal, but in both cases they functioned as licensed forms of business in cities such as New Orleans, LA, St. Paul, MN, and St. Louis, MO. In the case of St. Paul, MN the regulation of brothels was informal in that they were illegal and monthly the municipalities would fine the madams (Petersen 2013). This arrangement persisted from 1865 to 1883 and essentially amounted to a form of licensing (Best 1998). In contrast, both St. Louis and New Orleans legalized brothels during the same time period. New Orleans maintained legal prostitution in the Storyville district from 1897-1917 (Long 2005). Commercial sex in the United States was not limited to liberal New York City or the wild frontier of Nevada, but present in the Midwest and South during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.

I see a great deal of commonality between the invention of heterosexuality in the U.S. and the restriction of commercial sexuality during and after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Katz's (2007) work *The Invention of Heterosexuality* identifies many social forces in effect from the 1850’s to the 1950’s that constructed the popular belief that people are either heterosexual or homosexual. To the contrary, the majority of scientific evidence about human sexuality reveals diversity far too great to be contained by the hetero/homo binary (Weeks 2009). During this time period, “Bourgeois concerns about morality, religious virtue, appropriate gender, and nationalism led to new ways of regulating sexuality in the market,” (Brents, Jackson, and

Hausbeck 2009: 44). Progressive laws restricting same sex behaviors passed as did laws restricting commercial sexuality. Donovan has documented the multi-faceted work of activism from 1900 to 1920 that campaigned against "white slavery." He writes, "In the years leading up to World War I, over thirty cities launched vice investigations and forty-four states passed laws to stop coercive prostitution. At the federal level, Congress passed the Mann act, or the "White Slave Traffic Act," in 1910, which criminalized the transfer of women across state lines for "immoral purposes,"" (Donovan 2006: 1). One can see in the construction of this federal law the assumption that women engaged in "immoral purposes" were perceived to be at risk of other victimizations, such as being relocated without their consent. Today all 51 states prohibit prostitution and assess penalties for prostitutes, customers, pimps, and brothel owners (procon.org 2016). This history foreshadows the present moment in the U.S. encompassing both acceptance of LGBTQI subjectivities and stigma towards commercial sex.

#### Social Movements and the Sexual Revolution 1960 - 1990

The sexual revolution in the United States can be seen as a loosely organized social movement, or at minimum a multi-faceted, multi-year historical event (Risman and Schwartz 2002). Signs that a sexual revolution has occurred since the mid 20th Century are many. Today it is widely accepted that social opprobrium directed at people cohabiting before marriage, single parents, divorce, and homosexuality has decreased (Gray et al. 2015, Amato 2010). There also seems to be increased acceptance of the use of sex toys, oral sex, and masturbation, though prevalence does not necessarily mean decreased difficulty for people in discussing such behaviors (Satinsky and Jozkowski 2015, Halpern et al. 2000). Wide-ranging and pervasive changes in sexual attitudes, practices, and relationships in the United States have been well-documented (Rubin 2011, Bronstein 2011). The birth control pill, which came available in the United States in the late 1950s had great potential to cause social change. Giddens (1993) argued the technology of the birth control pill permitted women to control their likelihood of reproduction. This innovation worked in concert with increased emphasis towards individualism,

the rise of urban environments, and women's increased participation in the workforce, to give women more control over their own sexuality. Sexually active women experienced an increase in personal autonomy because of the birth control pill (Giddens 1993). Research shows that from the 1960s until the AIDS crisis of the 1980s many heterosexual couples relied only on the pill for contraception, permitting males in those relationships to forgo the use of condoms if the couple was unconcerned about disease transmission (Piccinino and Mosher 1998). A technological innovation (the birth control pill) encouraged this change in society. At present U.S. social relations are experiencing the effects of a different technological innovation, the Internet, also described as revolutionary (Giedd 2012). The digital revolution, like the sexual revolution, has altered so much of everyday life.

Four interconnected historical changes circa 1960 have become part of our sense of the world today. Though not viewed equivalently by all parties, these are women's increased entry into the labor force, disproportionate representation in the service industry (pink collar and care work jobs), increased sexual autonomy leading to changing rates of mating and sexual practices, and the market's increased commodification of domestic labor, including sexuality. In this section I consider these four factors, and the role of the women's movement in shaping the interacting variables of the Internet, sex work, the sex industry, and stigma. I describe both the history of the sexual revolution and, in the following section, the history of the digital revolution in the United States. I argue that for my dissertation research question change in communications technology and the Digital Age can be considered a fifth historical shift with contextual importance for understanding the effect of the Internet on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma.

Women's increased entry into the labor force is clear in the U.S. Census Data. In 1948 31.3% of women in the U.S. were employed in the civilian labor force. In 1960 that number had increased a bit: only 35.5% of women in the U.S. were employed civilians. By 2013 53.2% of women in the U.S. aged 16 and older were employed in the civilian labor force. Reliable birth

control most likely has helped women who are in the labor force to manage their ability to stay employed. We can think about this question by looking at the percent of women that returned to work after the birth of their first child. Laughlin (2011: 3) has stated, "During the past 40 years, the way families approach work and child rearing has dramatically changed. In the 1970s, the common expectation that women would leave work upon becoming pregnant began to change. Another change during the 1970s was an increase in the proportion of families with a second income." Birth control allowed women to manage reproduction so that if a dual-income family structure was needed, child birth could be fit into years when it worked best with a woman's career (Cherlin 1992). The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 also helped by making it illegal to discriminate against female employees on the basis of pregnancy or childbirth (Laughlin 2011).

Economically and politically the United States underwent a period from the 1970's through the present of increased market autonomy parallel to the increase in female sexual autonomy. The era of neoliberalism (1970-present) has been characterized by decreased regulation of markets, increases in the part-time workforce, and increased women in the workforce relative to the 1940s through 1960s. Ehrenreich (2011, 2004) documented the increase in neoliberal policies effect on women's labor. She argued many of the jobs women have taken as they moved into the workforce from the 1970s to the present have been in the service industry, the more feminized work relative to manufacturing or management. These kinds of labor include commercial food prep and serving (73% female), secretarial (96% female), childcare (98% female), cleaning (85% female), as well as sex (Carnevale et al. 2011). Many service industry jobs in effect replicate the comforts of home for a price, and a low one at that: their annual mean wages are \$19,110 (food prep and serving), \$38,750 (secretarial), \$32,040 (childcare), and \$22,500 (cleaning)<sup>4</sup> (BLS 2014). Research on workers in food preparation and food service has shown female-identified workers who played up their

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<sup>4</sup> Sex work is not measured in federal occupational employment statistics.

femininity reported improved wages (which are partially based on customer gratuity) relative to workers who did not (Hall 1993). These types of service industries cater to that busy head of the household who can't make it home in time, or who is too tired to engage these experiences when he/she arrives. Commercialization of the domestic sphere is one of many reasons the era of U.S. neoliberalism is described as increasingly differentiated and specialized. Specialization and urbanization interact with commercialization, decreased regulation of markets, increased availability of part-time jobs, and higher numbers of women in the workforce. Women in the workforce are doing some of neoliberalism's differentiated, specialized work, and some use female sexual autonomy in the process.

The United States feminist movement of the 1960's worked tirelessly to improve the conditions of women's lives in this decade. Well-organized and committed to the cause of gender equality, feminists protested the Vietnam war, rallied for women's right to choose contraception, abortion, or pregnancy in the event of conception, fought state-by-state to pass the (ultimately unsuccessful) Equal Rights Amendment and end gender-based employment discrimination, and supported women's appointments to the U.S. congress. Throughout a campaign of many successes, U.S. feminists in the 1960's developed a shared awareness that their lives were negatively affected by the patriarchy, a system of government led by males. Indeed during this decade for several years there was not one female member in the 437 seats of the U.S. House of Representatives, the vast majority of private businesses, as well as many households in the United States were male-headed, and though women had won the right to vote in 1920, 40 years later there still had not yet been a female president. Recognizing the pervasive power of men in the 1960's, it also became an issue of concern that many men took unfair advantage of their relative social power. During this time many women began to feel the crime of rape, which is overwhelmingly committed by men against women (Planty et al. 2013), and other forms of sexual exploitation were emblematic of men's exploitation of women through their socially-bestowed power.



In this historical context, the birth control pill was not universally welcomed by all women. Many people reacted negatively towards the sexual revolution (MacKinnon 1997, Dworkin 1980, Morgan 1980). The argument that the sexual revolution was tied to increases in rape was persuasive in the 1970's. Well-respected feminist Brownmiller has written of that time:

As an organizer of two public events in 1971, the New York Radical Feminist Speak-Out on Rape, followed by a weekend conference on rape, I was both stunned and exhilarated by what I learned. A woman's account of what she had gone through was diametrically at odds with the era's common narratives of eager consent and false accusation (preface: 2013).

There was a growing awareness that men's entrenched establishment in social positions of power was tied to disinformation campaigns wherein women were portrayed as always full of desire, except when lying about their sexual exploitation. Feminists were concerned that all-male police forces were unlikely to prioritize the woman's account in claims of rape, and men would take advantage of this power arrangement by denying the claim, thus justice was an unlikely outcome. It seemed the sexual revolution promoted the ideology that women should primarily be valued for their sexual and reproductive attributes, rather than be understood as human beings who, like some men could be intelligent, ambitious, adept, business savvy, and capable of governance.

In addition to members of the women's movement, social and religious conservatives lamented the decline of the family and public morality (Schlafly 1982) and responded with a backlash to the birth control-led sexual revolution and increased women's sexual autonomy. The anti-abortion movement, also known as pro-life activism, has been populated by many conservatives who oppose all reproductive technologies, including the birth control pill (Zirakzadeh 2009). The choice of this movement to fight women's right to abortion was evidence of focus on a goal that would be divisive enough to drum up heated support and movement involvement (Munson 2002). Many conservatives recognized that opposing the birth control pill

was a less popular stance than opposing abortion, nonetheless pro-life movement members often viewed any kind of reproductive technology as interfering with their spiritual leader's plan (Joyce 2010). Religious and social conservative opposition to sexual autonomy was not restricted to fights against birth control and abortion, but also included opposition to alternative sexual orientations. Social movement scholars have documented the social conservative promotion of homophobic ideology (Fetner 2008). In sum, the social conservative response to the sexual revolution has been mostly a response of opposition. This opposition can be characterized as aligned against any form of sexuality that is not procreative, occurring in a monogamous relationship, and heterosexual.

Though social conservatism in the United States experienced increasing support during the 1980s, many people, including many feminists, turned away from this movement. Pro-sex feminism sought to take back the night and located some of women's agency within sexuality. Contributions from Queer Theory gave pro-sex feminism a theoretical foothold, as it was already amassing empirical evidence: "The new scholarship on sexual behavior has given sex a history and created a constructivist alternative to sexual essentialism," (Rubin 1984, pg. 146). When sexuality is viewed through a constructivist lens, feminists can construct equal power in their sexual encounters through conscious practice. Many pro-sex feminists argue a hierarchy of sexual practices is dangerous, and the exchange of sex for money should be tolerated similar to various other sexual practices (Chateauvert 2014, Nagle 1997, Pisani 2009). These pro-sex activists believe workers who claim they have chosen sex work as employment.

As an example of sex work agency, some sex workers have found ways of situational navigation around the climate of sex negativity and power imbalance. Like any other form of freelance work, sex workers discussions involve mutual support for firing clients: refusing appointments with clients who make the work too difficult. In another example of women's sexual agency, recent research found "when women are presented with proposers who are equivalent in terms of safety and sexual prowess they will be equally likely as men to engage in

casual sex,” (Conley 2010: 13). These examples support the situational nature of sexual encounters and counter both the essentialist theory that women's drive to engage in sex is ultimately for reproduction, and the radical feminist theory that all heterosexual sex is rape.

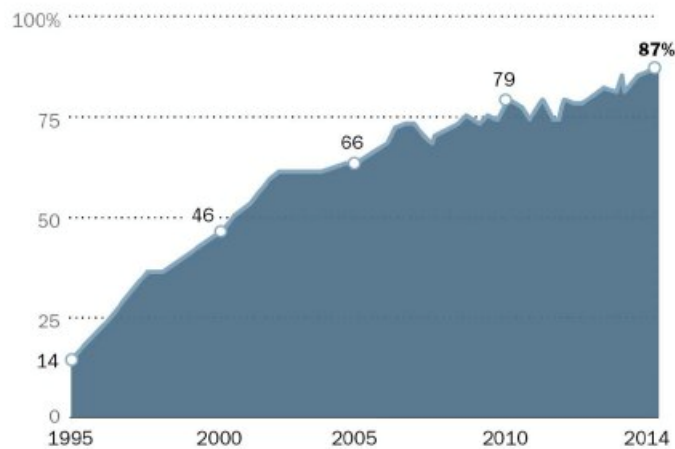
#### Another Revolution... of a Different Type

In 1991 a telecommunications innovation accessible through personal computing systems, and originally funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, was being used to trade written messages across vast distances in mere seconds, greatly improving upon the U.S. postal service rates of message transportation (Dicken 2015). In the initial years of the Internet's expansion from rarely to commonly used technology, most users only contributed messages and content in the format of text. By 1994 computer software programmers had designed several different programs to browse the content on the World Wide Web. One of these, NCSA Mosaic is credited as having popularized the web precisely because of its graphics capabilities. Photo files began appearing on the web. The war against pornographic images that had just a decade earlier been waged at newsstands and movie rental stores (public places) would soon adjust to new methods of transmission, such as online group websites and peer-to-peer file sharing.

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### Internet use, 1995-2014

*% of American adults who use the internet, over time*



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 1995-2014.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

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Figure 1: The Growth of U.S. Internet Usage Over Time.  
Source: Fox and Rainie 2014.

Figure 1 shows the spread of Internet-use practices in the U.S. population. By 1995 as technology to access the Internet had begun to improve still only about 14% of American adults used the Internet. While the technological capacity to display text and graphics together on a web page were present, few U.S. residents were using this communications medium as a replacement for news media, magazines, television, and DVD rentals.

Though in the mid to late 1990's a relatively small proportion of U.S. adults were using the Internet, already some of those people had uploaded sexually suggestive content. Even prior to 1990, when the Internet was primarily text-based and online social group spaces were bulletin board systems (BBS), sexually suggestive Internet graphics could be found in the form of a subgenre of American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) art: ASCII porn. ASCII art is a text-based art form, restricted to the text characters defined by the ASCII standard (Carlsson and Miller 2012). As early as 1993 Playboy Enterprises filed suit against Rusty-N-Edies, Inc. (a website) for copyright infringement in the form of hosting for public download

scanned images from Playboy magazine (Playboy Enterprises, et al. v. Hardenburgh, et al.). In light of these events from early Internet history Sociologists' claim that the introduction of Internet technology (web) into our lives has had a particular pernicious influence as a media gateway to increased consumption of pornography (Kimmel 2009, Dines 2011) seems almost commonsense.

As the anti-pornography and anti-sex negativity movements adapted to the Digital Revolution, they both took on characteristics reflective of this new communications medium. It is a medium that caters to niche interests, because it is a vast repository of information, and as such even the rarest hobbyists are able to find online people who share their views. Furthermore the Internet is data driven, so the ways that humans can be demographically categorized can also be exploited. Recent research on types of web content available to the average adult user indeed found that pornographic websites made up about 4% of the million most frequented websites are based on pornographic content (Ward 2013). Similar to a video rental store, most adult content on the web is cordoned off from the average visitor. One has to be searching in order to find it, as a general rule.

Other rules may apply. If an Internet-user regularly visits websites where the general population of site visitors patronize porn sites, those porn sites may purchase advertising space at non-porn sites to target that population. Second, many large web businesses circa 2014 engage in targeted advertising. Targeted advertising is a business marketing practice of individualizing advertisement content to the recipient based on demographic and web history data for that recipient. Targeted advertising algorithms are proprietary, but we do know they likely serve content based on the standard social science demographic variables like sex, age, race, class, religion, size, and disability (Duhigg 2012). Net neutrality groups have opposed targeted advertising, but their opposition has had limited effect thus far. For those arguing pornographic content has had an increased presence in their lives due to the Internet, targeted advertising plays an important role.

Setting aside the question of the user who unwittingly finds porn, there are many web users who seek pornographic web content. An economics publication states “As of June 2008, 36 percent of Internet users visit at least one adult website each month, according to comScore (2008) (based on comScore’s monitoring of web browsing by users who agree to install comScore’s tracking software),” (Edelman 2009). So what products are available? Pornographic web products are different than most sex industry goods and services available prior to the Digital Age because the delivery medium is the World Wide Web. These products all offer some kind of mediated sexuality. Like the adult magazine or home movie rental of earlier times, the interface between the consumer and the product is a media interface, in this case a website.

If we recall that the Internet is primarily a communications technology, we can also see that the structure of Internet products, particularly websites, affects the presentation and kinds of information available. Websites structured like a newspaper classified advertising section can be found hosting ads for erotic services (Castle and Lee 2008). Websites structured so that a large portion of the screen is devoted to hosting an image and relatively smaller portions host text, much like a magazine can be found offering nude and fetish photography, though the Internet engenders a feeling of increased privacy relative to shopping for a pornographic magazine at a store. A web user may be required to pay a subscription fee to access adult content.

Many sex workers have a few marketing photos, which they may utilize in advertisements across multiple trades in the industry. Some nude models put promotional photos of themselves on their Facebook page or other social media profile where they openly admit sex industry participation. Social media websites like these are structured to facilitate the presentation of a user’s identity, the exchange of information between users, and the mimicking of a real life social network. In these formats sex workers are more commonly found presenting a version of self that is a relatable human being, with interests and a job just like any other person. Another format of online mediated sexuality is web video content featuring some sex

workers, such as cam girls and pornographic actors. These can be gifs and films. Many of these are also subscription-based. Several web-savvy sex workers sell home-produced film content, over which they have all the directorial control and solely collect any profit.

Within their social group representative members of the technology industry can seem highly entrepreneurial. Many key stories that have emerged from this sector are about start-ups: Steve Wozniak working in his garage to build the first Apple I computer, Mark Zuckerberg programming the web application Facebook.com in his dorm room, Twitter co-founder Evan Williams leaving his undergraduate program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to join the tech industry after just one year. In reality, digital computing technology is a segment of the U.S. technology industry, characterized by large corporations with thousands, and tens of thousands of employees: 115,000 employees (Apple) (Yu 2015), 11,996 employees (Facebook) (Facebook.com 2016), and 3,900 employees (Twitter) (Bloomberg 2015). These are companies with HR departments, benefits packages that cover healthcare and vacation, and teams of law firms defending their brands. Partly because trends in individualistic ideology and neoliberal policy support were developing amongst U.S. voters as early as the 1970's, a full 30 years prior to the zenith of the Digital Age, it is inaccurate to hold the rise of the tech industry responsible for recent trends in highly individualistic voting patterns.

The independent entertainer model championed by youtube.com, a subsidiary of Google.com has a great deal of influence on the entertainment media landscape, which also relates to the effect of the Internet on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma. As of February 2016 youtube.com users (called youtubers) PewDiePie, HolaSoyGerman, and Smosh each have 42 million, 26 million, and 21 million subscribers to their channels where they release videos about video games, entertainment, and comedy (vidstatsx.com 2016). Youtube.com also provides the YouTube Spotlight, which streams content promoting Youtube.com's contributors. This entertainment model contrasts against the backdrop of major media conglomerates such as Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, News Corp, and Viacom that now own "half or more of

the broadcasting, newspaper, and film industries in the U.S.A." (Winseck 2008). Since Google.com is a major media conglomerate in its own right, the contrast functions in that Youtube.com users generating original content do not contract with YouTube.com in the way a television show on a major network is offered a contract by that network. Rather, YouTube.com cuts content-generators a monthly check based on the number of views they have received (cost per 1000 views), and the advertisers that bought online advertising space on their channel that month. Youtubers also accept direct advertising agreements from companies. In a marketplace where individual bloggers and video creators generate online content as a full time job, those people who operate independent sex work practices may find some parallels.

Considering again the opposition to sex work, one of the key arguments of sex work abolitionists is that sex work is the apex of Marxist alienation. The concern is that in the neoliberal environment, where businesses and industries are increasingly de-regulated, everything is a commodity (Gimenez 1991), even something as intimate as sex. The critique of this view is that it lacks historical perspective as sex work has been a documented practice since before the advent of capitalism. Nonetheless, the argument goes that in an environment of unfettered capitalism, Marxist alienation and commodity fetishism is intensified. The worker is so accustomed to giving part of her production value to the capitalist that she comes to see that practice as intrinsic to labor (Marx 1987: 180, 210). For this to be true about sex work in the Digital Age, there would need to be evidence among sex workers, for example all of my interviewees<sup>5</sup> would give a portion of their earnings to a capitalist who does not do sex work, but merely profits off the labor of the workers. Adequate proof of commodity fetishism would be evident if sex workers only had sex for profit, indicating advanced levels of commodity fetishism and disordered behavior. Yet neither case was evident within my interview data. Some research participants worked for companies that took a portion of their profits. Some did not. Here is one

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<sup>5</sup> For a full description of my interview methods and data, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.



of my interviewees discussing the way that she sells home-produced film content, not giving any part of her production value to anyone other than herself:

It takes a couple hours to do hair and make-up, a couple hours to do set-up, then I have to shoot the set. Videos are kind of quicker because you just do it in one take and then it's done. Everything else (she also sells nude photos to Gods Girls) is independent. I sell them (the videos) directly to the consumer (Interview Transcript 2014, Daya).

As to the test of advanced levels of commodity fetishism, all of my interviewees indicated having sex with primary partners that did not include commercial exchange. Much like any other type of work, sex workers receive money for sexual acts when they are working, and they engage in sex without commercial exchange when they're not working.

Some sex work abolitionists argue capitalism is not the problem inherent to sex work, rather patriarchy is the issue. It is within the system of patriarchy that women grow so accustomed to giving part of their sexual expression to men that they see that practice as intrinsic to life:

A theory of sexuality becomes feminist methodologically; meaning feminist in the post-Marxist sense, to the extent it treats sexuality as a construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender, (MacKinnon 1997: 159).

Independent sex workers I interviewed were not likely to assent to anything any man desired. Furthermore, only three of my interviewees had ever done sex work for a man with whom they also had a romantic relationship, and two of those women went on to sever relationships with the romantic partner or friend who had demanded or coerced them into engaging in sex work. Independent sex workers decide if their products match the desires of a potential buyer, and can refuse transactions that are not the right fit. Sex workers are like any other freelancer in this regard, including massage therapists, personal trainers, and aestheticians. Sex workers I spoke

with had set limits on what they would do and with whom. Here is a quote from a sex worker who started out as an independent contractor for a man who brokered clients seeking sensual massage, but after less than a year working that arrangement she left and formed her own independent practice of professional domination.

I'm totally comfortable in this environment. I think it's awesome that I get paid in cash and I have complete control over when I work and who I see and what I do with them. So I felt pretty empowered when I started, and I was like "Yeah, I am totally doing this of my own volition and it's the best job available for me for sure," (Interview Transcript 2014, Rebecca).

Rebecca's quote contrasts with the quote above from MacKinnon as Rebecca clearly states she sees her ability to exchange sexual acts for money as a construct of personal power, rather than male power.

Perhaps the most controversial issue linking sexuality and the Internet is "Internet porn." Internet porn includes a variety of products, such as nude photos, written erotica, videos, and webcam sites, and especially pornographic videos. Probably the most commonly cited web-centric sex industry service is "camming" (Ray 2007). Camming is short for webcamming, and there are several different sites where workers sign on to say they are available for appointments, like LiveJasmin.com, clipvia.com, extralunchmoney.com, clips4sale.com, niteflirt.com, or bundled in with sites that provide pre-recorded videos like pornhub.com or xhamster.com. Camming as a trade has most in common with nude dancing/working at a peepshow, or as one interviewee described it "a wack-shack"(Interview Transcripts 2014). While cam work online is similar to how dancers at a peepshow work in a booth separated from the customer, many nude dancers say the key difference is the nude dancer had much more control over whether or not the customer was attempting to record the interaction. When camming the worker may negotiate with clients that she will perform a sexual act or acts, with or without the aid of specific clothing and/or props for an agreed upon fee, or she may do a pre-planned show

of her own design (Ray 2007). The worker never experiences physical contact with the client, and can be geographically down the street or thousands of miles away, so long as both are logged into the same site and specific web location.

Far less interactive than webcam sites, but not without risk to the worker are sites that sell pornographic photography, videos, and/or written erotica. First, there is a calculated risk that some workers make, which others never do, of being documented as a sex worker. Internet porn sites using pictures of physical bodies, whether photographs, videos, or cam shows are documenting a workers' association with the industry. The truism once it's on the Internet it never disappears is particularly relevant for sex workers. Posing for nude or fetish photos, usually for a one-time fee, crosses a boundary into forever after regardless of life and career changes running the risk of being labeled as having worked in the sex industry. For this reason, there are many workers, including some in my interview pool, who consciously choose to never pose for photos, work in porn films, or perform cam shows. There are some strippers, escorts, street prostitutes, and phone sex workers who have posed for promotional photos or sold photos to a site that does not show penetration like [playboy.com](http://playboy.com) or [suicidegirls.com](http://suicidegirls.com) (Magnet 2007). Some sex workers find that working with a photo site, however, can serve as cross promotion for their work in other trades, though many employers discourage this kind of individual-level marketing (Escoffier 2008). There is often an employer hope that the dancer working at your club will be exclusively found in your location, ensuring that the club can profit exclusively off the interaction.

Americans today are particularly fascinated with the concept of sexting. Although this is a digitally-mediated communication on the practice of sexuality (Tolman 2012), there is not much evidence that sex workers engage in this practice. Sexting is rarely used in the sex industry unless as part of another form of sex work. For instance, in trades where the relationship between service provider and client most mimics the relationship between a girlfriend and boyfriend (like sugaring and escorting with regular clients), sexting can be a part of

the work. Those involved in sugaring may also find new sugar daddies (clients for this form of sex work) via websites such as ArrangementFinders.com; much like two people not planning to exchange money in their interaction would at a dating website. Sugaring, escorting with regular clients, and street prostitution are three forms of sex work that are both likely included in survey respondents who claim to have had sex for pay in the past year. In contrast to sugar babies, strippers tended to be divided in their use of mobile phones and online profiles for their clients. Some said they texted with their customers, though not so much sexting as rather to let the customer know of an upcoming shift. Though, considering these types of notifications are invitations to view sexually provocative dancing, they perhaps border on actual sexting. More strippers in my interview pool said they did not exchange phone communications with their clients, and many did not even have an online profile where they were out about their work, preferring to keep all online presence completely separate from participation in stripping.

Some who study online commercial sex transactions argue female customers more commonly prefer written pornography (also known as erotica), while male customers prefer the visual forms of pornography (Ogas and Gaddam 2011). This is debatable: owners of female-targeted and feminist pornographic photos and videos claim they have plenty of customers and the fan base is growing (Naughty 2013; Comella 2013). There are also many fans of erotica, and thousands of websites market products to these people. Some sites, like literotica.com provide plot-driven erotica for free, but also sell visual pornography. Other sites (fanfiction.net, livejournal.com) have user groups dedicated to character-driven erotica incorporating characters from famous books, movies and television shows in pornographic scenarios. For the purposes of a brief introduction to the digital sexual revolution, written erotica is an important component of the market. Authors of marketed erotica are often overlooked in most considerations of sex work, but there is no doubt they create products engaged in sexual provocation for commercial gain, and they are further aligned with sex workers because their products are stigmatized in a

way that mainstream fiction is not. For these authors, the digital sexual revolution has been a boon: digital device use is a popular method of consumption of erotic fiction.

Some social scientists say one way the Internet has affected sex work is that it has helped street prostitution to move indoors (Cunningham and Kendall 2011). Academic research on Internet effects finds people seeking to fulfill niche interests, wanting anonymity, and desiring non-normative experiences congregate on the web (Jenkins 2006). The relationship between the Internet and pornography was early to develop, expansive in its reach, and continues unabated today. While pornography is one type of sex work and the sale of sex for money is another, they share many commonalities. One study found and analyzed content on 76 different websites offering sex work services (Castle and Lee 2008). The authors noted: “the lack of disclaimer (that no sexual services are provided) or safeguard (phone numbers that can be traced are listed on all but five of the websites) on the websites indicates a lack of concern with law enforcement,” (Castle and Lee 2008). This finding seems to indicate that many sex workers online are comfortable with civil disobedience. Sex work services arranged online prevent the need for streetwalking, which is inherently dangerous (Dalla 2010). So sex work that utilizes the Internet can be safer than otherwise. Researchers also claim there are observable differences between people engaged in street prostitution and sex workers who advertise online. “When you take the profile of Internet prostitutes versus street prostitutes, you find there’s more education, and that more work temporarily, then exit.... They also are significantly less likely to work for a pimp,” (Cunningham in Gilderman 2012). This quote indicates the Internet may aid in some degree of sorting, or stratifying by class and education characteristics. In these ways the Internet may present new opportunities for sex workers.

The extent of these claims is difficult to gauge when many in the population risk criminal repercussions for participating with research. Scholars in the UK link increased university student presence amongst those providing sexual services to changes in funding options in

higher education since the 1990s (Roberts et al. 2013). A scholar linking similar changes instead to the Digital Age in the U.S. has stated,

The Internet is fast democratizing the porn business. Women from all kinds of backgrounds – soccer moms, single mothers, college students – are filming themselves living out their own pornographic fantasies, and they are broadcasting these images to the world (Miller-Young 2012).

The Internet's impact on sex work industries may be both diversifying and democratizing. Perhaps the Internet provides a sense of control over sexual expression for some women, while research has shown that an increased sense of safety correlates with increased sexual participation (Conley 2010). The class stratification evident in some studies may dissipate over time as the digital divide in America continues to disappear. Some studies also claim the advertising of sex work is highly lucrative.

During the last 12 months, prostitution advertising in 23 U.S. cities generated at least \$36.7 million, the AIM Group estimated. More than two-thirds of that amount — \$26.7 million — was generated by Backpage (AIM Group 2012).

While this quote discusses advertising purchases on a classified advertising website in a sample of U.S. cities, it also gives an indication of the interaction between the Internet and sex work industries. Undeniably these quotes all put a positive spin on the effect of the Internet on sex work. Social science has documented how sex workers are getting off the streets, advertising openly, are being joined by others across the class spectrum, and are generating a great deal of money for some news outlets, such as the classified advertising websites.

While Internet technology may have made it easier to do many types of sex work, this does not necessarily indicate U.S. culture at large has adapted towards habits of greater acceptance. Research on attitudes toward sex work amongst college students found that as recently as 2012 the greatest predictor of accepting attitudes towards sex work was whether or not survey-takers knew someone who did sex work (Long et al. 2012). This finding is

inconsistent with the hypothesis that the Digital Age has led to widespread mainstreaming and acceptance of sex work. My research confirms most sex workers, in all trades do not perceive their work has undergone acceptance due to the Digital Age. Where I have encountered sex workers on the Internet they are using pseudonyms or hiding their faces, and calling on the community of fellow workers to help re-educate so-called "civilians" (non sex workers) in how to behave with civility.

Many questions remain in light of this history of U.S. 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century sexual revolutions. If the telecommunications industry and the sex industry have persisted over time, what is their relationship and inter-relationship today? How has the relationship between these two industries changed over time? What are the implications of the digitization of sex work for sex workers? Has sex work become easier for some workers and more difficult for others as the Internet has become a commonplace utility media in most Americans' lives? These topics are explored in Chapter 2, Overview of Interacting Industries, which analyzes the differences and commonalities between the 14 different occupations known as sex work.

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## Chapter 2: Overview of Interacting Industries: Technology and Sex Work

### Introduction

The United States commercial sex industry and its workers have adapted to the Digital Age in various ways. If we conceptualize the major innovations of the Digital Age as the World Wide Web and mobile phones, then for some sex workers the Digital Age, specifically the Internet, has made it easier to do the work. For some sex workers the work remains about the same. For others sex work has become more complicated and involved. Research in the past decade found domestic sex workers working legally reported job satisfaction parallel to other service industries, though they found some sex workers reported that neoliberal economic policies were bad for business (Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2009). Exotic dancer's personality characteristics were not found to be significantly different from non-dancers, though working in the industry was correlated with a more casual attitude towards sex (Pederson et al. 2015). Some International sex workers have enacted embodied change that is emblematic of shifts in global capital (Hoang 2014). All of these studies were based on in-depth interviews with or surveys of workers in the industry in the time period of high Internet adoption (79-87% adoption in the years 2010 – 2014) (Fox and Rainie 2014). Yet none of them focuses specifically on the relationship between the Internet and sex work.

As the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the effect of the Internet on sex work, and attitudes toward sex workers in the industry, in this chapter I examine the extent of the relationship between sex work and the Internet. I draw on data I collected attending two sex industry trade conferences, the 2014 Feminist Porn Conference and 2015 Adult Video News (AVN) Adult Entertainment Expo, and my interviews with 36 sex workers to show the variation within sex work occupations as well as the impact of the Internet on the work. I find the Digital Age has had a major effect on the commercial sex industry, specifically in the realms of advertising, fellowship, and skills acquisition. My analysis reveals very little evidence in support

of the idea that the Internet has increased profits for most sex workers, reduced the taboo of overt sexuality, or decreased the stigma of sex work.

The impact of the Internet on sex work can be best understood by examining each of the fourteen sex work trades individually: cam play for pay, escorting, fetish modeling, nude modeling, nude dancing, phone sex, pornographic acting, power play for pay, sensual massage, sex surrogacy, street prostitution, stripping, sugaring, and writing erotica. My intent in the research of this chapter was to consider the worker's perspective first, and the owner's, media producer's, or customer's after, as a practice of feminist empirics. My interviews, observations at worker trade shows and conferences, and review of websites reveal the Internet has affected sex work in several ways: 1) it is now easier to find and connect with others who do any specific kind of sex work, 2) new ways of advertising and selling the products and services of the commercial sex industry are now accessible, and 3) more information is readily available about how to do specific kinds of sex work.

My research confirms that every major communications technology, from papyrus scrolls to movies to the Internet and many more, has been used for the creation and dissemination of sexual content, usually within the earliest stages of that technology's adoption (Luxenburg and Klein 1984, Lee-Gonyea et al. 2009). For escorting and street prostitution, two of the oldest known exchanges of sex for money, throughout history we find references to whores and prostitutes in accounts from multiple different cultures in books, plays, movies, and other media formats (procon.org 2015). Communications technology changes often are linked to changes in the popularity of certain sex work practices. For example, research into the bordello system in Minneapolis, MN from the 1870s to the 1910s reported the waning of brothels occurred partially because "the new telephone technology facilitated "call girls," who were not tied to a specific location and the supervision and protection of a madam," (Petersen 2013: 11). The impact of the Internet on different forms of sex work can therefore be understood within a historical context of several older types of communications technologies and socio-cultural shifts.

## Methods for Collecting Qualitative Data from Fieldwork, Blogs, and Interviews

Knowing that I wanted to study sex workers, a population described as extremely difficult to access in the publications that have done so (Hoang 2011, Weitzer 2009, Escoffier 2007, Bernstein 2007, Brents et al. 2009) I began to seek out people identifying as sex workers online in Fall 2012. Prior research into the role of the Internet in society indicated many people utilize this communications medium to express and support non-normative identities. If I conceptualized the trade of sex for money as a non-normative practice, then it would follow that some engaging in this practice may be discussing it online. Indeed, I was able to identify at first just a few self-described sex work bloggers. Next, thanks to a brief conversation with a colleague, I found a large sex work community blog, which indicated there were at a minimum hundreds of sex workers online. The community blog had strict policies for maintaining contributors anonymity so it did not reveal any further individual sex workers except the former sex worker (FSW) running the blog. I observed and became active on one social media website with several of the initial sex work bloggers as well as the sex worker community blog. Over time I identified and kept up with reading the posts of more than 100 individual self-identified sex work bloggers.

I designed an interview instrument that addressed three different topics (Appendix C). First, I wanted to know from people in the industry what the work was like. These questions involved reporting what an average day at work was like, and how the interviewee got involved with the work. The next section of questions tried to gauge workers' perceptions of their work: whether or not they felt it was stigmatized, who they told about it, what they thought others thought about sex work. Lastly, I asked questions on the presence and impact of law enforcement on the industry. While the actual workers might have experienced the social control of their work in one manner, the powerful institutions of law might portray other patterns.

In January 2014 I began in earnest to seek interviews with sex workers to understand how people who practice sex work in all its forms experience and navigate others' reactions to

their work, in 14 sex trades. In order to obtain interviews I posted a Call for Participants (CFP) in the online community (Appendix D); by April 2015 I had completed 36 interviews. The high number of trades affected my recruitment strategy because I sought a breadth of representation of as many of the different types of sex work as possible. Most of the research participants worked in more than one trade. On average each worker had experience in three of the fourteen. While there is undoubtedly a hierarchical valuing of sex work in society, for example stripping is somewhat socially acceptable, while street prostitution is intolerable, from the vantage point of many of the workers this hierarchy was a useless social construction. In my reading of sex workers' commentary on the Internet, I saw many of them were critical of the hierarchy, which some labeled the "whorierarchy," or "ho-iarchy." I included one demographics question and one qualitative question on the interview instrument to explore the pervasiveness of the egalitarian sex work perspective.

The interviewees ranged in birth year from 1972 to 1994. They were mostly women, including one trans\*female, one person who identified as genderqueer, and one man. Twenty-eight interviewees self-identified their race/ethnicity status as White, two as Black, two as Asian, one as Native American, and three as mixed (Asian Indian, Half-white/Half-Iranian, and Latina/white) (Appendix A). Eleven self-identified their sexual orientation as bisexual, six as pansexual, eight as queer, one each as asexual, bi-curious, genderqueer, heteroflexible, heterosexual, lesbian, omnisexual, straight, straightish, and one said it depended on the day. The interviewees had worked or were currently working in the sex industry in 33 of the United States, plus Canada and Australia. Aggregating their responses 13 of 14 sex work trades are represented; the only trade that no interviewee claimed to have participated in was street prostitution.

In terms of online ethnography, while I was conducting interviews I maintained a presence online at the social media website where I posted the CFP. This enabled me to observe how community participants interacted and usually worked together. From October



2013 to October 2014 I followed approximately 100 bloggers, checking in usually weekly on what they had posted. Since a primary practice of membership in this online community is re-blogging (to post on one's own blog an item found on another's blog, conventionally with attribution given to the post's author, and the location where the post was found) I made it a habit of re-blogging things that were not politically-oriented (dealing with the power relations of work in the sex industry) or advertising, to my own blog. I felt that re-blogging advertising and politically-oriented posts would threaten my attempted objectivity.

### The Internet and Variation in Sex Work

The four of the fourteen sex work trades most consistently practiced and often criminalized in the United States are also some of the oldest forms of employment. At present most forms of escorting, sugaring, sensual massage, and street prostitution are illegal in most of the United States, with the exception of a few counties in Nevada (Brents et al. 2009). Few types of labor in the United States are illegal; as such the illegality of sex work may be a factor in why many people do not recognize it as work. A list of tasks that are performed in the labor of sex work includes: advertising one's services, beautifying and grooming one's body, meeting with clients, providing sexual services, receiving payment for services rendered, providing for one's own safety, gathering information about the work, and in the case of escorting, maintaining a schedule of client appointment bookings. It may be normative to downplay the work of beauty and grooming for those in professions who require it, but in light of Hakim's (2010) argument the maintenance of Erotic Capital involves attending to six or seven different personal factors, it can be seen as work indeed. In the Digital Age several of the escort job duties are now handled via the Internet, but a substantial portion of the work remains unchanged. Consistent criminalization of a trade did not correlate with reduced participation relative to other trades amongst the research participants.

Figure 1: Interviewee list by Sex Work Trade  
*Trades highlighted with a red border are illegal in most of the United States.*

| Camming | Escorting | Fetish Modeling | Nude Modeling | Nude Dancing | Phone Sex | Pornographic Acting |
|---------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Britney | Britney   | Elsabet         | Marline       | Frida        | Lurline   | Frida               |
| Lurline | Charmain  | Isabel          | Anica         | Halle        | Elsabet   | Trina               |
| Anica   | Elsabet   | Natasha         | Frida         | Una          | Giselle   | Halle               |
| Elsabet | Frida     | Frida           | Trina         |              |           | Una                 |
| Quinn   | Merilyn   | Zephyr          | Halle         |              |           | Daya                |
| Una     | Katherine | Farin           | Daya          |              |           | Elijah              |
| Violet  | Una       |                 | Linnea        |              |           | Farin               |
| Yasmin  | Xara      |                 |               |              |           | Heather             |
| Zephyr  | Yasmin    |                 |               |              |           |                     |
| Ava     | Elijah    |                 |               |              |           |                     |
| Bella   | Linnea    |                 |               |              |           |                     |
| Cailin  |           |                 |               |              |           |                     |
| Elijah  |           |                 |               |              |           |                     |
| Farin   |           |                 |               |              |           |                     |
| Iris    |           |                 |               |              |           |                     |

| Power Play | Sensual Massage | Sex Surrogacy | Street Prostitution | Stripping | Sugaring | Writing Erotica |
|------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| Elsabet    | Rebecca         | Linnea        |                     | Marline   | Lurline  | Britney         |
| Isabel     | Frida           |               |                     | Charmain  | Charmain | Giselle         |
| Frida      | Una             |               |                     | Deanne    | Elsabet  |                 |
| Natasha    | Farin           |               |                     | Grace     | Natasha  |                 |
| Piper      |                 |               |                     | Anica     | Westlyn  |                 |
| Rebecca    |                 |               |                     | Elsabet   | Yasmin   |                 |
| Katherine  |                 |               |                     | Isabel    |          |                 |
| Halle      |                 |               |                     | Natasha   |          |                 |
| Una        |                 |               |                     | Piper     |          |                 |
| Juliette   |                 |               |                     | Seraphine |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Violet    |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Yasmin    |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Zephyr    |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Ava       |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Cailin    |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Heather   |          |                 |
|            |                 |               |                     | Iris      |          |                 |

Figure 2: Digital Desire Interviewees by Sex Work Trade

A study of sex work is ultimately a study of occupation, so perhaps predictably the variables of work and education contradicted what most studies of sex work that focus tightly on one trade like "prostitution" seem to indicate (Dalla 2000, Potterat et al. 1998). Workers in the fourteen trades discussed in this chapter are perhaps uniquely likely relative other occupations to work in multiple trades within the industry (Escoffier 2007). Figure 2 demonstrates the overlapping experience levels of many of the sex workers I interviewed. On average one interviewee had worked in three trades. For example Elsabet, born in 1987 had worked as a

Dominatrix, Escort, Sugar Baby, Camgirl, Phone Sex Operator, Fetish Model, and Stripper. Nine of 36 workers I interviewed had worked in just one trade; the majority had worked in two or more. Though some workers, like Elsabet, Frida, Una, and Halle had worked in several sex trades, it should not be assumed that once a worker entered the sex industry they ceased work in so-called legitimate forms of employment. Research participants reported using sex work as a form of supplementary income while working as arcade game operators, writers, researchers, nurses, social workers, therapists, project coordinators, promotional models, restaurant hostesses, musicians, tutoring, entertainment, administrative assistance, and in retail. Several identified as students, including graduate students. Two stated they were Directors at non-profit organizations, one owned a small publishing company, and one was a single mother. In terms of educational attainment, 14 research participants said they had attended some college, 12 reported they had a Bachelor's degree, and 9 had a Master's degree.

Figure 2 also demonstrates the relative popularity of each of the trades represented by workers in my participant group. The two most popular trades for interviewees were stripping and camming, followed by escorting, and power-play-for-pay. The highest number of trades any one worker I interview had done was seven. Multiple workers reported attempting work in one trade (i.e. camming), finding it did not suit his/her skills, and trying a different trade (i.e. escorting). The high likelihood of a sex worker to have worked more than one trade is one reason I designed my study with a broad definition for the term sex work. Those studies that conceptualize sex work as purely escorting or street prostitution suffer from two drawbacks: they focus on one of the few jobs in the sex industry that is illegal, and they neglect evidence that work in this industry is often not only consensual, but also independent, and executed with a great deal of consideration and care.

### **Escorting**

Escorts and brothel employees I spoke with said they used websites such as backpage.com, erosguide.com, craigslist.com, and myredbook.com to post their availability for appointments

and as primary sources for advertising. Escorting is the act of selling time for sexual acts indoors, and can be in-call (at the escort's place of business) or out-call, at the client's choice of location (Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2005). Street prostitution is the act of selling time for sexual acts in a public location, such as a street corner or parking lot. I did not interview anyone who claimed to have participated in street prostitution, though some interviewees had exchanged sexual acts for pay in a client's car. Street prostitution carries negative connotations, and particularly the connotation that it's "survival sex work" such that I suspect few interviewees personally identified with the label. Amongst the escorts and brothel employees I interviewed, none mentioned using newspaper classifieds, which was the primary source of advertising prior to the Digital Age (Bernstein 2007). Other research has found the process for finding clients in street prostitution involves being on the street to signal one's availability to potential clients driving by (Venkatesh 2008, Bernstein 2007). Some sociological research, and my own review of advertisements on backpage.com reveals some street prostitutes have likely transitioned off the street and into escorting because of the available technology (Cunningham and Kendall 2011, Castle and Lee 2008). Street prostitutes are likely to have phones that can access the Internet (Fox and Rainie 2014). Posting at some of the websites where services are advertised is completely free, and the widespread availability of wireless connectivity in coffee shops and free computers at libraries enables a good deal of liberty in advertising off the street even for workers with little to no money, or without a phone.

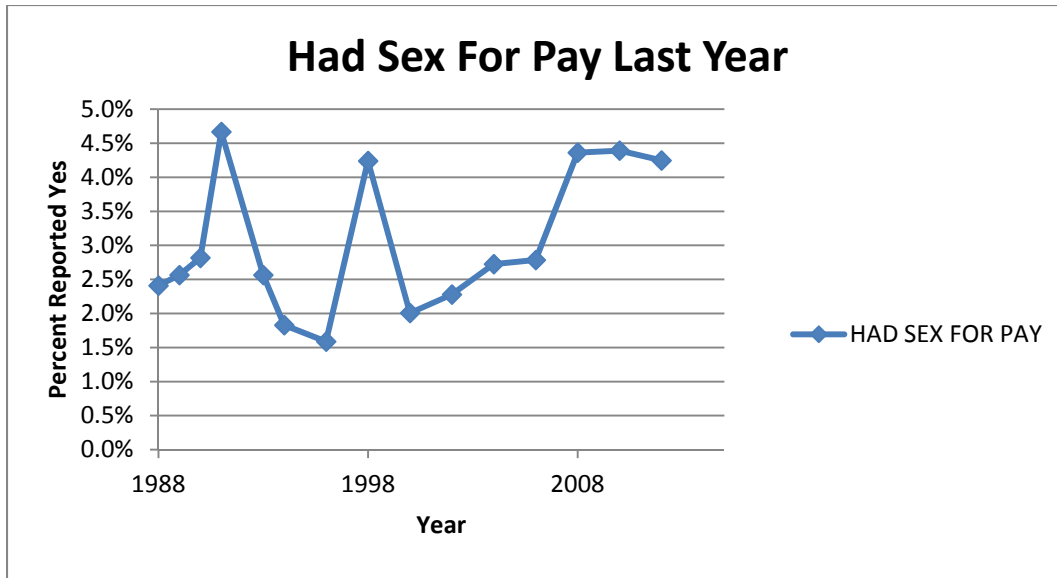


Figure 3: U.S. Residents Answering Yes to "Did you have sex for pay within the last year?"  
Annually 1987-2012  
Source: Smith et al. 2012. General Social Survey.

The data in Figure 2 indicates the General Social Survey found for 2012 approximately 4 in every hundred respondents claim to have had sex for pay in the last year. Since sex for pay is a job duty of an escort, and 4% is rather low, probably most people do not know about or understand how escorting works. This quote reveals a day in the life of an escort. Note that sex for pay is but one of many escort job duties; others include correspondence, travel, and scheduling. Note also the relatively small amount of digital technology involved in the key functions of the work of escorting:

In terms of escorting, alot of my job has to do with kind of administrative things that are boring like answering emails. Answering emails, responding to emails, sending emails to either gentlemen that have contacted me or other providers for references. I post on different forums, either advertisements or kind of social things. I get my name out there so people recognize me and hopefully think of booking. And phone calls sometimes: certain clients like to text me and I'll text them back. Occasionally I'll have to call a work place for references or a client

want to speak to me prior to meeting. So there's some of that. Otherwise there's a lot of traveling. I usually have to drive at least an hour to see a majority of my clients, (Charmaine, Interview Transcript 2014).

Digital technology is present in her statement when she refers to "email", "post on different forums," and "certain clients like to text me." Once contacted for an appointment, workers who escort usually request the prospective client's first and last name, as well as a phone number. Several use these three pieces of information to do a background check, either via search engine, background check service, and/or sometimes calling references if those were requested and provided. If everything with a new appointment checks out, then the worker will schedule an appointment and request the meeting location information. All workers I interviewed said they usually either go to the client's residence or hotel room for the appointment. Three said they have also infrequently rented a hotel room and tried to book as many appointments as possible while they have the reservation. Much of the provider-client communication happens by email and workers said they could usually book appointments within a day or two of when they had been contacted with a request.

The personal grooming that occurs prior to an appointment, the travel to an appointment, the services rendered, and the receipt of payment have been minimally affected by the Digital Age. One thing in these phases of the work that has changed for some is at least one worker said she texts a friend when she arrives at the appointment location, as she crosses the doorstep. This lets an outside contact know the appointment has begun and she should expect a confirmed complete text in approximately one hour. In summary, there is a possibility that the Digital Age has led to some who practice street prostitution transitioning out of the public eye. Confirmed effects of the Internet on the practice of escorting are changes to advertising the business, scheduling appointments, ensuring the safety of the work via search, background check, or ally support text, and maintaining client contacts.

## Sugaring

Sugaring has been affected by digital technology in ways similar to how escorting has been affected. Sugaring involves the sale of sexual acts for money or in exchange for gifts, with a limited clientele, sometimes only one client, known as a sugar daddy or sugar mommy. Service providers who sugar reported they found clients on websites like [seekingarrangement.com](http://seekingarrangement.com) and [sugarbaby4u.com](http://sugarbaby4u.com). Sugaring websites host client profiles and client advertisements in addition to service provider profiles. Clients will preview the available possible arrangements in their area or the area they plan to visit and then make offers. Sex workers who sugar reported the importance of being patient during the review of offers, since the important thing is to find a good fit, someone who has the right amount of money and who intends to use that money on a (hopefully) longstanding arrangement. Like escorting, much of the work involves checking email, replying to possible clients, and scheduling appointments, which usually take the form of going out to coffee or dinner.

The data in Figure 3 may also include some sugar babies, since having sex for pay is one of the job duties of a sugar baby. Once again, it seems unlikely that most people are aware of the work that goes into sugaring. One interviewee, Natasha described a day in the life on the job. Once again note the degree to which digital technology is used in the many facets of the work.

So as a sugar baby, a day-in-the-life is pretty boring... I just have one sugar daddy, and we're like very close. I've actually been seeing him for a year and a half probably. We generally see each other once a week. Maybe he texts me and says he saw something that reminded him of me, I'll text him back, and that could be it. On days that we see each other we do things that we like to do: we go out to this one restaurant a bunch, we sometimes do yoga, or go kayaking, sometimes just hang out in his apartment and read. I mean alot of times it's like what really would be boring to everyone else, but we do have sex, and there is

an exchange of money. But we don't necessarily have sex every time we see each other. It feels a lot more like a relationship except he doesn't know my real name (Natasha, Interview Transcript 2014).

Digital technology is present in her statement when she states "he texts me", and implicitly in the statement "he doesn't know my real name." Digital technology may improve Natasha's ability to hide her identity from the client, possibly just by strengthening her resolve to over time by observing through Internet fellowship that she is not alone. Self-described pseudonym-using sugar babies have dedicated online communities to discussing sugaring. Sugaring appointments are different from escorting in that the appointments tend to be longer, much like an actual non-paying date, the client's payment can be monetary, or in the form of expensive gifts like airline tickets, a shopping trip, or expensive lingerie, and the ideal format is a regular appointment, perhaps a couple times a month. A sugaring arrangement tends to mimic that of a significant other, hence the term in both sugaring and escorting of "girlfriend exchange" (GFE), so these clients also may expect the ability to text and email the service provider in a friendly way. Since the appointments tend to be longer in duration than a standard escort appointment, and they are often accompanied by text and email access with the service provider, the pay for sugaring is higher than for escorting. Digital technology has affected the practice of sugaring by improving the service provider's ability to search for clients, communicate with clients, scheduling, and information gathering about the work, going rates, ideas for how to manage clients, and about the client's status or occupation.

### **Sensual Massage and Power-Play-for Pay**

Two different trades, sensual massage and power-play-for-pay shared their own set of similarities. According to the interview transcripts, sensual massage usually occurred in a massage parlor and involved somewhat similar services to a therapeutic massage, but with the inclusion of sexual acts. Power-play-for-pay is the act of dominating or submitting to a client in a sexual manner. Multiple workers I spoke with had done both sensual massage and power-play-



for-pay, which provided useful comparisons of the two. Both trades often occurred at a sex worker's place of business. Sometimes the erotic service provider did the work in the style of freelancing, where he/she rented a space to meet clients. At other times the service provider worked at a place of business providing sensual massage or bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism (BDSM) (Lindemann 2012) with other independent contractors working shifts. Workers in this second category have pointed out the many similarities between working at a dungeon or a massage house and being an employee. The business owners may require the worker to clock in and clock out at certain times, the shop owners take a cut of each transaction between service provider and client, process the client payment, and expect the workers to provide additional services for the good of the business, such as laundry, making coffee, opening and closing the business, cleaning, and booking appointments. In spite of the similarities to employee status, the sex workers I spoke with who do or had done sensual massage and/or power-play-for-pay all said they were independent contractors. Two of the workers had transitioned away from working for business owners and had formed their own independent domination businesses.

Recalling Figure 2, ten of my 36 interviewees stated they had worked in the fields of power-play-for-pay, including professional fetish work, domination, switching, or submission. To my knowledge there are no demographic counts of those who have done professional domination in the United States. Unlike most occupations it is work that seems to be rare enough that accurate population accounts have not yet been obtained. Hence here one interviewee described a day in the life of power-play-for-pay:

I did more domme stuff. I also did some sub stuff. Peed in people's mouths. We had set schedules, so I would take the train to [the location], bike over to [the business], enter through the back door. There was like, you know you have a shift, unless you come in for like one booking. And then there was collective responsibilities like doing the wash and folding, cleaning the toys, and answering

the phones. But there was also freedom, it wasn't like a super... there was a kitchen, you know. There were rooms you could sleep in if you needed to take a nap. And you'd just stay there for the whole chunk of time. I would say on the best day that I'd ever done it, if I'd do three sessions I would probably walk away with almost \$200. That would be like three hours of work plus the remainder of the shift, which I can't remember now. I think it was like six hours. So that was my day there, (Piper, Interview Transcript 2014).

As in the prior quotes, we can also analyze this statement for the presence of digital technology in the work of pro domination. Piper indicated the work can be done completely devoid of digital technology. These storefronts are often nondescript and sometimes located in residential areas, as they were prior to the Digital Age. Workers arrive, hold their appointments, help out around the shop, and then leave, just as before. The key difference today is advertising often happens online. One worker I spoke with who did sensual massage at a massage shop said when she got into work she posted ads on Backpage.com that a masseuse is now available, or if she posted the day before she updated her old post to get it bumped up to the top of the webpage. Independent professional dominants, of which I spoke with seven, had similar advertising practices. They posted online when they were available to work and then waited for replies, though they were more likely to have their own freestanding website and in a couple of instances an account on the fetish social network Fetlife.com. Once potential clients started replying to the post or messaging the account, the erotic service provider negotiated where, when, and what type of work could be done. Some clients requested visits to their own homes. Others needed to go to a place of business, so the pro-domme would set up an appointment often at a local dungeon or in a studio rented out for the purpose of the work. The independent pro-dommes I interviewed said their communications leading up to an appointment with the client were a time to try and figure out what the potential client wanted during the appointment, and make sure he wasn't in law enforcement. For independent pro-dommes, the remainder of

the work that has been affected by the Digital Age is parallel to that of the escort, rather than to the sex worker who worked for a shop owner.

### **Nude Dancing and Stripping**

Two more forms of sex work shared several commonalities: nude dancing and stripping. Nude dancing occurred at peepshows and strip clubs, where one or more naked women danced in a sexually suggestive manner for a paying live audience. Stripping is the act of dancing and undressing in a sexually suggestive manner for a paying live audience. Strippers and nude dancers both most commonly worked in a public place of business, often owned by someone who did not dance. These establishments included gentlemen's clubs, strip clubs, video rental stores with peepshow booths, and peepshows with video booths. Workers at these establishments were almost always independent contractors, though several legal battles are being and have been fought over that employment status (Walters 2015, Gregorian 2014, Chateauvert 2014). I spoke with workers who started out clothed at the beginning of a shift and stripped on a main stage, workers who started out topless, and workers who danced completely nude. Fully nude dancers are standard at a peepshow, but they dance behind glass so there is no contact between the dancer and the client. Peepshows often serve no food or drink, but do have an attached video rental section and/or video booth section where a customer can watch porn. Peepshow business owners tend to install several videos in a video rental booth and then the customer pays into a machine in order to choose and view the video that is played. In some states and counties, strippers could dance nude and come into contact with clients, but at those establishments often only food and non-alcoholic beverages are sold. Portland, OR strip clubs were uniquely permissive in terms of fully nude dancers and alcoholic beverages.

Sex work at a club that is open to the public often engendered a unique type of fellowship amongst the workforce. Frequently the club had enough dancers that most of the knowledge acquisition necessary to do the job could be acquired at the club. In contrast, a highly isolated workforce characterized many other forms of sex work, so in those forms the

Internet served both the roles of fellowship, and skills acquisition that were not as necessary if one worked at a club with several other dancers. Furthermore most clubs (peepshows, strip clubs, toy stores with live performers) had some system in place to maintain the dancer's security. This could include bouncers, some of whom walked dancers to their cars when they went off shift, bartenders who provided watered-down pours at the dancer's request, or non-dancing staff that ejected customers who broke club rules. Club employees were also known for remarkable visual transformations from the performer on stage to the worker going off shift, and this transformation was acknowledged to be good safety precaution. Here an interviewee described the work of stripping:

I would shower in the morning and then eat something and bring a snack with my bag and stuff and then hang out until like one in the afternoon. I usually get mid-shift, it's the 2:00 PM. So I head out there, put on my make-up at the club. Get dressed and figure out what I want to play on my iPod... Then I'll have a three song set on the stage, and then the other girls will rotate. Customers tend to not come in until 4 in the afternoon, so I can just chill out with the dancers and the bartender until then. And I get to do yoga on the stage and stretch so I don't hurt myself later. But when customers start coming in I gotta put on my 'I'm adorable and I like talking to you' attitude. And sometimes they'll offer to buy me a drink and I'll be like "Oh hell yeah! I want a White Russian." And they're like "Oooh, you're cute." I make alot of my money on pole tricks and stage work.... At my favorite club I can say, "You don't touch at all because that's not allowed," (Anica, Interview Transcript 2014).

Similar to professional domination, stripping could be and at times was done almost completely devoid of digital technology. Anica described using her iPod for her music set list, but not to text with potential clients or update her social media profiles to say that she was going on shift.

In the early to mid-1990's it was speculated that easy access to information online would lead to the closure of some retail shops. This was before it was also widely acknowledged that what goes on the Internet stays on the Internet. Whether it is the client's desire to avoid leaving a data trail of involvement with the sex industry, or to have human contact rather than a computer-mediated sexually provocative experience, gentlemen's clubs and strip clubs have for the most part remained open in the Digital Age. Workers that I spoke with from these segments of the industry did report a flattening of wages of late, but this was at a time when the minimum wage in the United States had also flat-lined and the U.S. Median Household Income had only recently recovered from a slump in 2007-2011 to the 2012 median household income of around \$51,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Most workers in the United States were being asked to do more while being paid the same. Even as the majority of U.S. citizens accessed the Internet daily, customers still visited strip clubs and gentlemen's clubs.

Peepshows have fared a bit differently than strip clubs in the Digital Age. It is important to note that peepshows have for many years been less numerous than strip clubs in any given city. In San Francisco, Seattle, New York, and Las Vegas in the 1990's through 2014 my anecdotal experience is there was usually one peepshow relative to every 20 strip clubs. No formal data I could find clearly delineates the two and longitudinally counts the number of each. Most cities in America during this time did not have a peepshow at all. The business model has always involved an attached set of video rental booths, since Reuben Sturman invented the first peepshows in the 1960's (Rosen 2012). Perhaps as porn has undergone changes in the industry this has affected the perceived utility of a visit to a peepshow. Regardless, 2013 saw the closure of the Lusty Lady peepshow in San Francisco, known to many as the subject of the documentary film *Live Nude Girls Unite* (2000). The Lusty Lady was one of only a few unionized venues for nude dancers in the United States, and the former place of business of Carol Leigh (2004), Melissa Gira Grant (2014), and Siouxi Q (Whorecast.com). I visited a Las Vegas peep show in January 2015 and chatted with one of the video rental employees who recounted years

past when business to watch the girls in the peepshow was booming. The employee stated in the past few years the dancers were definitely struggling to make money. I watched a dancer walk back to go on shift, but I did not see any customers enter the part of the business to visit her booth while I was present at that store from 8:00 PM to 11:00 PM.

The Internet's effect on stripping has been to some degree to increase fellowship between workers across clubs, though no change was indicated regarding fellowship amongst dancers within a club. Multiple workers I interviewed discussed using the Internet to connect with other dancers they didn't otherwise know. Some workers also mentioned posting when they were going to have shifts at the strip club during the week on a social media account, which was a form of advertising, though much less extensively practiced than by sex workers in other trades. Table 1 therefore reflects the Internet's effect on stripping and nude dancing as increased capability for fellowship and skills acquisition across clubs, knowledge acquisition about practices in other clubs than the one of primary employment, and a new avenue for advertising that was not present prior to the Digital Age. I received no indication from any dancer I interviewed that the Internet had led to increased profits. There was evidence it may have negatively affected profits at some peepshows precipitating closure. One interviewee said she felt the Internet had led to decreases in worker safety, and some interviewees said it had become easier over time to tell people about their work as an erotic dancer. Other interviewees offered opposing information, indicating negative judgment from people they told about the work, or other indicators of persistent occupational stigma.

### **Pornographic Acting and Writing Erotica**

Two trades in the sex industry that have survived in the Digital Age are pornographic acting and writing erotica. Writing erotica is the practice of crafting stories with the intent to provoke a sexual response from a paying clientele, often via a publication or website. The first known occurrence of pornographic acting, defined as performing sexual acts usually recorded for sale, sometimes in the context of a film with plot, sometimes without, and sometimes live on

a stage for an audience (Vannier et al 2014), is thousands of years old. Naked or near-naked women were incorporated in the earliest motion-picture recordings even prior to 1900 when films were still developing beyond one shot, adding sound, and a continuous narrative. The first motion picture camera was invented in around 1890, and by 1899 Eugene Pirou had produced a 7-minute film entitled *Le Couchee de la Mariee* that included a striptease performed by Louise Willy (Abel 2005). Meanwhile sexually provocative content in works of fiction have also occurred since shortly after the invention of the printing press. An interesting question to ask ourselves here is if it is widely believed that U.S. women first had widespread access to birth control in the 1960's, why would there be media depictions of provocative female sexual behavior as early as the 1900's? Though oral contraceptives attained widespread use in the 1960's, historians have documented several other kinds of birth control available to U.S. consumers much earlier. Mick LaSalle (2000: 5) writes, "the availability of diaphragms, spermicidal jellies, and pessaries in the twenties resulted in real changes in sexual behavior." Houses of prostitution were popular in the United States even prior to that, so birth control, the video camera, and the printing press were three technologies in use by at least some people throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that affected sex work.

A landmark in the history of pornographic films was 1972 when *Behind the Green Door* was widely released and it seemed possible pornographic films would attain popularity parallel to the popularity held by the mainstream film industry. In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Miller v. California* effectively legalized pornography. Sadly, at no time in porn film's history have pornographic contents copyrights been obtained or defended with the consistency that has been carried out by the traditional film industry. Today online porn film piracy is rampant, facilitated by large, free websites like pornhub.com, and xhamster.com. Research has shown that Internet search engines including Google, Yahoo, and Bing have the ability to promote links to legal or illegal (pirated) content (Sivan 2014). Today these companies consistently promote links to illegal content in their search returns, particularly illegal porn. Piracy has negatively affected

porn's ability to sell. In spite of that moment in the 1970's, today pornographic films remain extremely distant from the type of appreciation and acclaim characteristic of mainstream film. Pornographic film stars may employ agents, they may have dedicated fans, and they do sex scenes, just as most mainstream film stars do, but that's where the similarities end. Most notably for the worker, still in 2016 it is rare to the point of being unheard of that a porn film star collects royalty on any of their work, unlike mainstream film stars, and there remains a huge gulf in respectability and career longevity between the two.

For further considerations of the work involved in pornographic acting, here an interviewee described a day in the life:

Generally, our day is similar to a nine-to-five job as far as the length of time you're at work, so I wake up and I go to work. I go into make-up. Then I'm sitting around for a little bit sometimes. Then start shooting the production of the scene or the movie, which consists of photos of myself. We call them pretty girls. It's just like modeling photos of me alone. Then you would do sex stills, which is sex photography. We would go through all the action. And after that we would shoot the actual scene, (Heather, Interview Transcript 2014).

Heather was an accomplished porn actress and current sex worker. She lived in California and told me she did not schedule her own gigs, rather she employed an agent to book all of her work. It would be a mistake however to think that the work ended after a day of shooting photos and scenes. She also noted,

There's interacting with other people in the industry, I guess schmoozing. I'm going to compare it to being in mainstream, where you want to keep your name out there. There's also social media, it's important that you have a presence there, so alot of the girls are on Twitter and Instagram, and making sure they're keeping up with that. I blog, so that's something else. I also do interviews outside



of work, radio, over the phone, in-person interviews, (Heather, Interview Transcript 2014).

The role of networking in the maintenance of fame should not be underestimated in the work of porn acting. As Heather's second quote illustrates, the reach of a porn scene is such that it can be consumed by local, domestic, and international audiences. Like an escort, the porn performer needs to maintain a media profile of her brand. Like a cam performer, her performances would be simultaneously consumed by many people. Particular to a porn actress, the recordings could and did sell again and again, which would be quite lucrative if porn performers were to collect royalties. Since they do not, the audience can enjoy a porn performer's work many times over, without any tangible benefit to the worker.

It appears written erotica has undergone a boom since the widespread adoption of Internet technology (Ward 2013, Jamison 2013). Many articles have discussed the ease with which someone can read a tawdry romance or a dirty story behind the confines of a non-descript Internet-enabled mobile phone or Amazon Nook (Ogas and Gaddam 2011). There is a widespread expectation that women are more commonly consumers of written erotica than men, but that is not substantiated by any formal data. Males and females may be enjoying the types of written erotica found on literotica.com, and furthermore all kinds of people are writing erotica.

Written erotica and porn experienced a similar threat of market saturation in the likelihood that Internet technology was making it easier for amateurs and those not trying to earn money with their film or written compositions to put something online for an audience. Sites like literotica.com allowed anyone to post, and they did not pay writers for their submissions. It was launched in 1998 and by 2008 had amassed 299,000 stories freely contributed by site users (Wikipedia.org 2015). Separate, but not fully distinct Internet fan fiction as one could find on fictionalalley.com and in the original draft of *50 Shades of Gray* was a highly popular form of written erotica written mostly by amateur authors (Jamison 2013). Amateur contributors to

filmed porn sites were also somewhat common and had been since the early days of Internet technology porn sites (Ray 2007). Exhibitionist desire has been facilitated by Internet technology and some sources argue this amateur content has threatened the profitability of pornographic film businesses (Fritz 2009, Gilderman 2012). Studies have documented the demand for amateur porn films, which are very commonly interpreted as "authentic" depictions of sex, increases as porn consumers age (Kimmel 2008). The sex industry, the porn film companies, strip clubs, peepshows, and nude magazines have long known this about human sexuality and thus have commonly sought to present porn that appears amateur, host amateur nights in strip clubs, and publish amateur written and photographed erotica submissions so as to sell to this specific market (Rosen 2012). Perhaps that is one factor that has ensured the survivability of pornographic acting and erotica writing in the information economy of the Digital Age. My interview and online ethnography data indicate the market for written erotica and pornographic films has increased in the case of the former and stayed relatively steady for the latter throughout the Internet age.

### **Fetish and Nude Modeling**

Prior to the Digital Age, the most common way to consume the products of fetish modeling and nude modeling, nude pictures, was to purchase a magazine. Fetish modeling is the act of selling photos of oneself in fetish gear or activities, such as leather, bondage, age play, etc. Nude modeling involves selling photos of oneself in sexually suggestive poses and sexual acts, such as in adult magazines, and on the Internet. Early nude magazine content appeared on the U.S. market in 1949 with the publication of *Stag* magazine (Rosen 2012). Since the advent of Internet technology, magazine photos scanned into digital files have appeared in chat rooms and in discussion boards (Ray 2007). Much like porn films, fetish and nude pictures have been pirated since their first known appearance on these types of websites. For a brief few years at the start of the Digital Age the primary format for the appearance of a nude woman online was ASCII porn, but ASCII porn was soon eclipsed by the appearance of

folders on discussion boards with digital files scanned of actual photos. One of the first Internet-related lawsuits was Playboy magazine's suit alleging trademark infringement against a website that had such a folder of scanned images (Playboy Enterprises, et al v. Hardenburgh, et al, Docket #1:93-cv-00546, Ray 2007). Nude and fetish photography for sale online made a strong comeback following this inauspicious start with the advent of several paid membership sites including Suicidegirls.com, Godsgirls.com, Burningangel.com and others.

The U.S. census has an occupational category for modeling. It is unclear how many people who claim to have done paid modeling did fetish or nude modeling, as the census does not separate the occupational category out in the manner perhaps of fashion, catalogue, promotional, fetish, and nude. As such, information about the work of fetish modeling is necessary before we analyze the occupation for how it has been affected by digital technology. Here is how an interviewee described the work of fetish modeling:

I was a touring bondage model. There was bondage modeling, there was fetish modeling. Bondage was like hardcore I'm dangling from my ankle in rope and making it look really good and then there was specifically S/M pain Slut modeling which usually meant you were marked up for several weeks, which I was also good at, but you had to minimize when that happened in your tour. Because even in bondage modeling they don't want you necessarily torn up for the next shoot. And then there was fetish modeling, which I've done a lot less of and it's more like latex, and heels, and I'm definitely not awesome at crazy high heels and being wonder-femme... I prefer the ropes to the corsets, (Halle, Interview Transcript 2014).

We find little mention in her description of using the Internet, but later in our interview Halle stated that in her work as a bondage and fetish model she primarily used the Internet for scheduling and communication, furthermore most of the photos she modeled for were sold to companies that posted them online, many of which were membership-based websites. Many

nude, bondage, and fetish models sell content to Internet sites, as mentioned, and some of these websites are social media sites, which encourage models to participate as community members. Membership photo websites in this way offer fellowship that selling erotic photos to magazines and newsletters prior to the Digital Age did not. Social media websites can enable communication with fans, which can be an avenue for the model to advertise his/her portfolio. Those I spoke with who had worked as nude, bondage and fetish models made no mention of the Internet leading to modeling skills acquisition, increased profits, increased safety, or decreased stigma. One note about skills acquisition: in modeling it is rare to find guidance for how to hold the body in a sexy pose. Modeling is one of the many types of work not commonly recognized as work. Like fashion models, many nude and fetish models learn modeling skills by imitating what they see in photos they like (Mears 2010). Though my interviewees did not mention the Internet as a location for gaining knowledge about how to model, since the Internet makes the collection and bookmarking of photos much easier than was possible when print publications were the primary photo medium the Internet has likely has increased the potential to gain knowledge about modeling. Perhaps interviewees did not mention this because modeling is not often thought of as a thing that involves skill, or perhaps because I did not ask enough follow-up questions about skills acquisition.

The consumer benefit of the paid membership website is some Internet users perceive content subscriptions to be safer ways of obtaining access to nude and fetish photography, as well as pornographic videos (Edelman 2009). Furthermore, many erotic photography sites are organized so as to be mutually beneficial for the model and the member (sex industry service provider and customer), even while they are able to frequently update with new, high-quality content. SuicideGirls.com (SG) for example has had thousands of models each independently working to set up their own photoshoots with either site-registered photographers or others, in a speculative business model. SG does not promise those who model for the photos they purchase that every set of photographs produced in a photoshoot and submitted to the website

will be purchased. This creates an environment of competition that keeps the bar rather high for the quality of sets submitted. If SG purchases a set of photos, both the model and the photographer make a flat fee. Members also pay a flat fee, a fraction of what one model makes selling one set. There are several times as many paying members as there are earning models. So the site stays well afloat and has been able to do so since 2001 (wikipedia.org 2015). Much like the girlie magazine of old, the pornographic photography website has retained a sizable customer base for the consumption of nude and fetish photography during the Digital Age.

### **Sex Surrogacy and Phone Sex**

Two innovations in the 1970's and 1980's indelibly altered the landscape of the sex industry as the trades sex surrogacy and phone sex first became widely known in these two decades. Sex surrogacy first came into practice as an offshoot of 1970's sexological research pioneered by Alfred Kinsey and continued by Masters and Johnson (Noonan 1984), while commercial phone sex began as an offshoot of the men's magazine industry in 1982 (Rosen 2012). Commercial phone sex involves selling time at a telephone number for sexually suggestive conversation. Sex surrogacy is a form of therapy involving sexual acts with a paying client who has special needs due to impairment of some kind. Sex surrogacy is rarely recognized as part of the U.S. sex industry. However, it fits within my definition of a commercial sex practice because clients with a therapeutic need for intervention in their sexual practices meet with a surrogate who provides the therapeutic intervention for a fee (Freckleton 2013). The intervention can and does include penetrative intercourse when deemed necessary by the practitioner. In the U.S. climate of sex negativity, the disavowal of a connection is likely a way for U.S. sex surrogates to protect their continued ability to do business. Phone sex operators have no such "legitimate" industry to look to for protection.

Phone sex has always been connected to technology. Rosen (2012) says in the early days of 900-numbers porn performers would earn extra money by visiting a magazine office and recording a greeting for those that called the number. Given that communications technology

has always been a part of the work of commercial phone sex, then will technology be evident in a worker's statement about a day in the life, or will technology be implicit in her explanation?

Here an interviewee described the work of being a phone sex operator:

So my focus is late at night, preferably 11 pm to sometimes 7 am. I'm awake and I sleep at really weird hours as a weird side effect of it. So usually I'll get up and do my day, drink my coffee, if my girlfriend's at work I will usually log in even if it's the daytime. If it's late at night then I log in, and I get set up with writing. Sometimes I'll chat with friends, but I'll say hey I'm logged in so I might get pulled away. Sometimes I'll watch TV and I just wait for the phone to ring. And it usually rings a fairly good amount, like a third of the time I'll be on the phone usually, on a good night. Sometimes more, sometimes I'm just busy back-to-back-to-back and after about four hours I'll be like, "I'm done," (Giselle, Interview Transcript 2014).

Technology was heavily involved in Giselle's account, from logging in when she was ready to work, to chatting online with friends while she was waiting for her first call, to logging her appointments as the shift goes on. Rosen has written that in 1982 when the magazine *High Society* ran the number to a phone sex operator, in the first few months the number received thousands of calls; so many that the line was flooded. "It would take 100 phone lines and 9,000 answering machines to handle the volume," (Rosen 2012). Today, commercial phone sex operators (PSOs) engage in a far more interactive performance. There are multiple different ways to work as a phone sex operator that range from owning your own line to working for one of the existing numbers. A caller must agree to a fee before they are connected with a PSO, and that service provider will engage with the caller in generally whatever fantasy role-play they desire.

When I attended the 2015 Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas, at least one large booth dedicated to a phone sex line was present alongside several other types of sex industry

service providers. The sound of a sultry voice, particularly if it is the voice of a pornographic actress with film credits, holds a special allure for many people, even in the Digital Age (AVN.com 2013, 2011). Phone sex operators (PSO's) I spoke with indicated there were few opportunities to become acquainted with other PSO's in the course of doing the actual work, so the Internet was a great boon for establishing fellowship between PSO's. Different phone sex companies have different structures, varying in the extent to which they cover the overhead of hosting the number, and a website advertising the available operators. For those companies that cover less of the marketing and advertisement, and for independent PSO's who maintain their own dedicated phone lines, the Internet has offered new routes for advertising. One PSO I interviewed stated she used the Internet to do all of her research about phone sex before she applied to work for a company. There was no indication in my interviews that the Internet led to direct increases in profit, better safety, or reduced stigma associated with being a PSO.

### **Camming**

In a sense, the introduction of the webcam to the sex industry was sure to follow along a path marrying media technologies to the sex industry that had previously included still cameras, motion picture cameras, telephones, and now computers. Cam-play-for-pay, more commonly known as camming, is the act of operating a webcam, often from home, and selling time on the webcam for private sex shows. The cam in camming is short for webcam, and as soon as the first webcams appeared on the computer retail market, innovative individuals were using them to broadcast their sexual acts (Ray 2007). Cam-play-for-pay is the solitary new sex industry trade, the 14th of 14, adding to the wide array of work already discussed in this text. While all other trades existed prior to and have had to adapt to the Digital Age, cam-play-for-pay was not feasible before the webcam and Internet connectivity. Today there are several companies, such as myfreecams.com and livejasmin.com, for which erotic service providers independently stream their cam content from a location of their choosing (often from home). Alternately many cam performers work alongside their fellow cam performers in a large space designated by the

company, usually a warehouse with several small cubicle-rooms. When a cam performer is ready to begin a shift working, they go live online by logging into the site, somewhat similar to how a porn performer shows up on set the day of filming, or a phone sex operator calls in to the service to say she's ready to take calls.

Camming is particularly technical and obscure in terms of how the worker collects his/her fee. Here an interviewee describes the work of camming:

I wake up, do whatever I feel like doing in my house. Whatever time I feel like working I will go into my bathroom. I'd do my make-up. Normally, to do it for camming, it takes about half an hour because you have to look flawless. After that I have two towels. I have one for my toys, because afterwards I don't want them going on the bed. So I have one for my toys, and I have one for when I squirt, and I hate that. So the thicker one is under me, and the thin one is under my toys. And basically if someone wants a private show they get a private show. If someone wants a VIP show, the VIP is only them. In VIP I have it set up, for either of the shows you can have someone call you. I only have that set up for VIP because it makes them go there more, it costs more. The calling doesn't cost. The VIP does. Because I think I have it set up for like maybe \$5/min. for private and then like \$8/min. for VIP. Then there's gold shows which you can get just like a whole bunch of people to pledge like 5 gold, which in the end you only get a \$1.75 of that, which sucks.

Once a cam performer logs in to their work website they can see customers who are also online to draw into an interaction. Oftentimes these initial forays for customers will be some type of game or raffle, where the performer sets a monetary goal she is trying to make and site members are encouraged to donate credits or tokens worth money toward that goal in exchange for a chance to win some desired outcome. Most cam sites have a public space where cam performers and members mingle and then private spaces where cam performers



can agree to go with users for a negotiated amount that will be exchanged for a sexual performance. Cam performances happen in both public spaces that can be accessed for free and private spaces that can be accessed only by paying. Once an erotic service provider sees she is earning tips she exchanges that for the service she has offered, regardless of whether many viewers are watching or one. Different workers I spoke with said they pursued different types of strategies with regards to how much time and effort they spent in the public area relative to how much time and for what amounts they went to more private areas. It was generally agreed that some amount of time in the public space was good for cam performers because that was where they could interact with a large membership base, and drum up interest for a higher-priced, custom show. Some cam performers said some days they could make all their money in the public area, without doing any custom/single-user shows.

In the boundary between camming and pornographic acting, the Internet has specifically enabled the creation of a cohort of erotic service providers, both workers and producers, known as clipmakers. At least one clipmaker I interviewed said her work had more in common with porn acting than camming, and if forced to choose between the two for a self definition she would chose porn actress. Clipmakers engaged in a great deal of online self promotion across a variety of social media platforms, specifically Tumblr and Twitter. Their self-promotion and product advertising strategies tended to be the most advanced amongst sex workers online in that they spent multiple hours daily blogging and chatting with other members of social media sites, making promotional ads in the form of captioned photos. Often they also made promotional gifs, which were short automated images, usually a very small clip from a larger scene the clipmaker intended to sell. Independent clipmakers often created a mix of custom and general short videos that they sold on sites like clips4sale.com and extralunchmoney.com and/or completely independently via email with a customer. The current trend in mainstream porn is heavily reliant on the production of clips or vignette porn as opposed to feature-length films. Many awards are given for Best Scene or Best Series (multiple scenes with the same

topic, but no continuous plot), while only a few are given for Best Feature. Clipmakers are different from cam performers because unlike cam performers they did not do realtime interactive shows; their product was a recorded video. In this way they were more similar to porn actors, who also starred in and sold recorded videos, but many clipmakers ran completely solitary businesses, and did not involve even a second performer, or cameraman in their shows. In that convention they resembled cam performers more than porn performers.

We have looked here at the different sex work trades individually and in pairs. One repeated trend throughout these sections was the Internet was used a site for sex work advertising. Due to my online ethnography of sex work blogs I was able to understand what it meant when sex workers claimed they were using the Internet as a site for advertising. A wide variety of advertising strategies were employed by sex workers online. Here I offer an explanation of several different ways sex workers reported and were observed using the Internet as a site for marketing their work.

#### Sex Worker Online Advertising

There are many options for sex workers advertising online, as there are for many kinds of personal service providers (athletic trainer, masseuse, make-up artist, photographer, etc.). Sex work advertisements are arguably the most prevalent appearance of sex work on the Internet. While only a subset of all sex work is mediated through a communications technology (phone sex through telephones, porn acting through video, camming through the Internet, etc.), all types of sex work stand to increase profits through advertising. Perhaps the most independent form of online advertising is to have one's own website, either by owning the URL, and purchasing hosting space, or by using a blog or pre-fabricated website template service like wordpress.com, blogger.com, or weebly.com. While this option conferred the most control to the erotic service provider, it also involved the biggest investment of time, expertise, and potentially money to populate and market one's own website with original content. Alternatively, a sex worker could advertise online through social media, by having an account on facebook.com,

twitter.com, tumblr.com, or some comparable site. The benefits of this approach were that the social network of site visitors on the website may include many potential clients, allies, and supporters. The challenges of this approach for advertising were that many social media sites do and have shut down sex workers accounts if they had been reported by other users. Social networking sites also gate accounts so only people who have been invited to view can do so. A third way to advertise online is to have an account on a classified site, such as backpage.com, or a sex-service specific site like arrangementfinder.com, thereviewboard.com, or theeroticreview.com. Those sites offered had a high potential to connect with clientele, but they offered much less security than other options because they also had a high potential to connect with police.

Some sex workers advertised on sex-specific social networking sites, a kind of hybrid between advertising on social media and advertising in the classifieds. This occurred on websites like fetlife.com, match.com, and other dating and hook-up sites. Of all of the advertising options mentioned, only dating and hook-up sites showed up in the top most visited adult websites globally, for example adultfriendfinder.com, fetlife.com, and adam4adam.com (Alexa.com 2015). These sites have been able to reach great heights of popularity because any erotic service provider advertising on them is a small component of all the functions on the site. The vast majority of connections being made through these sites can be and often are non-commercial, including non-commercial erotic photo and video sharing, and sexual hook-ups. Several of the top adult sites globally are cam sites such as livejasmin.com, flirt4free.com, cam4.com, and xcams.com (Alexa.com 2015). On cam sites the sex work service and advertising the service are all done simultaneously. A provider is advertising when he/she logs in, and some sites will send messages to the provider's top clients when his/her log-in occurs. Finally Alexa.com listed clips4sale.com as the 25th most popular adult site globally in May 2015. The sex work sold on this site was pornographic acting of all varieties from short clips and

vignettes of mainstream pornography, amateurs, independents, feminists, disabled porn actors and actresses; truly any type of body or niche sexual interest.

Historically, one of the most popular locations for commercial sex advertisements prior to the increase in Internet use was classified sections of printed urban news circulars. By 1992 most early adopters of Internet technology were installing the Netscape browser to view web content, but the majority of that content was still text-based. Through most of the 1990s pornographic content was on the web, but the producers of that content rarely profited. By the mid 1990s this began to change. Many erotic service providers moved their advertisements to the free website Craigslist.com, and many other kinds of porn producers began websites offering access to nude pictures and short video clips. In 1995 both Playboy.com and Craigslist.com first appeared on the World Wide Web. Playboy.com hosted photos of nude women, while Craigslist facilitated appointments with escorts via their Erotic Services listings. Craigslist.com maintains hundreds of local classified-type websites, which early on contained listings for "Erotic Services" alongside Automotive, Beauty, Computer, Creative, etc. After years of pressure and ultimately a federal hearing in September of 2010 Craigslist shut down its "Adult" services section (Saletan 2010). Many providers moved their advertising strategies to Backpage.com following this structural change. Another website, MyRedbook.com was a popular site hosting erotic service advertisements in Northern California. It was seized by the FBI and shut down in July 2014 (FBI 2014).

A possible contributing factor to the closure of Craigslist's Erotic Services ads was the Long Island Serial Killer murders. These are several unsolved cases (as of 1/3/15) involving the murder of 10 to 17 people involved in the Long Island sex industry between 1995 and 2010 (Hamilton 2015). Police identified the first four victims bodies as deceased escorts who had been using Craigslist to find clients from 2008 to 2010. Subsequent investigations in the area revealed the remaining victims. Families of the first four victims found allege the police have neglected the investigation of the murders because the women were sex workers (Kolker 2011).

This view is consistent with sociological research that finds stigma and marginalization of sex workers persists, and prevents justice and security for sex workers (Chateauvert 2014, Weitzer 2009). For example Hamilton (2015) reports The Long Island Serial Killer is "the fourth killer to slay multiple [sex workers] on Long Island since 1989". An analysis of 502 U.S. serial murderers found 32% of their 3,228 victims (1970-2009) had been sex workers (Quinet 2011). Several research projects have documented the difference in justice and social services that sex workers receive relative to the normative working population (Chateauvert 2014, Weitzer 2009). It is unknown precisely how Craigslist fits in the Long Island crimes since the perpetrator has not yet been found, but the closure of the Erotic Services portion of Craigslist.com chronologically followed the identification of the Long Island escorts bodies.

During the time period of focus in this dissertation (1990-2014) sex workers advertised on Backpage.com and Craigslist concurrently, as well as on other websites. Following the closure of Craigslist's erotic services pages, the practice of advertising on Backpage.com increased (Backpage is owned by the Village Voice newspaper in New York City). The site was ranked 169<sup>th</sup> in the United States as of February 2014, and 381<sup>st</sup> in June 2015 (Alexa.com). Yet there were material differences between the two sites and set-ups. Craigslist had been an open environment where clients and workers both placed ads: of services desired and services rendered. Backpage.com is a classified website in the more strict sense of the word, where workers only place ads. They must log in to the site and place a new ad on each day if searching for new clients. Each ad appears as one hyperlink, which can be filled with special characters, and inducements to click. When clicked the links take website users to a dedicated page about a single offer. Like Craigslist the design of the site is extremely bare; a white background with hundreds of blue links each representing a different listing, divided only by spacers listing a new day's postings, and a few sidebar advertisements well delineated from the primary classified content. Also similar to Craigslist, hundreds of U.S. cities are listed on Backpage.com, from Auburn, Alabama to Wasau, Wisconsin. The site has likely decreased in

popularity because during the course of this dissertation research many police stings and raids were carried out on sex workers throughout the United States, and some escorts I interviewed believed the police were finding sex workers through [backpage.com](http://backpage.com).

A different form of advertisement, more consistent with a social networking site than a classifieds page, can be found at [Tumblr.com](http://Tumblr.com). Tumblr, acquired by [Yahoo.com](http://Yahoo.com) in 2013, is a blogging and microblogging site. Microblogging is the practice of creating a post of usually minimal text, and predominantly an image, for example on [Twitter.com](http://Twitter.com), [Instagram.com](http://Instagram.com), and [Tumblr.com](http://Tumblr.com). A microblog post's popularity and community presence is measured by how often the post is reblogged and/or "liked". Sex workers on Tumblr often reblog/like posts as part of larger sex work friendly communities, such as sex positive bloggers, people of color (POC) bloggers, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, and queer (LGBTQ) bloggers. There is a sex work-specific community on Tumblr, but it is somewhat discreet. Community-focused sex worker sites such as [sexworkerproblems.tumblr.com](http://sexworkerproblems.tumblr.com), [sexworkerdirectory.tumblr.com](http://sexworkerdirectory.tumblr.com), and [fuckyeahstrippershit.tumblr.com](http://fuckyeahstrippershit.tumblr.com) operated somewhat as hubs where much of the content was both generated and reposted by multiple individual sex workers. Individual sex workers maintained dedicated sites as well, and these could often be less focused on services offered, and more diverse in content. The diversity, where a popular escort may intersperse posts about her upcoming camshows and contact info for setting appointments with funny reblogs about Star Wars fashion, fat positivity, and/or mermaids, promotes the idea of the sex work blogger as a human being, with a complex, multi-layered persona. Many sex work bloggers on Tumblr also maintained Twitter and/or Instagram accounts: microblogs that enabled frequent quick updates, and exposure to different audiences for each of the platforms. Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr accounts could be linked back to one another, which extended the circle of self promotion.

A new addition to the sex work Internet environment was [Slixa.com](http://Slixa.com), and an older parallel to this site was [ErosGuide.com](http://ErosGuide.com). Unlike general classified and social media sites ([Craigslist](http://Craigslist), [Backpage](http://Backpage), and [Tumblr](http://Tumblr)) [Slixa](http://Slixa.com) and [ErosGuide](http://ErosGuide.com) are specifically devoted to the

promotion and representation of sex work. Slixia was ranked 9,898 in the United States as of February 2014 (Alexa.com). Formed in 2012, it is questionable how long this site will last, since it openly mixes advertisements of sex work services alongside blog posts and articles about professional aspects of the industry, such as how to advertise, pose for photos, grow a clientele, move from one trade in the industry to another, sex work activism, and many other topics. Fundamentally, the site was a boon for the community, since it served multiple needs of sex workers, and was specifically designed to engage sex workers, as opposed to the several other websites where the workers maintain a presence, yet were part of a larger project of microblogs, blogs, and/or classifieds. As of February 2014, this site maintained profiles of sex workers in 50 cities in the United States (n=45) and abroad (n=5). ErosGuide.com, a website hosting adult classifieds and cam shows has been in business since 1998. Here sex workers could not only find clients as they had on Craigslist by answering classified ads, but they could also create and maintain individual profiles, to allow clients to review multiple service providers in their city before making an appointment. Like Slixia, this site was dedicated specifically to sex worker advertising. Each erotic service provider kept a web page they could update, and the pages displayed consistent types of information sitewide, such as service provider height, weight, hair color, and a description of services.

Review sites, like TheEroticReview.com contained reviews of erotic service appointments. A different review site, Punternet.com serving the United Kingdom was utilized in a massive data analysis by Jon Millward in his web article “Dirty Words: A Probing Analysis of 5000 Call Girl Reviews” (2011). Each erotic service provider listed on a review site appeared there because they had been reviewed by a visitor to the site. Over time a service provider's page became populated with multiple user reviews. Much like the reviews of restaurants on yelp.com, the site functioned to promote or critique an erotic service provider through portrayals of the sex services from the client's point of view. Sex workers on community and individual websites of their own were highly critical of much of the content on review websites. They said

reviews were tied to the concept of the *hobbyist*. Sexworkerproblems.tumblr.com for example lists *hobbyists* as a sex worker problem. Titsandsass.com has a 2013 article entitled, “On Hobbyists and Reviews: Providers Sound Off,” by SuzyHooker. One sex worker critique of review sites noted,

Between the overt fat hatred and body-snarking, and the assumption that an escort should provide the same acts (e.g. bbbj or cim) with every client, they’re soul-sucking, and should be avoided at all costs, (Berlin, in Ottawa via SuzyHooker).

This poster noted that review sites often served as a place for clients to create community at the expense of othering sex workers, their reviews treat sex workers as interchangeable, and deprived them of their humanity and diversity, which is replete in this largely unregulated, criminal marketplace. Review sites remained a visible, if flawed site of sex work representation and promotion on the Internet.

#### Patterns in the Internet's Effect on Sex Work Trades

While the Digital Age has affected thirteen of the fourteen different forms of sex work and led to the creation of the fourteenth, the impact of the Internet in the lives of each type of sex worker is not as extensive as one might think. After closely examining all of my interview data for evidence of how the trade had changed in relation to the introduction of the Internet I found of six possible related outcomes, evidence supported change in only three main categories and rarely or not at all in three other categories. I checked transcripts to see whether workers in each trade experienced the Internet as having connected them with other workers in their trade (i.e. a phone sex worker said the Internet made it easier to connect with other phone sex operators), and if yes, then I coded that as increased fellowship. A second pattern that emerged from the data was workers in every trade attested to using the Internet for advertising. A third pattern that I saw repeatedly in the interviews with workers was they referenced websites



on the Internet to improve their knowledge of doing sex work, everything from how to run an independent business, to what kind of services to offer, to how much to charge, to whether or not a prospective client was trustworthy. I also examined the interviews for mention of the Internet having been used to bring in increased business relative to before the use of the Internet. Very few workers attested to an increase in profit, and some workers stated they believed the Internet was leading to decreased profit (strippers, nude models). Workers representing only three of fourteen trades said the Internet had led to increased profit: Sugaring, Writing Erotica, and Cam-play-for-pay.

Another hypothesis I have seen discussed in relevant literature is that the Internet might lead to increases in trafficking or other kinds of unsafe job outcomes. One interviewee said she believed the Internet had reduced the overall safety of her job (stripping). Finally, several questions in my interview instrument were designed to measure whether stigma associated with doing the work had decreased due to the Internet. Workers in two trades discussed changes in perception of their work that they equated with lowered stigma (Stripping, Pornographic acting). Not all strippers and porn actors I spoke with mentioned it being easier to tell more people over time that they had worked in the sex industry. Specifically some strippers said they told fewer people over time. However, some who had stripped said they believed that overall the Internet had led to decreased stigma against sex work. Table 1 shows these six possible functions of the Internet as the column headings (fellowship, advertising, skills knowledge, increased business, increased safety, and lowered stigma) and the different trades of sex work as the row labels. A check appears in the box if any mention of this function was made in any of the interviews with workers.

Table 1: Internet-Related Outcomes in Sex Work Trades

|                     | Fellowship | Advertising | Skills Knowledge | Increased Business/ Profit | Increased Safety | Lowered Stigma |
|---------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Escorting           | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Sugaring            | X          | X           | X                | X                          |                  |                |
| Sensual massage     | X          | X           |                  |                            |                  |                |
| Street prostitution |            |             |                  |                            |                  |                |
| Nude dancing        | X          |             | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Stripping           | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  | X              |
| Writing erotica     | X          | X           | X                | X                          |                  |                |
| Power play for pay  | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Fetish modeling     | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Nude modeling       | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Pornographic acting | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  | X              |
| Phone sex           | X          | X           | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Sex surrogacy       | X          |             | X                |                            |                  |                |
| Cam play for pay    | X          | X           | X                | X                          |                  |                |

Table 1 shows the frequency of claims that the Internet had improved sex workers ability to network with one another (Fellowship), to advertise their services (Advertising), and to accrue skills and knowledge about the work (Skills Knowledge). As Table 1 shows, very little evidence of increased profits, safety, or lowered stigma resulting from the Internet was present in the interview transcripts.

The link between the Internet and commercial sex industry has drawn the attention of legislators and regulators. In the last two decades, there have been several policy attempts including three federal laws introduced in 1996, 1998, and 2000 to modify the relationship between the Internet and commercial sex<sup>6</sup>. Two of the federal laws have since been overturned,

<sup>6</sup> The Communications Decency Act of 1996 sought to regulate Internet obscenity, The Child Online Protection Act of 1998 sought to prevent minors from accessing obscene Internet content, and the

a reflection of the ongoing conflict in the Internet and pornography's social norms (Edelman 2009). Advocates for free speech align with pro-sex work feminists on this issue. They see the relationship between the Internet and commercial sex as largely unproblematic. One advocacy group writes, "digital delivery is the future of not just adult entertainment, but of all entertainment... most production companies now earn more money from new media revenue streams than from physical media," (Free Speech Coalition 2008). This group also argues the adult industry was particularly likely to undergo a smooth transition to Internet platforms stemming from three factors: 1. Early adopters of technology tend to like adult entertainment, 2. Adult entertainment has simpler royalty and licensing concerns than mainstream entertainment, 3. Many adult entertainment producers and distributors are small and flexible businesses, unlike those in mainstream entertainment (Free Speech Coalition 2008). Sex positive feminists and free speech advocates thus argue Internet pornography is relatively harmless.

Economists have studied the prevalence of the market share occupied by online commercial sex transactions (Edelman 2009) and the role of the Internet in changing the sex work market (Cunningham and Kendall 2010). Criminologists have meanwhile noted the proliferation of online locations to engage in commercial sex exchanges (Castle and Lee 2008). Relatively few sociologists research sexuality, and of those researching sexuality, a focus on sex work is highly uncommon (Irvine 2014). Most notably, sociologists have either considered sex work from the worker's perspective (Hoang 2010, 2011, 2014, Weitzer 2009), or sex trafficking (defined as sexual labor due to force, fraud, or coercion) (Hoang and Parrenas 2014, Weitzer 2012), or they have opposed commercial sexuality as a damaged and damaging form of sexual expression (Dines 2011; Jensen 2007; Kimmel 2008). Sociologists studying sex work have not yet thoroughly considered the relationship between the Internet and commercial sex in the United States, though an important project stemming from American Studies made great

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Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 legislated that libraries must use filters to prevent visitors from accessing obscene Internet content.

initial strides (Ray 2007). Grasping the history of this relationship we can better hope to understand the socio-cultural and structural effects of the Digital Age on sex workers, a multi-vocal U.S. labor population not unlike other marginalized workers.

### Summary

In this chapter I have documented multiple ways the Digital Age has affected sex work and the sex industry in the United States. I have shown how the Internet is being used by sex workers today as an avenue for advertising. The ability to advertise sex work on the Internet is particularly important for independent sex workers, and in this chapter I have shown the relative popularity of independent sex work. I have also shown how the Internet is used to improve sex worker fellowship, particularly amongst sex workers who do not work together in clubs, dungeons, or houses. While some sex workers today work in group environments such as some who strip, do pornographic acting, sensual massage, or nude dancing, a great many sex workers work alone such as escorts, cam performers, nude models, dommes, phone sex operators, sex surrogates, sugar babies, and writers of erotica. For these workers the ability to find fellowship with others who do similar or the same work is extremely important. One other way the research participants reported using the Internet was to improve their ability to do the work, whether this was by reading about how other sex workers approach managing clients, or by keeping a calendar of appointments, or by communicating with clients about their availability the Internet as a site for knowledge and skills acquisition was a consistent theme in the transcripts.

I looked also for evidence that the Internet had improved sex worker compensation, safety, or status. I checked the interview transcripts for mention of these variables or indications of change in these realms. The two of these variables that were consistently mentioned in the transcripts were stigma and compensation. Research participants were highly likely to say they did not earn a wage that they considered fair for the work they did, and the Internet had not had

any positive effect on this issue. The Internet was not tied in any consistent way to decreases in sex work stigma. A few research participants who had worked as strippers reported their friends accepted this work, but increased acceptance towards stripping was documented in social science research prior to the advent of the Digital Age (Brooks 1997, Barton 2002) so it is questionable whether or not the Internet has improved public opinions toward stripping. For the other sex work trades stigma was consistent throughout the interview transcripts. In this chapter I provided a model for analyzing the presence of stigma in a population, and I used interview data to show how sex work is stigmatized.

In the next chapter I will go into more detail on sex work stigma. It is a complicated issue, and one that has been somewhat under-studied in research on sex worker populations. In considering the effect of the Internet on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma, I argue that a study of sex work and the Internet is an ideal location of analyzing sex work stigma. The Internet is a site for access to information of all kinds. As I have shown in this chapter sex workers use the Internet to accrue information about how to do their work. My documentation of sex work advertisements in this chapter indicates customers of the sex industry use the Internet to accrue information about sex work services and sex industry products via advertisements. Given these findings, are people using the Internet to access accurate information about sex work and combat stereotypes, discrimination, or stigma? In the next chapter I will focus on that question, and given that as I have shown here sex work stigma is ongoing, what does that actually mean in sex workers' lived experience? How does stigma affect sex workers relationships with friends, social service providers, teachers, employers, and others? How are sex workers responding to and fighting stigma? These questions are thoroughly explored in the following pages.

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### **Chapter 3: If My Parents Found Out: Lived Experience of Sex Work Stigma**

#### Introduction

Thus far I have considered the research question "what is the effect of the Internet on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma?" by using interview data to provide sex workers own descriptions of the work, and the effect of the Internet on the work. I have shown why it is necessary to use these methods to answer the research question in the absence of updated opinion poll data (the last nationwide poll discussing the legalization of sex work was published in 1995). I have argued the criminalization of four out of fourteen forms of sex work affects perceptions of all forms of sex work and the sex industry. One question that remains is to what extent occupational stigma is present in sex workers lives. Stigma, defined as a characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued and triggers discrimination in a particular social context (Link and Phelan 2001) is quite clear when devaluation and discrimination towards an identity marks it as criminal. Establishing that sex workers experience stigma would indicate the depth of impact of criminalization relative to the effect of the Internet on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma.

In this chapter I use data from the workers of the sex industry to reveal nuances within sex work regarding stigma and civil resistance. Some argue the Internet is a gateway to promiscuous sexual practices and harmful sexual behaviors (Dines 2011, Jensen 2007, Kimmel 2008). Others find U.S. communications technology in the Digital Age has been transformed in a way that gives voice to those previously unheard (Tonkin et al. 2012, Schradie 2011, Jansen et al. 2009, boyd 2007). My position acknowledges and diverges from these two assessments. Sexual subjectivity in the U.S. may have expanded thanks to the Internet, but this trend is marked by continual marginalization of those in the sex workforce. I use the model of stigma created by Link and Phelan (2001), and concepts from the work of Erving Goffman to evaluate ongoing stigma associated with sex work. In order to contribute to existing research on stigma, I

interviewed 36 people who had engaged in sex work, and I observed sex work online weblogs. I discuss my findings in the context of two forms of resistance countering hegemonic narratives of sex work: sex workers' active resistance, and sex workers' everyday resistance, drawing from James C. Scott's (1985) analysis of weapons of the weak. Evidence concerning sex workers experiences of stigma, both passive, and active resistance, gives us a new way of understanding the relationship between the Internet, sex work, the sex industry, and stigma.

### Presence of Stigma

Early sociological research on stigma comes to sociology from Goffman, also the pioneer of dramaturgical theory. Goffman used stigma to explain the differences between in-group and out-group identity (1986). More recently scholars Link and Phelan (2001) created a 5-part model for establishing stigma exists amongst a group of people. These five parts must co-exist in order to affirm the presence of stigma in an out-group:

1. People distinguish and label human differences
2. Dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics--to negative stereotypes.
3. Labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them"
4. Labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes
5. Stigma is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001).

The evidence supports the idea that people who exchange sex or sexual provocation for money are labeled differently than those who don't in police and crime reports (prostitution is listed at the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics as a vice crime), in U.S. news reporting, in popular culture, and in academia. Perhaps the simplest demonstration of sex work labeling is to consider the large variety of words in the English language labeling deviant women as people who exchange sex for money (ho, hooker, whore, prostitute, trick, etc.). Part 1 and Part 2 of Link and Phelan's model are thus unified regarding sex work stigma. People who exchange sex or sexual

provocation for money are labeled as different from the mainstream population and the majority of those labels are negative stereotypes. It is neither a compliment, nor a neutral claim when one is labeled ho or whore, rather most often it is an insult used to police and restrict.

As mentioned, the Bureau of Justice Statistics has a specific category for prostitution, consistent with Part 3 in the model: labeled persons are placed in distinct categories. The specific definition of prostitution as a federal crime is

The unlawful promotion of or participation in sexual activities for profit, including attempts to solicit customers or transport persons for prostitution purposes; to own, manage, or operate a dwelling or other establishment for the purpose of providing a place where prostitution is performed; or to otherwise assist or promote prostitution, (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2014).

Many people who work in the sex industry do not engage in prostitution. My data shows many strictly work in the legal forms of the sex industry. However, when some forms of sex work are illegal, the criminalization of those forms is consistent with the promotion of stigma. One website, which asks whether prostitution should be legal, states,

Opponents believe that legalizing prostitution would lead to increases in sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, global human trafficking, and violent crime including rape and homicide. They contend that prostitution is inherently immoral, commercially exploitative, empowers the criminal underworld, and promotes the repression of women by men, (procon.org 2013).

When it is a commonly held belief that people who practice the exchange of sex for money, if permitted without censure, could increase sexually transmitted disease, coercive sex, and violent crime, there is very much a sense of “us” versus “them”. This practice, ultimately a private exchange between two consenting adults, is seen as having much larger ramifications beyond the actual work. The extension of the implications of sex work is key to the creation of a separate and unequal category.

Having observed plentiful support for Parts 1 through 3 in the model for stigma present in multiple facets of life, I sought to test Parts 4 and 5 through a question in my interview instrument. The question, “Has your participation in this work led to threats to your safety, harassment, exclusion from jobs, education, or social services? If so, can you provide an example?” was informed by Belle Knox. Her article on xojane.com on 2/21/14, entitled “I’m the Duke University Freshman Porn Star And for the First Time I’m Telling the Story in My Words,” (Knox 2014), states, “We must question in this equation why sex workers are so brutally stigmatized. Why do we exclude them from jobs, education, and from mainstream society?” The article appeared 24 hours after my first interview with a self-identified sex worker. Reflecting on my interview instrument I realized I needed to ask the workers specifically about their experiences with stigma. Perhaps it was not present in their actual lives. After all, in the 2012 General Social Survey about 4.3 percent of survey-takers, which if applied to the full U.S. population that year would have been 13,506,300 people said “Yes” they had sex for pay in the last year (Smith et al. 2013). Yet also in 2012 only about 58,000 U.S. arrests were made for prostitution and commercialized vice. Perhaps sex workers who have not been arrested, also had avoided stigma. Or perhaps those who work in the sex industry in the legal trades were avoiding status loss and unequal outcomes. It was therefore necessary to ask my interviewees about threats to safety and exclusion from society.

All U.S. interviewees in my sample stated yes, they had experienced threats to safety, harassment, and exclusion from jobs, education, and/or social services. Among the examples I received, some were interpersonal from a client or customer, but most were institutional. By institutional I mean most were forms of rejection from outside the sex worker/customer interactions, perpetuating the cultural institution/dominant hegemonic narrative of sex worker othering and stigma. Most of the examples can best be understood if we accept Rubin’s (1984) notion that the predominant U.S. cultural outlook towards sexuality is one of sex negativity. If stigma were no longer present, then it would make sense to find some individual-level accounts

of harassment and exclusion mixed with a variety of other experiences, including many who had not experienced those outcomes, consistent with the general variation in any social phenomenon. Instead, my data indicate pervasive anti-sex worker sentiment.

### Risk, Resistance, and Sex Work Research

Sex work is a topic that has often been viewed from the perspective of the consumer, or abstractly, in debates about women's exploitation. Notable examples of the perspective of the consumer occur in works where sociologists either interview or observe consumers as part of a larger project (Kimmel 2009), recant past use of pornographic materials as a feminist research project (Jensen 2007), or argue pornographic materials are steadily becoming more misogynistic and anti-social (Barton 2014). These works all conclude the sex industry is both expanding, and having an increasingly negative impact on society.

Research that deals with sex work abstractly tends to carefully avoid mention of whether or not the author has ever actually been a producer or consumer of the sex industry. These include an influential article arguing ultimately the problem is prostitution is morally offensive (Overall 1992) and the book *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* by sociologist Gail Dines (2011). Dines is systematic in her separation of a critique of pornography from her own personal enjoyment of sexuality, but this delineation is problematic because many people who enjoy sex also enjoy pornography unequivocally, and many people who produce and create pornography and other products in the sex industry have "normal" sex lives outside their work. So though her subtitle is "How Porn has Hijacked Our Sexuality," the "our" in the sentence refers to a very particular subset of the population, neglecting many, while presuming to speak for all.

Acknowledging this pervasive and popular sociological critique of the sex industry, as I came to consider the narratives of men, trans\*folk, and women sex workers online and in interviews, three primary works influenced this chapter: Erving Goffman's book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), Bruce Link and Jo Phelan's article,

“Conceptualizing Stigma” (2001), and James C. Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985). Goffman documented several types of stigma, of which “reputational stigma” is most characteristic for U.S. sex workers. Link and Phelan’s article provided a model to critically question the persistence of stigma stemming from sex work. Several researchers have implied the consumption of sex industry products and services has become so widely accepted as to seemingly indicate stigma surrounding the work is no longer present (Dines 2011, Kimmel 2009, Jensen 2007). My goal for this chapter is to show the degree to which sex work stigma persists. I have turned to Scott’s analysis of resistance to consider interview data from sex workers living with stigma and its effects in their lives. A segment of the sex worker population engages in open activism (Chateauvert 2014), while many other workers do not. According to Scott’s thinking, even in the absence of open activism, there are often passive forms of resistance motivated by a shared understanding of fairness countering the dominant hegemony. Informed by this argument, regarding a shared understanding of fairness, I sought to determine the extent and contours of stigma and shared understanding in sex worker narratives.

E.P. Thompson (1978) coined the term “moral economy” to indicate peaceable acts of civil resistance stemming from a common culture. These acts of resistance affirm a sense of fairness in contrast to the free market. A moral economy is present when members of a subculture apply concerted forms of resistance to a dominant culture, engaging in practices that preserve fairness in opposition to the dominant culture’s reliance on oppressive practices that maximize profits. As Thompson (1978: 171) wrote, “every contradiction is a conflict of value as well as a conflict of interest.” This quote explains the mechanism for how those engaged in peasant resistance maintain a shared sense of fairness in opposition to dominant culture. Underlying the material reality of needs, there is affect, emotion, and feeling; even a sense of morality shared by the oppressed that experiences dominant cultural ideology as unjust.

Moral judgments and value conflicts are often studied as highly personal topics, encouraging individual-level research. The study of cultural cognition shows how things we perceive as highly personal are also ultimately informed by culture, and is useful in analyses of the intersection between sex work and Internet technology. Cultural cognition holds that decision-making about highly polarizing and politicized issues often falls along ideological lines. This logic parallels that of moral economy, which requires a “common notion” of how things should be (Mau 2007). In order for members of a particular culture to share a common notion of expectations for reality it would follow that these members share cultural ideology and their shared ideas about reality may be different than that of other cultures'. The multiple cultural allegiances (to family, peers, co-workers, religious community, etc.) in our lives affect personal decision-making and social interaction. Research on cultural cognition shows that well-informed individualistic people, for example, will learn of the same scientific finding as well-informed communitarian people yet interpret the finding differently, in keeping with their existing individualistic or communitarian beliefs. While this seems to indicate that solutions to social problems will remain elusive throughout history, Kahan (2012) argues this is not the case. He shows how hierarchical individualists are more willing to agree something must be done to remedy social problems if the suggestion has a technological solution. Since hierarchical individualists "value markets, commerce, and private orderings. They are thus motivated to resist information about [a problem when] they perceive (unconsciously) that such information... will warrant restrictions on commerce and industry," (Kahan 2012). Technology is popular, perhaps for different reasons, both with digital natives (those born after 1975) and people in the first two stages of the life course.

Research on cultural cognition also provides information about how to communicate effectively about a polarizing issue, and sex work is indeed a polarizing issue (procon.org 2013). In light of the understanding that affinity group affects beliefs, two techniques for communicating about a polarized issue are *narrative framing* and *identity vouching*. In the case of narrative



framing, communication about a polarized issue to partisan groups will be more effective when the story is tailored to appeal to existing ideological frames (Jones and McBeth 2010). Second, identity vouching is when the need to find solutions to a politicized issue is more likely to be recognized and acted upon if the need is presented by a trusted source (Kahan et al 2010). These principles help explain results from research surveying 266 university women, which found those who knew a sex worker were less likely to stereotype sex workers, while those who did not know a sex worker had a higher likelihood of stereotypical attitudes (Long et al. 2012). While a precept of cultural cognition is that all people make decisions consistent with cultural affiliation, and this is often a source of division in society between liberals and conservatives, progress can be achieved with effective identity-attuned communication. Cultural cognition helps explain why sex workers face stigma and marginalization for their manner of employment since sex work culture is often overlooked and underrepresented. A thorough understanding of what is at risk should also inform analyses of sex workers who openly disclose their work online. In studies of passive resistance, "The cost of a bad name hinges directly on the social and economic sanctions that can be brought into play to punish its bearer," (Scott 1985:24). Research into the relationship between sex work and the Internet may advance social scientists' understandings of how risk-attentive decision-making is affected when one's bad name stems from one's profession.

Research on sex work considers individual and structural factors that contribute to the persistence, permutations, and proliferation of the sex industry. We can conceptualize membership in a stigmatized societal out-group as affecting one's belief system. Other studies of systems and sex work examine how sex workers use affect and commoditized care to meet individual economic needs (Escoffier 2008, Bernstein 2007). Some research considers how sex workers handle endangering and/or destabilizing their own and their clients pre-existing relationships (Smith et al. 2012; Nagle 1997). Research on built environments and total institutions considers the relationship between places with restricted availability of preferred sex

partners, such as prisons and military bases and changing sex practices such as increased homosexuality in prison environments (Kunzel 2008), and increased sex trade near military bases (Enloe 2014). Finally, some studies consider the relationship between state policies and the sex worker population (Hoang 2010).

It would be an incomplete analysis of the sociological contribution to the study of sex work if I neglected to mention several publications, which explain the work of sex work and the organizations within the sex industry. Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck's (2009) analysis of legalized prostitution in the state of Nevada is critical to tests of stigma under different regulatory schemas than the one primarily used in the United States. Hoang offers illuminating analysis of sex workers in Vietnam (2010, 2011). This research inspires different ways of thinking about sex work than the representations in hegemonic texts. There is also research by a few sociologists who openly admit to having worked in the industry (Bernstein 2007), or critically challenge the moral panic in the dominant hegemonic narrative of sex work (Weitzer 2009, 2012). These texts produce powerful counters to mainstream sociological narratives of sex work.

In my effort to document the extent and effect of sex work stigma I employed research methods described in Chapter 2. In brief, I interviewed 36 sex workers, asking about their perceptions of the Internet's effect on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma. I also engaged in online participant observation by interacting with over 100 self-described sex workers on a social media website where they congregated. My data collection occurred from October 2012 to December 2015. All research participants were assigned randomly generated pseudonyms; no real names or other identifying characteristics are used.

#### Results: A Lived Experience of Sex Work Stigma

Sex workers in this study all confirmed negotiations of stigma including threats to welfare and/or safety due to labor force participation. Workers' self-disclosure of sex work participation and consequences of disclosure varied by social location. Strengthened self-identification with the work, and utilization of in-group community spaces in response to social isolation was present in

the interviews. Sex worker communication exchanges regarding safety, self care, health services, collecting payment, advertising, and avoiding physical harm were present in the online community and interview data. Two of the sex workers interviewed, and three in 100 observed online reported experiences consistent with coercion. All 36 sex workers interviewed stated they had entered the sex industry voluntarily at some point in their history of sex work.

### **Threats to Social Ties**

I have labeled one cluster of sex work stigma-related outcomes as *threats to social ties*. Stigmatized occupation participation produced these threats in terms of fear of being outed as sex workers to friends and family, rejection by friends and family after the revelation of sex work identity, and increased dependence on other sex workers for one's personal and social well-being. Only four of fourteen sex work trades are illegal, yet even workers who only engaged in legal forms of sex work discussed social isolation and a related mistrust of law enforcement. One interviewee spoke of pervasive social isolation she experienced while working as a phone sex operator and camgirl:

There were others who I did tell, but they were also sex workers in their own way. Them I told because of the commiseration, the camaraderie, having someone who understood. Those were the only people I told, people who were in the business one way or another (Lurline, Interview Transcript 2014).

I named this chapter "If My Parents Found Out" because of the steady recurrence of this fear through multiple interviews with different workers. A direct outcome related to the high degree of stigma in the work was that many workers kept their involvement in the industry secret from all but their clients and other workers. As in other entertainment industries it is common for sex workers to use a stage name (Aimee, Kaiser, and Ray 2015). The stage name helped to construct an identity that could be concealed from those who were not allies, and it was an important security measure to protect against loss of social ties or the prevention of access to social services. Yet the common and necessary practice of identity concealment meant many

sex workers experienced social isolation, and found it to be one of the most difficult parts of sex work occupations.

Some sex worker websites offered mental health support, promoted the voices of sex workers, and provided information about self-care. As mechanisms for social isolation management one popular community blog site I observed hosted Mental Health Week, and included posts such as "Managing Anxiety and Stress Tip: Talk to someone. Tell friends and family you're feeling overwhelmed and let them know how they can help you," (<http://sexworkerproblems.tumblr.com/> 2014). Another post stated, "Self Care Tip: There is nothing wrong with taking a night for yourself! Soak in a warm bath, eat chocolates, watch movies, take a yoga class, go out with friends! Whatever you do, do it for you!" (<http://sexworkerproblems.tumblr.com/> 2014). Sex workers offered one another social support. The need to develop and maintain regimens of support has been documented as particularly pertinent for sexual minority populations (Singh et al. 2013). Sex workers' advocacy of self-care related to their lack of faith that traditional health care providers would be sex work allies. It was evident in the interviews and online posts that the desire to locate health professionals who would not marginalize sex workers further was pervasive and ongoing.

Sex workers also discussed the work of defining safe spaces for sex work. Halle, a pornographic actress, pornographic director, and power-play-for-pay or Bondage/Discipline, Sadism/Masochism (BDSM) performer, discussed her practices before a scene. She explained an extensive process of reviewing scene participants likes and dislikes, including discussing limiting factors for performance such as disabilities, sensitivities, and emotional and physical boundaries. Halle summed up the pre-filming and pre-scene process with the statement, "the first part of the day is really about creating that safe space and developing that trust and communication," (Halle, Interview Transcript 2014). The maintenance of this "safe space" was a practice that had crossed over to some pornographic filming sites from the BDSM community. Halle's long, detailed explanation of ways she as a director worked to engage her performers

before the camera started rolling in appropriate emotional preparation and consent was striking. The process of preparation and trust-building held the utmost importance for her.

Other practices for safe space prevailed when the work was cam-play-for-pay. Quinn described some of her personal preparations before she starts a night on shift as a cam performer:

I'll log on and go into different models rooms, scope their stuff out. You know see what they're doing, what's flying tonight, how many people does it sound like are in the room, how they're acting... I've been doing this for two years; I can tell when a model's frustrated or not.

Interviewer: What does that tell you? Are you thinking 'oh if I go into this room too I can pull off some of her customers and give her a rest?'

Quinn: Oh no, no, I don't do that. There are models that do that though. We actually call that poaching. We call that poaching. Um, we fucking hate that, (Interview Transcript 2014).

This quote indicates the presence of a shared sense of fair practices that reject the mainstream stigmatized view of their work. First, Quinn is attuned not just to her own sense of the situation, but her perceptions of the other sex workers affect on shift. Second, the refusal to "poach" another cam performer's clients is an important practice in the maintenance of in-group boundaries. This practice encourages trust amongst the workers, and creates a line not only between workers and customers, but also between workers and the hegemonic culture's understandings of their work.

## Threats to Job Security

Other stories of sex work stigma-related peril and status loss are included in a category I have labeled *threats to job security*. These types of threats were economic instability stemming from the low pay inherent to many non-sex work jobs, and the criminalized status of some sex work jobs, the part-time nature of many sex work jobs, and the lack of resume outcomes from work in this sector. Sex workers face stigma due to participation in a low-status occupation. Their everyday forms of resistance to sex work stigma included seeking and publishing sex work how-tos and price lists, pursuing formal education, disseminating knowledge about best practices, and maintaining bad client blacklists.

The act of seeking a how-to for sex work is often the first step in passive, or everyday acknowledgement of societal stigma towards sex work. Almost every interview participant discussed seeking knowledge from existing workers before or early on during the work. Often this was also a matter of looking for the "fair wage" or the going wage for a practice and then offering the same. No sex workers I spoke with described intentionally seeking the going wage intending to undercut it. Every interviewee talked about setting prices at the going rate, or sometimes higher, or if their club set the rate, then sex workers often critiqued what they perceived to be the club's error. Piper said for example, "I feel like it's incredibly unfair and especially with, I have one of the best relationships with our management and still they're fucked up." Many sex workers who worked in clubs expressed opposition to management in various ways, including hiring and firing policies, worker treatment, and customer treatment, but by far and away the most frequent critique was about rate and circumstances of pay. Though sex workers I interviewed were apt to accept a wage as fair if they had found out about it from another sex worker, as Piper's quote shows they were unlikely to take club management as an accurate source of "how-to" information.

This quote from interviewee Britney shows she sought the knowledge of other sex workers to understand what was a reasonable service to exchange for the wage:

Sex workers were among the people who helped me out.... I found a lot of resources made by sex workers for sex workers recommending like “here's how to avoid some of the early mistakes we made,” and that kind of thing.... I was very blown away by how willing [a sex worker] was to help this total stranger, (Interview Transcript 2014).

In the status quo occupations of capitalist economies it is both unusual and unnecessary to seek the knowledge of other employees before joining an occupation. Many normative forms of employment in the U.S. have a training video, which presents a corporate-designed portrayal of the work. Sex work in the United States does not have this structure, legitimacy, or corporate involvement. Even when some porn and cam performers I interviewed reported working for well-known sex industry companies, they were still given little or no instruction on how to do the work. If sex work was not so stigmatized, I would expect the competitiveness inherent in so many working class occupations, and in the normative capitalist outlook, to prevent sex workers from asking one another how to do the work, and reduce their willingness to share knowledge amongst one another.

Sex workers I interviewed repeatedly described getting help from one another and giving help to one another to circumvent stigma-related threats to job security. This can be seen as everyday resistance to the dominant capitalist hierarchy. For example Piper said,

And I found this um fetish and fantasy house and I feel like that's where I got started with sex work as a job and that house was amazing for a lot of reasons. It was really empowering. It was like a collective. It was woman-owned and woman-run and really sex positive. The amount of diversity around bodies, around genders, and orientations, and backgrounds was really amazing. And so I feel really lucky to have started there (Interview Transcript 2014).

In both Britney's and Piper's quotes we can see how the research participant recalls her own need for knowledge about navigating a type of work that is greatly marginalized. Both

interviewees connected the help they received in the form of "how-to" with great generosity from other sex workers. Britney also mentioned the support she received from the sex worker community as she transitioned from male to female gender. Piper also discussed having been homeless, and how her co-workers gave her a place to stay, along with providing a place to work.

Blog posts made by sex workers reaffirmed many of the issues uncovered in the in-depth interviews as well as the presence of sex work stigma. "How-to" blog posts detailed tips and instructions on how to do the work. For example a post entitled "The Ultimate Guide to Being a Sugar Baby" included more than 40 links separated into categories pertaining to how engage in sugaring such as "Beauty", "Mind", "Fashion", "How to Find a Sugar Daddy", and "How to Keep a Sugar Daddy" (Blog post July 2014). Another example was a blog with the subheading:

Escorts, Cam models, Strippers, Sugar Babies, ProDommes, Porn Actors, Prosubs, Phone Sex Operators, FinDommes, Fetish Clip Makers- All Sex Workers! This is the place for you to find things to help make your life simpler. Deals, giveaways, informational pieces, coupons, masterlists, Q&A, sex work tips, guides, freebies, whatever! (blog accessed 10/27/14).

On the one hand these examples reiterate the findings in the interviews: that sex workers saw requesting and providing information about the work as fair and necessary given the stigma surrounding the work and the lack of job security. On the other hand, "how-to" blog posts could be a contentious topic amongst the online sex worker community.

Many sites took an oppositional stance towards helping people improve job skills who were new to the industry. Individual sex work bloggers often posted that those looking for advice should do more research; the information was available elsewhere. One major community site stated:



We do not do 101. We do not advise anyone on jobs in the sex industry or how to find jobs in the sex industry. This is not a site for medical, legal, or psychiatric advice or care, (<http://sexworkerproblems.tumblr.com/> 2014).

“101” is a term for How To, as in Sex Work 101, like an introductory college course. When pressed some sex workers and former sex workers (FSWs) stated they were unwilling to do How To posts because the act of making that information available endangered the blogger to the accusation of pimping.

The difference in political power and job security between those in the sex industry and those on the outside can be seen in multiple interviewees' account of experiences in university settings, which are often conceptualized as a means to advance one's career. I argue sex worker status loss in the academic setting is likely more frequent than status loss in other settings, such as “legitimate” forms of employment, at the grocery store, or at a worker's child's school, because universities are perceived as open spaces relatively devoid of moral judgments. In this environment, unlike others, some sex workers may let their guard down, and/or some non-sex workers may, maliciously or not, underestimate the ongoing stigma and threat sex workers experience. For example, Grace stated,

I am taking a women's psychology class and everybody knows I'm a stripper. I didn't say it. But they all know. The teacher said it actually. She completely called me out in front of the entire class.

Interviewer: Had you disclosed it at some other time in school?

Grace: In a personal reflection paper that I thought was between me and the professor.

Interviewer: Are you a psych major?

Grace: No I'm a biology major. (Interview Transcript 2014).

My follow-up question about her major was exploring whether the class was part of a small degree program where the teacher was trying to use examples of objectivity to discourage

student judgment of non-normative practices and foster group trust. The fact that the student's occupation was not the teacher's to share, and the student was not even in the teacher's discipline indicated exclusion and discrimination. Because of the ability to administer a grade, and set the classroom tone, the teacher in this instance had greater power than the student, and her discriminatory sharing of the student's private information perpetuated the student's powerlessness.

I interviewed several sex workers who described breaking the law in the sale of sex, or disregarding club policy amongst those that worked at clubs. For the most part, those sex workers not engaged in illegal transactions were pointedly supportive of those that were. Some open discussion about illegal sex work practices was apparent in the blog posts. Several blogs discussed how to receive payment, a complex issue for the independent worker who participated in legal or illegal sex work. Even forms of sex work that are legal have been refused pay processing services by the major Internet payment processing options (Whorecast 2014). One extensive list entitled "Sex Work Approved Payment Options" labeled the services Paypal, Square, Greendot, WePay, Venmo, Bitcoin, Bitpay, Coinbase: "Do Not Use," (Blog post February 2014). This post included a much shorter list of services to "Use with caution," and just two companies labeled "Sex worker friendly!" (Blog post February 2014). Another blogger wrote, "Trying to figure out if Bitcoin is actually worth it for Backpage. Simultaneously plotting how to make all money through Niteflirt and camming so as not to have to leave the house during cold," (Blog post February 2014). These types of statements aided other sex workers in accruing some of the benefits of Internet communication documented in Chapter 2, such as fellowship, and skills acquisition. Members of the online community could empathize with this blogger's aversion to cold weather; endemic in a field that encourages minimal clothing and decorative, high-heeled footwear. Likewise they could follow along with her experiments with payment options and learn for themselves from her posts.

When an occupation is illegal and stigmatized it can be extremely difficult to locate authoritative information about worker process. Sex workers willingness to share their stories was a major source of social support for other workers. Interview data also revealed the practice of criminal activity:

I would say 90% of my clients want an in-call, so they want to come to me, so I have to provide the location. Other than that, some kind of primping like doing my hair, make-up, getting changed, all that jazz and then depending on how many client I see that day. I am a low volume provider, so I think the most clients I've ever seen in one day is four. In general it's between 1 and 3 clients that I would see in a day, (Charmaine, Interview Transcript 2014).

I interviewed eleven participants who acknowledged escorting was a part of or had been a part of their sex work practices. Some of these interviewees spoke about the social isolation they experienced as a result of escorting. In this respect, working at more than one trade in the sex industry held the potential to connect a worker who had escorted with other sex worker communities. Some interviewees who had escorted spoke of their participation in porn, or at dungeons as giving them access to additional sex worker communities that supported their work as escorts. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, online sex worker communities were also important sources of camaraderie.

One final way sex workers responded to threats to job security was by forming private groups online where they could discuss bad clients, work environments, and various other issues free from judgment. This worker who had done some stripping, discussed a private Facebook group whose only members were local strippers.

It's invite only. I've never invited anyone. I think yeah because we want to be able to talk about clubs and patrons without the club owners knowing what we're saying because it might affect our job. It's a really good place to share information, or sell things, or sometimes people post "Hey do you want to get out

of the stripping industry? Go to cosmetology school that I went to. It was pretty rad, (Isabel, Interview Transcript 2014).

According to many different workers the ability to maintain and exchange information about patrons was important to their work. Without the ability to depend on the police, client blacklists or patron insider information was an important key to safety, as well as a technique of everyday resistance. Much like the peasant workers Scott studied corroborated in the act of price fixing, sex workers corroborated in the act of client blacklisting.

Everyday resistance of the type Scott (1985) describes is an untraditional kind of political participation. It is the manifestation of deeply held political identity, and commonplace actions that also hold a political component. Sex workers I spoke with who had worked as porn actors or actresses were very politically conscious, and one of their most frequent critiques was of the hegemonic practice of porn piracy. Many consumers of pornography use so-called free sites to access online porn, yet those sites are also the most likely to contain pirated content, which angered many performers. Sex workers posted online about how to consciously and considerately consume sex industry products and services. One blogger, in response to the question "Why do some sites have "free porn" like, do the sites have permission from the sex workers?" answered, "Most "free porn" sites are huuuuuuuge DMCA law breakers. Most of the videos are ripped off, very few actually come from real companies or sex workers," (Blog post September 2014). Some sex work bloggers used their blogs to set an example of a conscious consumer. One blogger wrote, "I pay for porn because I like fantasy, I prefer to watch something when I am masturbating," (Blog post January 2013). The specific statement that she enjoyed porn because she enjoyed fantasy was a demonstration of her belief that one should not consume pornographic products as though they are documentary or instructional. She said, speaking as a worker in the industry, conscious consumption involved recognition that it's not real, as well as paying to watch. Porn films depict fantasy, like most motion pictures.

## Threats to Physical Safety

A third category of sex work stigma outcomes was threats to sex workers physical safety. These were described as stalking, hostile work environments, domestic violence, and increased threat of murder. For example, Frida stated,

I had this, I mean he kinda went away after awhile, but I had this low-level stalker for awhile who would just kinda pop up every now and then and he didn't do anything other than that, but it made the environment really hostile for me. You know I stopped studying on campus and I avoided alot of the public spaces on campus (Frida, Interview Transcript 2014).

She elaborated, "I remember sitting in the student lounge one day and he came up to me and he was like "I know about you," and it was really terrifying," (Interview Transcript 2014). There was no indication that Frida's stalker was an ex-customer. His intimidation tactics imply he did not know her, but felt he could exploit her powerlessness relative to the hegemonic view of exchanges of sex and sexual provocation for money.

Another example of a hostile work environment is described in this quote from a cam performer. Workers in online environments such as Britney, confirmed and elaborated on Quinn's comments about camming:

Camming, because I never did it that much was usually like whatever I was going to do by myself normally, throughout the day and then I would load up in the evening or something like that and try to go for two or three hours. Test the waters and see if it was either a positive or hostile environment any given night (Britney, Interview Transcript 2014).

There was the sense in the interviews that sex workers were required to be attentive to the environment in different ways online than in physical space. Both Britney and Quinn mentioned careful observation. These workers were often alone in their apartments, logged onto a website, and engaging in sex work. Efforts to ensure the safety of themselves and other workers

mentioned in Britney's and Quinn's quotes involved less direct communication with other sex workers than that experienced by Piper at the fetish dungeon, or Halle on the film set, but more indirect and observational attention to safe practices.

In the U.S. occupational safety is the province of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and/or regional police. In the case of sex work, OSHA was not mentioned by any of my interviewees, but regional police were repeatedly discussed. One might guess that given the legality of ten of fourteen sex work trades, police would be allied with these workers against disorderly, harassing, or threatening clients. My research participants told a very different story. Here is a quote about the police from a participant who had worked as a stripper:

They just want us out. So there's only two clubs left. They come in; vice comes like every couple months just to fuck with us. They'll give us warnings. They sent me a warning saying "Hey you were too close to the edge of the stage with your top off. If you do it again these could be the ramifications." And every couple months, they'll come in just to warn us, no ticket, just warnings. "You're doing something bad and we see you," and it scares the shit out of us. We're thinking that we're going to get cited or ticketed or fined and before you know it you're going to be standing in front of a judge saying, "Oh I'm sorry my tits were three inches in front of his face instead of six." They're coming in, making me feel like I'm doing something wrong, and I am not. I'm not. (Violet, Interview Transcript 2014.

This quote and others like it demonstrate a strong degree of mistrust toward the police from sex workers. Workers in every trade I interviewed, with the exception of the sex surrogate, spoke about police mistrust. Violet described in the quote above a work environment that many would find intolerable simply because there are very few people available to trust. One must care for one's own safety because the work is done in a public place, and at the same time stigmatized.

Workers mentioned club bouncers, but bouncers were ultimately beholden to management, and workers discussed the need to tip the bouncer or suffer consequences of reduced cooperation, increasing fears for physical security.

Worker safety was an area where occupational structure was particularly relevant. Interviewees who worked at brothels, dungeons, and clubs open to the public all had access to better safety measures than independent entrepreneurs, yet they also were more commonly targeted by the police than workers in other trades. The sex surrogate I interviewed was deeply embedded in her community, which I interpreted as a measure of safety, and those who wrote erotica and performed phone sex had the benefit of distance through more substantial mediation than what most porn and cam performers had. Independent entrepreneurs especially, whether they were clip-makers, porn workers, escorts, or sugarbabies had to be vigilant guardians of their own personal safety. During the time period of my analysis an escort who was working out of her home and advertising for clients on a popular online classifieds site likely prevented her own murder at the hands of prospective client, 45-year-old Neal Falls. A news article stated, "Neal Falls, the Oregon man who may be linked to 10 or more missing or murdered women, was carrying a list of six other women when he was killed last week by a West Virginia sex worker" (Johnson 2015). As discussed in Chapter 2, sex workers are one of the most common targets of serial murderers. Other forms of violence were also concerning for workers, as evidenced by this quote from a sex worker blog:

SIGNAL BOOST! Women in Canada-Vancouver specifically East Van area. Old dark green mini-van with a beige stripe, 6ft white male driver - has attacked and stalked multiple women. Be careful, (Blog post January 2015).

The willingness to share this type of information online was evidence of sex workers commitment to safety precautions for all workers in addition to personal safety maintenance.

## **Active Resistance to the Stigmatization of Sex Work**

From the organizational to the individual level there are a number of people actively resisting the stigmatizing narrative and treatment of sex workers in the United States (Jackson 2016). Brents et al. noted "Organizations like the Sin City Alternative Professional's Association (SCAPA, affiliated with the Las Vegas chapter of the national Sex Worker's Outreach Project) and the Desiree Alliance (a national sex worker's rights organization) have begun to publicly express concern about brothel worker's rights," (2010: 151). As mentioned earlier, Nevada is the only state in the U.S. with legalized prostitution. The provisions for legalization are not statewide, rather they apply to 13 select counties where escorts are required to register with the county, and work only in brothels, never on the street or independently out of their homes. Despite the relative ease with which Nevada brothel workers are permitted to do their jobs, they still see a need for improved protection of their rights. This gives us a sense of the necessity of traditional forms of activism for sex workers, many of whom work illegally, as well as for those who find themselves targeted by police despite working in legal sex work trades.

One extensive list maintained by Sex Work Activists, Allies, and You listed 29 U.S. sex work activist groups, and 80 International sex work activist groups as of April 2013. The Desiree Alliance, the Sex Workers Outreach Project, and The Red Umbrella Project are all reliable organizations working day and night in support of sex worker's rights. The needs of sex workers in the United States remain so great that many of these organizations are stretched thin. For example, The Sex Workers Outreach Project provides a hotline, connections for funding, media outreach and advocacy, mentors and leadership training, connections to additional allies, and advising on self-care and sustainability. With approximately 58,000 arrests for prostitution in the U.S. in 2012 alone, the demand for resources is quite high. Sociological research has shown the ongoing financial effects of arrest, and how these are particularly difficult to bear for low-wage workers (Pager 2003). Even if a sex worker's organization focused its resources solely on



provisions for U.S. arrestees, that still would not allocate any attention towards changing policy to prevent future arrests.

So often, both in the stigmatization of sex work, and when allies try to support sex workers, those who do the work report feeling unheard. As a result sex worker organizations prioritized current and former sex workers taking up activist organizational roles. For this reason individual sex workers working in the media are an important element of active resistance against occupational stigma and the negative narratives of sex work. A few I profile here are Siouxsie Q who contributes The Whore Next Door column at SF Weekly, Aurora Snow who contributes articles to The Daily Beast, and Stoya who contributes at Vice.com. All three publications are news media outlets, though only SF Weekly has both a print edition and an online edition. I also provide support for these quotes from sex work bloggers.

Siouxsie Q has written about a wide range of issues relating to sex work, one of which is the effect of the Internet on her work,

I am thankful for the internet.... I'm specifically grateful for the safety it can afford sex workers. For starters, placing the crucial barriers of time and space between oneself and one's client allows for screening. At the very least, you get a moment to check your Spidey sense. When sex workers can manage their own ads, as well as book and screen their own clients, they don't need to rely as much on third parties, potentially protecting them from exploitation. The internet plays a key role in keeping the work safe, as well as independent, (Siouxsie Q 2015).

As this quote illustrated, Siouxsie Q argued the Internet enabled her to do her work (screen clients, manage ads, book appointments), and to provide for her own safety (screening clients, and avoiding third party intervention). The news column also afforded this worker a platform for discussing the work in ways that challenge prevailing stigma. She didn't say the Internet lured her in to sex work, or damaged her sexuality, or that she suffered through her work in the sex

industry. Rather, like many freelance employees, she took the position that doing her work independently was preferable, and the Internet enabled this preference.

Several articles at *The Daily Beast*, a web-based news outlet, some penned by former sex worker Aurora Snow, others written by sex work allies, also presented narratives that countered dominant stories about sex workers and the sex industry. A 2015 article stated, Dunham and a slew of other celebrities... have lent their fame to a campaign opposing Amnesty International's draft proposal on the protection of the rights of sex workers....

"If Kate Winslet and Lena Dunham are trading sex in a criminalized environment, then they should speak out [but] the role of an advocate and an ally is to step back and let these people speak," Jane (not her real name), a 30-year-old sex worker who has been practicing in New York City for eight years, told *The Daily Beast*.

She fully supports Amnesty International's proposal (Shire 2015).

This online news article depicted a regular phenomenon. Famous women opposed a policy that sex workers recognized as beneficial. Without interviewing sex workers for articles like this one, the status quo would be upheld. The willingness of a very few news media outlets to employ former sex workers as current journalists, and to interview sex workers regarding sex work policy offered these workers a chance to engage in active resistance.

A third well-known sex worker actively resisting negative portrayals of sex work and the sex industry was Stoya, who in addition to writing for *Vice.com*, had also performed in 65 porn films from 2007 to 2015, and directed 1 film in 2015 (Internet Adult Film Database 2016). Due to her involvement in these overlapping occupations, Stoya had written in her news media column about the experience of deciding whether or not to be interviewed. That she must carefully consider interview requests is an indication of the controversy surrounding sex work. She wrote,

When I consider accepting a request for an interview, I research the writer's previous work, personal blog, and Twitter stream to gauge whether their biases are likely to cause them to view me positively or negatively. I can also look at the publication that an article is intended for to evaluate what angle the final story is likely to have. If kind words about Gail Dines or Pat Robertson are found, it's probably a [takedown piece](#) and communication should be politely severed immediately (Stoya 2013).

This quote revealed Stoya's familiarity with the likelihood that internal bias towards sex work is evident in the work of those who write about sex workers and the sex industry. A takedown piece is a media article advocating the abolition of sex work. These types of biases can remain completely unexamined indefinitely. Thus sex workers reported being in the precarious position of not only needing opportunities to actively resist status quo depictions of their work, but also having to accept these opportunities with great care. Stoya's quote also revealed her belief in the magnitude of the power imbalance between status quo narratives about sex work and alternative narratives. With many other controversial issues, any press might be considered good press. Stoya argued that with sex work the potential for "a takedown piece" was great enough that "communication should be politely severed," and no attempts should be made to convince the person requesting the interview otherwise. Her argument was reminiscent of this quote from Scott: "Where resistance is collective, it is carefully circumspect; where it is an individual or small group attack on property, it is anonymous and usually nocturnal," (Scott 1985: 273). Indeed, the necessity of careful consideration before mounting challenges was a substantial component of sex workers' active resistance.

Some sex workers' forms of active resistance included engaging in pro-sex work theorizing online. They showed appreciation of one another's work by reblogging, or reposting each other's posts. This was the case in the following quote, which I found reposted between one male and one female active sex worker on a social media website. In this short thought

experiment, arguments sex workers say they have heard opposing sex work and the sex industry are paired up with a different job to reveal how unusual these arguments can seem to sex workers. In this case, a sex work blogger drew the parallel between being a sex worker and being a barista,

Why did you get a job as a barista? Were you forced to drink coffee as a kid? Did someone recruit you to work at the coffee shop? Do you make coffee outside of work? Does making coffee at work affect the way you make coffee at home? If you like coffee so much you should make it for free. You should give me a sample of your coffee so I know I like it. Is being a barista empowering? Do you do it because you love coffee or just for the \$? I've always wanted to be a barista, but I'd charge \$10,000 lol. Did you know that there are hundreds of thousands of underaged baristas forced against their will to make coffee? You making coffee is aiding in a system of oppression. The coffee industry is oppressive. Ban coffee drinkers. Save the baristas. End demand. (ArabelleRaphael on Instagram.com 2016)

The argument these statements make is that working in the sex industry has parallels to working in the coffee industry, but is treated with much greater suspicion and prejudice. People work in the sex industry because they need a job, just like baristas work at coffee shops because they need a job. In hegemonic stories about sex work meanings are attached to the work that are rarely attached to other forms of employment. In this quote most of the statements are somewhat absurd when applied to a job that is not sex work. Coffee is fitting for the parallel because many have documented worker exploitation in the coffee industry, yet few suggest the appropriate response to that exploitation would be to stop drinking coffee altogether.

During the time I was engaged in collecting interviews and online ethnography, there were at minimum four major events that led sex workers to pursue traditional forms of political participation. In October 2014 an Oakland, CA ordinance was updated to include "pimping,

prostitution, pandering, and solicitation" as rightful grounds for tenant evictions. Sex workers and allies protested at the city council meeting where the ordinance was being revised (Levin 2014). In New York sex workers protested the police use of condoms found on pedestrians as evidence of plans to solicit sex, and in 2013 Assembly Member Barbara Clark submitted to the New York City Council a revised No Condoms as Evidence Bill. Sex workers attended protests at the New York City Hall in April 2013 (sexworkersproject.org 2016). In October of 2013 sex workers and allies protested a Phoenix prostitution diversion initiative entitled Project ROSE (Reaching Out to the Sexually Exploited; now called Project Phoenix). The day after attending the protest Monica Jones, a transgender woman, was arrested and accused of "manifestation of prostitution," while walking down the street. Project ROSE organized police street sweeps, delivering arrestees to Bethany Bible Church, and Monica was an ally, not actually a sex worker (Swift 2013; Ford 2014). Recently in Brooklyn on September 3, 2015 sex workers and other activists protested the closure of Rentboy.com. About 100 protestors demanded dropped charges for Rentboy.com staffers and the decriminalization of prostitution (Tempey 2015). Sex worker political organizations including the Sex Workers Outreach Project, and the Red Umbrella Project have been instrumental in this type of political organizing.

Sex workers writing for news media organizations, serving at sex worker organizations, and picketing and rallying at city council meetings, City Hall, and against unfair policing are engaged in active resistance to the hegemonic treatment of their occupation. The stigma of the work, the effect sex work stigma has had to threaten or reduce narrative framing (i.e. telling friends and acquaintances of sex worker status), laws restricting some forms of sex work, and the minority status of sex workers relative to U.S. population, all create a hostile social environment for sex workers active resistance. Though I have demonstrated here a few active forms of resistance sex workers openly deploy, far more common and prevalent were what Scott called everyday resistance, or the ways sex workers quietly and consistently engaged in

counter-hegemonic practices. I focused on news media, online active resistance, and sex workers organizing protests against unfair policies in Phoenix, Oakland, and New York City.

### Conclusion

My interview data show consistent evidence that sex workers experience a high degree of stigma for their work and identities, and many felt the need to conceal their involvement in the industry from employers, family, and many friends. Most sex workers I interviewed began their work in the industry because they needed more money than they were making in other forms of employment, or during a pause in employment. Interviewees pursued gigs in the sex industry while also working outside the sex industry as actors, nurses, artists, social service providers, student employees, restaurant hostesses, and in retail shops. Some were students or single mothers with no other form of employment. Many entered the industry for financial gain, but nearly all explained they had other work opportunities, and therefore were not "survival sex workers" such as done to support of a drug habit (Levitt and Venkatesh 2007, Scambler 2007). A few interviewees reported using alcohol or marijuana before or during work, but most did not. Some told me they had been diagnosed with mental illness, a motivating factor to work in the sex industry since they could work during periods of illness, especially online. Most interview participants communicated clearly that their main motivations were for income (primary or supplementary) and that their job opportunities were constrained because they were students, single-parents, or disabled. These are consistent with other working class women's choices in a hierarchical capitalist society.

The next major pattern was an interaction effect between three variables: social ties, job security, and physical safety. All the workers I spoke with had experienced some type of threat to *social ties*. This often was in the manner of social rejection or isolation related to their work in the industry. A few stories from the interview data have already appeared in this chapter to illustrate the presence of stigma associated with sex work. Beyond there being consistent and proliferate tales of social rejection and judgment, it was also clear that the sources of these

negative outcomes tended to be either institutional (co-workers at the second job, people encountered in public, school administrators) or relational (family members, ex-romantic partners, ex-friends). Some of the interviewees reported experiencing social rejection by potential clients, but this was relatively rare and trade-specific. Workers also discussed threats to *job security* in the form of work that couldn't be listed on resumes, that damaged reputations at school even as workers tried to advance mainstream careers, and that tended to be part-time and supplementary. Finally, workers mentioned stigma-related threats to *physical safety*. Cam models discussed abusive clients with much greater regularity than porn actors, escorts, or fetish models. Sensual massage providers and strippers were more likely to mention pushy, though not abusive clients, than any other trade. Threats to physical security interacted with persistent fears and mistrust towards law enforcement, voiced in nearly every interview. Even stripping, arguably the most socially acceptable form of sex work, produced tales of fear of cops or disrespect from cops relating to the sex industry affiliation. In light of these powerful negative social forces (stigma-induced threats to social, job, and physical safety) the variable of social support had extremely great importance in the workers lives. All of the workers I spoke with mentioned the deep importance of some people in their lives who supported their careers and accepted them in spite of powerful negative messages around sex work.

Finally, there was another interaction effect in the interviews between political awareness, more specifically critiques of porn piracy, misogyny, and capitalism, and activism, both traditional/active resistance, and more passive, everyday forms of resistance. Most workers I interviewed argued the problem with sex work was not inherent in the work itself. Many interview participants had regular romantic relationships, were good parents, were considered reliable workers in other fields of employment, and apart from their involvement with the industry seemed rather average. However they tended to identify occupational stigma as the source of ongoing difficulty in their lives and take up politicized and activist positions in response to that context. Some discussed the issue of porn piracy as a key problem. Some critiqued

capitalism and its inherent tendency towards worker exploitation. Some critiqued misogyny. Almost all were concerned about anti-sex regulations and the police. There were many relevant reasons these workers gave for maintaining activist and politically aware identities. Of the two techniques for political activity mentioned in the cultural cognition literature (narrative framing and identity vouching) sex work activism I observed in blog posts and in the interview data more commonly took the form of identity vouching. This could be a problematic political tactic however, because nearly every sex worker I spoke with had lost some friends or experienced some other penalty after revealing their identity as a current or former sex worker. Narrative framing was a less commonly engaged tactic, probably partially because many sex workers feel misunderstood, so they are less likely to want to pitch their arguments to specific audiences for fear it will lead to further misunderstanding. When articles like Marshall's (2015) imply all sex workers are just neoliberals demanding an unregulated free market for the sale of sex, the ire of many socialist and communitarian sex workers is raised. Given these overall patterns, the interaction between sex work stigma-related insecurities, mistrust towards law enforcement, and social support, as well as political awareness and activism, we are left with questions for future research into social forces responsible for the maintenance of sex work stigma.

A great deal of academic research and popular press documenting the voices of sex workers has been published, with new articles and books coming out every day (Mielke 2015, Escamilla Loredo 2014, Armstrong 2014, Nyanzi 2013). Internationally, the organization Amnesty International in August 2015 decided to support the international decriminalization of prostitution. In the United States anti-human trafficking and anti-prostitution activism remains politically powerful and police refer to suspicion of human trafficking frequently in conjunction with their arrests for prostitution. There is ongoing political maneuvering to disenfranchise those suspected of prostitution, whether it is through using condoms as evidence (HRW.org 2012), or making it legal to evict a person suspected of prostitution from his/her home. Books like *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution* (Marshall 2015) tell one woman's story about how



ashamed she is of having worked as a prostitute. Meanwhile anthologies, such as *Spread* (Aimee, Kaiser, and Ray 2014), and *Prose & Lore Collected Issues 1-5: Memoir Stories About Sex Work (Volume 5)* (Ray and Alanna 2015) contain hundreds of workers stories from the sex industry, but are often overlooked by pop culture critics. In the context of multiple stigma-related outcomes, the necessity for sex worker resistance is ongoing. Like the Malaysian peasants Scott studied, U.S. sex workers must resist the police, mischaracterizations of their work, the judgment of peers, and be wary of employers who might seek to exploit their unwillingness or inability to pursue justice through normative channels. It is these forces that ultimately help to cultivate a need for out-group social support.

The necessity for a belief-system based on fair and just exchange between members of an outcast community, appeared heightened in relation to stigma as illustrated by this research. Sex workers remain marginalized to date, and evidence of stigma was persistent in the interview and online data. In response to public perceptions, sex workers often experienced social isolation, and some experienced rejection by family members, friends, and employees in other industries, classmates, university teachers, and ex-boyfriends. In response to social rejection, sex workers became politically aware of occupational stigma, and sought the social support of other sex workers. Political awareness manifested in two outward ways. Some sex workers engaged in public protest of anti-sex work policies, and police procedures. More commonly, and consistent with the large majority of sex workers I interviewed (33 of 36), sex workers participated in everyday resistance. They worked to provide for their own safety and the safety of other sex workers, disseminated occupational information to encourage skills acquisition by other sex workers, and sex industry consumers, and finally they rebelled against a culture that criminalizes some forms of their work, by discussing and blogging how to break the law and how to avoid getting caught. Contrary to recent sociological research that finds an increase in the popularity, or mainstreaming of pornographic content, there was little evidence of

decreased stigma or increased power and/or legitimacy for sex workers in relation to wider culture.

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## Chapter 4: Screening Sex Work: Culture, Film, and Commercial Sex

### Introduction

In the hugely successful film, *X-Men: First Class*, a sultry woman wearing a fringe bikini and go-go boots walks along a lit-glass raised bar at a posh 1960's-era nightclub. The character, Angel Salvadore unfurls large wings resembling those of a dragonfly and hovers over two seated superheroes in plainclothes. By the conclusion of this film, Ms. Salvadore has sided with the opposition to the heroic X-Men. She is a traitor and her story concludes with the loss of her mutant powers. This scene of an untrustworthy stripper with wings who can spit fire has become an important cultural document. Few people outside the U.S. sex industry know strippers personally, so, for many, popular films have become defining representations of sex workers and the sex industry. As we have seen many workers in the sex industry tend to be guarded about their involvement, such that popular films, fictional portrayals, and nonfiction accounts of sex workers are among the primary cultural definitions of the sex industry and those in its employ. This chapter asks what is the public seeing when sex workers are portrayed in popular films?

Given the important cultural impact of the Internet, and present-day discussions of digital knowledge (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2011, Hargittai 2010) it remains to be seen whether Internet adoption rates, which have increased annually since 1990 and as of 2014 were at 87% for all U.S. residents, lead to increases in status for the under-privileged, or changes in public perceptions for marginalized groups (Fox and Rainie 2014). A 2010 study found that older white males were more likely to have more advanced Web-use skill (Hargittai 2010). Older white males are the predominant demographic for popular film directors (Hunt and Ramon 2015). With the increased likelihood that U.S. popular film directors have access to the full span of information on the Web, might this have led to a decrease in stereotypes for marginalized groups?



In this chapter I trace changes in societal attitudes toward sex work by analyzing one type of cultural representation: popular films. I examine the extent and persistence of negative representations of sex work in popular U.S. films, and evaluate these representations in light of the impact of the Internet. In my research I documented the frequency, type, and tone of sex work representations in popular films over a 24-year span of time. After a brief literature review, I checked the sex work portrayals for statistically significant change over time. I found no statistically significant change over time in the number, or type of references to sex work and the sex industry in U.S. popular films. Rates of negative portrayals of sex workers and the sex industry remained consistently much higher than rates of neutral or positive portrayals, even as the Internet became more commonly used, and enabled increasing numbers of U.S. residents to access vastly greater amounts of information with ease. I then presented a close reading of sex worker and industry portrayals in four films. Next I sorted all films into three sections, one on positive depictions, one on neutral depictions, and one on negative depictions. Where applicable I cited responses from sex work bloggers towards the films discussed in this chapter. My goal is to examine the degree of stereotypes associated with sex work and the sex industry in one popular culture medium and look for changes over time (Musial 2014). This research is intended to clarify the relationship among the Internet, popular culture, and marginalized populations such as sex workers.

#### Sociological Analyses of Popular Culture

Social scientists are concerned with negative stereotypes because we know that repeated exposure to lies or misrepresentations of an issue can lead even people who should know better to believe the lies are true (Fazio et al. 2015). The phenomenon known as the illusory truth effect has been documented by psychologists since the 1970's, and is one reason that studying stereotypes in popular culture is particularly important, and can even be used to understand things like the persistence of stigma. The time period of widespread adoption of the World Wide Web has been characterized by changes in society towards more permissive

sexual mores according to some (Dines 2011, Jensen 2007). During the same time period U.S. attitudes have become more accepting towards premarital sex (Elias, Fullerton, and Simpson 2015). Scholars argue the addition of the Internet into homes and mobile communication devices has increased the likelihood of exposure to pornographic materials, and since the tools for accessing the Internet (computers and mobile phones) are often personal devices, the use of those tools to access pornographic materials can happen in private. The issue of privacy is particularly important for explaining an increase in likelihood of pornographic content viewing, because sexuality is a private issue for most people (Irvine 2014). Not only is sexuality considered a private matter, but commercial sexuality also harbors connotations of fear and shame for both consumers and producers (Frank 2002, Weitzer 2009). Negative stereotypes increase the likelihood of fear and shame surrounding sexual practices.

The critical theory approach to media and film is characterized by the view that most mass media is a tool to disseminate hegemonic ideals and maintain the interests of the dominant power structure (Gramsci 1971, Frith 2015). In this perspective media conglomerate owners driven by a for-profit motive invest in media products that preserve the status quo. When minority cultures are portrayed, it is often to the disadvantage of those cultures, by neglecting to employ members of the community to represent themselves, disregarding stories members of minority communities tell about themselves in favor of dominant stereotypes, and various other methods. As media scholars have written:

The asymmetry in representational power has generated intense resentment among minoritarian communities, for whom the casting of a non-member of the "minority" group is a triple insult, implying (a) you are unworthy of self-representation; (b) no one from your community is capable of representing you; and (c) we, the producers of the film, care little about your offended sensibilities, for we have the power and there is nothing you can do about it, (Shohat and Stam 1994).

Additional arguments from a critical theory perspective are found in the work of Winseck (2008) on media ownership and DeBord on spectacle (1967). Scholars have documented the trend in media ownership towards consolidation of most production companies into the hands of a few large media conglomerates (Winseck 2008). This consolidation leaves audiences of popular film with as few as 6 parent companies responsible for more than half the options in any given year's Top 50 Box Office successes. Critics have pointed out that a likely outcome of consolidation is a tendency of production companies to invest in films that are safe bets for market success (Winseck 2008). Films that strongly challenge societal norms, for instance, would be less likely to receive funding in this market context, so patterns in sex work representation may be consistent across films, and consistent with the larger politicization of the topic.

Historical analyses of marginalized populations in film often necessitate a discussion of the Motion Picture Production Code, a set of U.S. film industry guidelines that regulated and restricted filmic depictions of morality. These guidelines were maintained by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) from 1930 through 1968, with the strongest period of enforcement occurring from 1934 to 1954 (Vasey 1995). Since the Production Code was a set of morality guidelines for films, populations of workers who were criminalized, often female, often queer, and sexual, as is the case with sex workers, definitely experienced effects of the code regarding their filmic representations. "Though the Production Code administrators booked no lewdness or nudity, their main goal was to censor ideas. The censors were absolutely fixated on the messages movies transmitted," (LaSalle 2000). The MPAA's media censorship became focused in 1934 and female actors disproportionately felt its impact. Prior to 1934, many of the most famous roles for women in film involved topics that would soon become taboo, such as divorce, female sexuality, and even prostitution, performed by "assertive, free, happy women" (LaSalle 2000). After enforcement of the Code was institutionalized, these roles were no longer

available for many years. Even long after 1968, roles such as those in pre-code cinema were rare; a clear illustration of how regulation and restriction of ideas in film created a silence, or worse yet encouraged the criminalization and shaming of sexual behavior.

Social scientists have historically considered the relationship between cultural products such as films, and audiences: in some cases via analysis of a film's messages, and in others via audience reception (Jackson and Vares 2015, Meischke 1995, Shively 1992). The symbolic interactionism approach to media scholarship focuses on the dialectic relationship between producers and consumers for determining the meaning and value of media products in society, and it shares similarities with the Reader-Response literary theory (Kim et al. 2007, Meischke 1995, Shively 1992, Ellis 1990). One such study compared marginalized and non-marginalized people viewing films, specifically “matched groups of American Indian and Anglo males,” viewing Western films, also known as the cowboys and Indians genre (Shively 1992). Shively found marginalized groups viewed the film in the role of the film’s protagonist, despite the fact that protagonist roles in this genre are universally filled by the dominant racial group (whites). These findings aligned with some critical theory media theorists who have argued the hegemonic ideal portrayed in mass media products is seductive and easily adopted (Bordo 2004, Schor 1999, Gramsci 1971, deBord 1967). Symbolic interactionists are likely to stress the social construction of film interpretation and enjoyment in contrast to critical theorists who may focus on production aspects of film.

The symbolic interactionist approach to media theory holds that although hegemonic ideals are promoted and reinforced in mass media, there are also variable, often unpredictable fan responses to media, which alter the meaning of media products, such as films (Kern 2014). Media scholars document the interaction between highly popular films and television shows and the fan cultures that have blossomed in response, many facilitated by the medium of the Internet (Salmon and Symons 2004, Jenkins 2008). Fans are often responsible for the perpetuation and extension of media products beyond the primary media into proliferate

secondary media without the approval or even knowledge of primary authors/creators (Jamison 2013, Salmon and Symons 2004). Internet phenomena such as television show discussion boards and audience-produced memes and short films utilize elements of popular films in ways that diverge from the intent of film companies. Indeed, the Internet is characterized by its dual function as a location for the production and consumption of media content.

Feminist film critique has shown that forms of oppression, such as stereotypes, exclusion, and discrimination intersect (Crenshaw 1991). One way to think about intersecting oppressions in film production is to consider how white female directors are rare, but black female directors are rarer (Hunt and Ramon 2015). For example, in 2013 women directed only 6.2% of popular films (2015). This statistic illustrates how women had a reduced chance relative to men of attaining the powerful position of Director. Minority race/ethnicity directors were also rare in 2013 (17.3% of all directors), which demonstrates the presence of intersectional oppression in the film industry (Hunt and Ramon 2015). So, if a person was black and female in 2013, evidence suggests she had little chance at obtaining the position of popular film Director. Intersecting oppressions can occur via race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and/or body size. Media studies have documented the consistent presence of stereotypical film and televisual portrayals of class (Butsch 2010), race (Shively 1992, Shohat and Stam 1994), gender and sexual orientation (Kim et al. 2007), and race and gender (Merskin 2007). When stereotypes prevail in the media, it undermines viewers' ability to remain critical.

If there is a tendency towards stereotypical representations of sex workers in the media, then we can expect to encounter intersecting oppressions of class (specifically occupation), gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity in film, though other intersections are possible. Sex work oppression also takes the form of moral oppression: the dominant culture's morals and values are used to oppress a subculture's behavior. Moral oppression is evident when a former sex worker concludes it is morally wrong that her job as a sex worker required her to have sex with many partners; therefore all sex work should be stopped (for example, see: Moran 2015). There

are subcultures throughout the United States that condone multiple sex partners over the life course (Aubrey and Smith 2013). Polyamory and swinger subcultures have rules and structured practices for multiple, simultaneous sex partners (Anapol 2012, Taormino 2008). Even polygamy has been represented in a mass media television show (Kean 2015). Moral oppression is effective because it exploits one or many subordinate power structures. Sex work is particularly vulnerable to moral oppression as it intersects with many of the forms of the oppression discussed above.

#### Methods for Analyzing Cultural Representation

My research methodology follows Gould et al.'s (2003) research on media portrayals of suicides and subsequent reporting and Jamieson's (2003) suicide representations in film. The goal of my research was to assess the extent to which the expanded influence of the Internet on society has led to a change in popular culture representations of the sex industry from 1990 through 2013. I combined data from multiple sources, including *Screen World*<sup>7</sup> publications by Monush (2013), and two websites: the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) (IMDB.com 2015), and Box Office Mojo (Boxofficemojo.com 2015). This data selection process generated a list of 1200 films.

The Internet Movie Database is a crowd-sourced collection of data edited by paid database employees containing information on 2,814,650 movie titles spanning the years of 1880 – 2021 (IMDB 2014). Films are classified by genre, production company, cast, and film content such as plot summary, plot synopsis, and keywords. I used Box Office Mojo to add the director and production company of each film to my variable list. If a film contained references to the sex industry, I checked the plot synopsis for that film to see if I could find a description of the occurrence. Utilizing this method I was able to identify the portion of films from the total

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<sup>7</sup> *Screen World* is an annual publication, which includes a list of the Top 100 Box Office films in publication from 1949 to the present, including my time period of analysis.

population that portrayed commercial sex exchanges in any form. I then counted the frequency of occurrence of commercial sex in the Top 50 Box Office films for each year (n=204).

To determine the type and tone of sex work representations in popular films I analyzed film transcripts, film clips, full films, and plot synopses for each movie in my sample of portrayals of commercial sex. I coded each for tone of representation of both the sex worker and the sex industry (positive, neutral, or negative). I graphed the frequency of positive, neutral, and negative occurrence with a separate line for each. Film clips and movie scripts are easily sourced online, although not every film in the data set had both available online. When film data were unavailable online I rented full films from Netflix.com or my local movie store. I used content analysis to code the tone of depictions of sex workers. Positive portrayals of the character/industry were defined as those in which the workers or industry was relatable to the viewer. Neutral depictions were defined as those where the workers or industry was neither relatable, nor feared/shamed. Negative depictions were defined as those where the workers or industry was depicted as something to be feared, reviled, shamed, mocked, shunned, or criminalized.

A note on being relatable: Bloom (2014) argues "our public decisions will be fairer and more moral once we put empathy aside." He states, "Without empathy, we are better able to grasp the importance of acts that impose costs on real people in the here and now for the sake of abstract future benefits." The short-term effect of being able to relate to a sex worker in a popular film will be that the viewer perceives sex workers' humanity regardless of occupation. The long-term abstract future benefit that correlates with this perceived humanity would likely be that viewers would in turn support a reduction in sex work stigma and the decriminalization of prostitution. The primary argument against the decriminalization of prostitution in the literature is

the possibility that it would increase incidents of human trafficking (Weitzer 2015). No scientifically valid studies to date prove this to be the case<sup>8</sup>.

#### Tests of Statistical Significance of Sex Work Portrayals

The data collection process from the Top 50 Box Office films resulted in a pool of 1200 films over twenty-four years (1990 - 2013). Of 1200 films, 204 involved depictions of some aspect of the sex industry. Nora Ephron was the only female director in the 204 films of the sample (*Sleepless in Seattle* 1993). Twenty-three years of popular film depictions of sex work reveal a consistent trend: there is no statistically significant change in number of films portraying sex work over time<sup>9</sup>. I ran a t-test on the table of number of portrayals per year. I grouped the dataset into two periods: the first half of the data (1990-2000) and the second half of the data (2001-2013). There was no statistically significant difference in the number of portrayals between the years when the Internet was relatively novel and likely to be used by only a small pool of tech-forward individuals, to when Internet-adoption had firmly taken hold within U.S. culture to the extent that 87% of residents say they use it daily. I also tried moving the break to create different pools like defining period 1 as 1990-2001, and period 2 as 2002-2013. The findings stayed consistent.

In all 23 years there were two peaks (1996 and 2003) when as much as 30% of the top 50 films<sup>10</sup> (14 and 15 films annually respectively) included at least one depiction of sex work and/or the sex industry. The years with the fewest number of depictions of sex work in Top 50 films were 2009 and 2011 (3 depictions in each year). Regardless of these peaks and valleys,

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<sup>8</sup> For a review of the scientific errors in popularly cited studies linking legalized prostitution to trafficking by Cho et al. (2012) and Jakobssen and Kotsdam (2013) see Weitzer (2015).

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Patricia Oslund, Research Associate at the Institute for Policy & Social Research, University of Kansas for her assistance with the statistical analyses.

<sup>10</sup> It is much easier to find films that are accurate representations of sex work outside of lists of the most popular films annually (Titsandsass.com 2015). One can locate films made by sex workers about sex work (Maitra 2010). Many are documentaries: *License to Pimp* 2009, *Straight for the Money* 1994, *Meet the Fokkens* 2011, *Remedy* 2014. Others are original creations made by outsiders to the sex industry: *Scarlet Road* 2014, *Fading Gigolo* 2013, *Don Jon* 2013, *From the Head* 2012, *Careless Love* 2012, *Heidi Fleiss*, *Hollywood Madam* 1995. These films are not widely seen, in some cases in spite of big production budgets.



there was no recognizable trend in the data. One can say with some certitude that on average 8 to 9 films of the 50 top films annually will contain a portrayal of sex work and the sex industry. This is consistent from 1990 through 2013. Having established this average is consistent, I next sought to determine, and did the frequency of negative depictions of sex workers and/or the sex industry decrease over time?

To measure whether the likelihood that given a depiction of sex work in a film existed, it would be negative, I first calculated the percent of films depicting sex work that were negative for each year in the dataset. On average about 65% of popular film depictions of sex workers were negative each year. Once again I created two periods, the early years of Internet adoption for period 1 and the later years of Internet adoption for period 2. I ran a t-test comparing period 1 to period 2 to see if negative depictions of sex workers had decreased over time. I found that no; there was no statistically significant decrease of negative depictions of sex workers in Top 50 films annually over time during the Digital Age. The likelihood that the depiction of a sex worker in a top grossing film was negative stayed higher than the likelihood of a neutral or positive depiction at a rate of about 3 negative depictions to 1 positive or neutral in any given year.

I also checked for differences in depictions of the sex industry in popular film over time. On average about 72% of all depictions of the sex industry in Top 50 grossing films annually were negative. Positive and neutral depictions of the sex industry combined made up only about 28% of all types of depiction each year. Once again the likelihood of a negative depiction of the sex industry stayed consistent over time. Even as more information about the sex industry may be available to people due to the spread of the Internet, there has been no change in negative portrayals of the sex industry in popular film.

#### Content Analysis of Depictions of Sex Work in Popular Film

Film portrayals most commonly depicted the sex work trades of stripping, escorting and street prostitution, and nude modeling in pornographic magazines. Less frequently depicted trades



work and the sex industry. Figure 4 also reveals evidence of stigmatization through the censoring of counter-hegemonic storytelling. In terms of the frequency of words used to describe the sex industry and types of representations of sex work, some stories are told repeatedly, while others appear not to exist at all. Note the relatively substantial size of the words club and brothel, which are terms denoting the presence in the film of work environments for sex workers. Work environments communicated the film's stance toward the sex industry, because they give us a sense of the part of the work the employee does not control, rather the employer, or owner is responsible.

Given what we now know, that in 23 years the U.S. film industry has been consistent in both the number of Top 50 films annually containing a representation of sex work (on average 8.5 per year), and the tone of the representation (likelier to be negative than not), it is important that we understand what those consistent representations communicate. The increased access to information brought about by the Internet has not affected the tone of fictional portrayals of sex workers and the sex industry in film. If we observe the content of representations, then we learn some of the most popular narratives about sex work and the sex industry in consistent circulation over time. If these narratives present a stereotype of sex work and the sex industry, what is that stereotype? Recognizing a stereotypical narrative in entertainment products and testing whether or not that stereotype is consistent can help us better understand as researchers if there is common and easily-accessed inaccuracy about a population. The illusory truth mechanism functions when an inaccurate statement is repeated enough times that it fools the viewer into believing it's true. If there are widely-available consistent depictions of an occupation, even across the time period that a greater diversity of stories became easily accessible through the Internet, then that is an important factor in stereotype-construction to note.

I divide the data into positive, neutral, and negative depictions of workers and the industry. Examples of the workers are as follows. An example of a positive depiction of a sex

worker can be found in the film, *Independence Day* 1996. A main character's girlfriend works as a stripper named Jasmine, and in the film she is a faithful partner, good parent, and when necessary demonstrates a selfless willingness to help others in need. An example of a neutral depiction of a sex worker can be found in the film, *Major League 2* 1994. Nude models in the magazine *Playboy* offer a baseball player something to focus on when he's feeling nervous during baseball games. He uses the model interviews to take his mind off his fears and his in-game performance improves as a result. An example of a negative depiction of a sex worker can be found in the film *Out for Justice* 1991. Sex workers in this film are street prostitutes, shown on the street being beaten by their pimps, and part of the environment that harbors a fugitive drug dealer cop killer.

I pair discussions of different types of worker depictions with positive, neutral, and negative depictions of the sex industry. In these depictions I took note of the work environment when sex workers were depicted, noting whether it was outdoors or indoors, who was present aside from sex workers, and cleanliness. An example of a positive depiction of the sex industry can be found in the film, *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* 2003. The investigators, called angels in the film, perform a striptease at an up-scale club with a racially diverse cast of women, which gives them access to the villain without his knowledge that he's being manipulated for clues. The workers are indoors, the location appears well-kept, the workers look healthy and happy, and their audience maintains respectful distance. When approached by a dancer, one audience-member keeps his hands to himself and lets the dancer determine the interaction. In terms of the plot, the sex industry is cooperating and aiding a criminal investigation. An example of a neutral depiction of the sex industry can be found in the film, *The Fisher King* 1991. One of the main characters works at a video store, and one room of the store has all walls covered with shelves of porn films. The video store appears independently-owned, and the room indicates the presence of a market for sex industry products that benefits small-businesses. These video containers and the presence of this room do not bother the characters or detract from the plot;

in fact they are associated with one of the more morally strong characters in the film. They are just present as a part of the store. An example of a negative depiction of the sex industry can be found in the film *The Mirror Has Two Faces* 1996. This film includes a portrayal of a phone sex hotline called "Hot Talk," staffed by "Briana, Tina, Marla, and Felicia." When an unlucky-in-love protagonist calls the number for relationship advice the phone sex operator replies with "You think too much. Don't you want to know how big my tits are?" The industry appears staffed by airheads and hustlers, unwilling to break from script in spite of the slightly unusual profit opportunity.

### **Consistency in Popular Film Depictions of Sex Work Over Time**

The years 1990 and 2013 bookend the data I collected. In 1990 there were 10 references to sex work in the top 50 grossing films, and in 2013 there were 11 references. Six portrayals in each of these two years depicted sex workers negatively, while seven depictions of the sex industry were negative in 1990 and eight were negative in 2013. Numerically there was an approximate consistent number and type of sex work portrayals in a year when only 14% of people in the United States used the Internet, and twenty-three years later when 87% of people in the United States used the Internet.

A closer examination of depictions during these two years shows the degree of similarity. In 1990 the film *Back to the Future III* was released by Universal pictures, directed by Steven Spielberg. In *Back to the Future III* the protagonists travel back in time from 1990 to 1885 and multiple scenes occur in a town saloon. Twice the camera pans to three escorts employed at the saloon. The escorts do not have dialogue. The other women in town are fully clothed; the main female protagonist wears a full-sleeve, full-length dress with petticoats, and gloves for much of the film. In contrast the escorts wear only bloomers, bare arms, and corsets displaying their cleavage. The escorts are the only women in the saloon, and they do not smile. The saloon is populated with drinking men who mock the protagonist and in a later scene the film's antagonist finds and issues threats to the protagonist in this location. By 2013 the use of sex

workers as symbols of a bad place and bad people, indeed to act as a foil against respectable women had not changed. The film *The Heat* is about two female police who work together to solve crimes. An early scene of *The Heat* involves one protagonist policewoman sitting in her car observing a man in a different car negotiating with a scantily-clad woman standing on the street. Three women stand in an unsmiling group near the woman leaning into the car on the street. All of these women wear short skirts or shorts with heels and small tops baring cleavage. The one woman leaning into the car and negotiating with the man stops and walks away when the protagonist policewoman wearing jeans, a t-shirt, a vest, and gloves walks up and shows her badge. The policewoman requests the man's wallet and phone, and uses them to call the man's wife and report she found him "with a known prostitute." Film directors for both *The Heat* and *Back to the Future III* took care to separate and illustrate the differences between respectable women and sex workers. The sex workers in these two films associated with bad people (drunks, cheating husbands) in bad places (the saloon, the street). Their presence in each film was a simple way to establish bad people and the wrong way to live.

The similarities between the film *Back to the Future III* 1990 and the film *The Heat* 2013 were not aberrant in relation to other film comparisons from 1990 and 2013. Each of those two films contained depictions of sex workers that lasted around three minutes. A different pair of films also contained similar depictions for closer to eight minutes of their total runtimes: *Marked for Death* 1990 and *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013. *Marked for Death* was an action film released by 20th Century Fox starring Steven Segal, while *The Wolf of Wall Street* was classified as a drama film released by Paramount starring Leonardo DiCaprio. Both featured moral ambiguity in their lead characters, though Segal's character John Hatcher was depicted as ultimately a good person, while DiCaprio's character Jordan Belfort was portrayed as ruthless, greedy, and hedonistic without many redeeming qualities. The moral ambiguity of the protagonists was one reason the sex worker portrayals were more extensive. In *Marked for Death* the second scene of the film was set in a strip club. A long camera shot of a nearly naked

dancer on a raised stage with lights at the edge and a stripper poll filled the third minute of the film. Also portrayed was the dancer's one entranced client sitting at the edge of the stage in a suit and tie. The club was small and the camera mainly focused on the dancer's body. The protagonist and his ally passed through the club, stopped to talk to the dancer's client, and then were led through a back room to a different area of the building. The second area was a brothel. The protagonists walked down a long hall with small rooms on each side. The door to one of these small rooms was open and it showed a woman in tight leopard-print pants, a bustier, and jewelry cajoling a prone man on a bed. *Marked for Death* 1990 did three things in its portrayal of the sex industry: it depicted a strip club and a brothel as related businesses, it indicated there were many employees in the industry, and it showed they wore little clothing.

Between the second and third sex worker depictions in *Marked for Death* 1990, the film showed other details about the environment to indicate this business was located in Mexico, and it was owned by a drug dealer. After a scene in which Hatcher is threatened by men with guns, he and his ally run back through the brothel out of the club. This getaway scene included a third depiction of a sex worker. As the two men passed another slightly open door, Hatcher's ally pushed the door fully open to reveal a topless woman who spoke to him in Spanish. The pretty and soft-spoken woman distracted the man with her initial statement, and then used her advantage to pull a gun and shoot him. The escort's actions mortally wounded Hatcher's partner prompting Hatcher to return fire and kill her. This third sex work depiction in *Marked for Death* 1990 portrayed sex workers as beautiful, duplicitous, and threatening.

Some details of *Marked for Death* 1990 may seem excessive, but they were also a time-honored popular culture technique. Twenty-three years later the film *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013 contained many parallel portrayals to *Marked for Death* 1990, including portrayals of strippers, escorts, and the threat of mortal violence. The first occurrence of a sex work portrayal in *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013 (WWS) was a narrative reference in the second scene of the film. The protagonist Jordan Belfort said "I also gamble like a degenerate, I drink like a fish, I

fuck hookers maybe five, six times a week, I have three different federal agencies looking to indict me, oh yeah, and I love drugs," (WWS 2013). During this voice-over there was a short scene of Belfort and a naked woman (not his wife) doing drugs. The apparent sex worker was indoors, in a very nice apartment, and the camera focused on her body. In the film's second portrayal of sex workers, a large open floor of a high-rise building contained desks, computers, and many men wearing suits, button-up shirts, and ties and was the scene of an office party. Belfort was on a microphone and said "send in the strippees," which caused about forty women wearing lace and sequin undergarments and heels to run into the party. The office workers grab at the women and some push the women around. Similar to the first brothel scene in *Marked for Death* 1990, this scene in *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013 communicated many women and many clients were involved in the sex industry, and the interactions between worker and client were brief and somewhat anonymous. WWS contained two more spoken descriptions of sex workers before a third visual depiction, one referring to a "prostitution ring." In the third visual depiction a long quote narrated three waves of lingerie-clad women entering once again an office space. The voice-over described the scene, dwelling on class differences amongst escorts and street-prostitutes. Belfort stated,

Then came the Pink Sheet hookers, who were the lowest form of all, usually a streetwalker or the sort of low-class hooker who showed up in response to a desperate late-night phone call to a number in Screw magazine or the yellow pages. They usually cost a hundred dollars or less, and if you didn't wear a condom, you'd get a penicillin shot the next day and then pray that your dick didn't fall off, (WWS 2013).

This scene from WWS paralleled the third portrayal of a sex worker in *Marked for Death* 1990, because sex workers represented a mortal threat to the clients. The film asserted the worker's desperation resulted in poor self-care practices, which hurt their clients. Furthermore, the



scenes and narration taken together depicted sex workers as greedy, voiceless, and morally corrupt.

These four films, *Back to the Future III* 1990, *The Heat* 2013, *Marked for Death* 1990, and *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013 each contained one or more depictions of sex work and the sex industry and show the depth of stereotype persistence. Whether the films had fewer or more scenes depicting sex workers, or were newer or older, the following trends remained consistent. Sex workers were escorts, strippers, or street prostitutes, they didn't enjoy their job, they were morally corrupt, they didn't wear much clothing, and they spent their time with people who sold and did drugs, cheated, and killed people. They worked on the street, in drinking houses, bars, and brothels, and when they did outcall they went to large office spaces where the clientele outnumbered the sex workers usually two or three to one. They were rarely depicted with any type of control or agency except when they asserted their right to hurt another character in the movie. While some of the 204 films I studied contained positive and neutral portrayals of sex workers, the four films described here depict many of the key ingredients found in the many negative depictions in the remaining films.

### **Positive Depictions**

Observing the range of positive portrayals of sex workers (n=39), this tended to occur when a character in the film was a sex worker and she had positive character traits. An example is in *Charlie Wilson's War* 2007, a film set in the 1980's that contains a scene of *Playboy* magazine models in a hot tub. These women are depicted as highly attractive and their presence at the event confers a kind of cultural capital due to their affiliation with the uniquely popular adult magazine *Playboy*. I therefore coded the portrayal of these sex workers as positive. In another film, *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* 2008, the main character becomes the most popular hair stylist at his salon by offering sexual services along with his beauty services. Sex work permits him to transition out of an earlier life of danger as an Israeli special agent, into a life of giving pleasure and beauty, and he's the movie protagonist. In *The Hangover* 2009, the

first mention of strippers is as the butt of a joke. Not only did a character marry a stripper as the result of a drunken blackout, but the film's protagonists also had to parent her child until they can locate the child's actual parent. Nonetheless, when the protagonists return the child to mother the stripper character is understandably highly disturbed over the temporary loss of her child, and reasonable about the necessity of obtaining a divorce. I coded this portrayal of a sex worker as positive. Other positive depictions of sex workers appeared in the films *Valentine's Day* 2010, *The Book of Eli* 2010, *Step Brothers* 2008, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* 2005, and *Starsky & Hutch* 2004. My prior experience working with and interviewing actual sex workers indicates many would dispute any of these characters as realistic or accurate representations of themselves and associates. I was not coding for accuracy; these were not documentary films. Popular film is an important cultural realm for fantasy and the display of artistic license.

Positive depictions of sex workers and even a few of the sex industry do occur in the data set. The film *We're the Millers* 2013 is told from the vantage point of a male lead, but much of the movie is about a group of people, a drug dealer, stripper, latch-key kid, and a street kid, together pretending to be a nuclear family on a road trip. The stripper character, Rose O'Reilly not only invites empathy from the audience, but some of her actions directly ensure the success of the group's goal achievement. Rose-the-stripper's storyline is vital to the plot throughout the film, but the sex industry that employs her does not fare so well. Rose is poor, and her boss exploits her poverty by telling her a new policy now requires her to have sex with the customers while she's on shift at the club. The sex industry is depicted negatively in what are usual tropes within the dataset: exploitative, seedy, and male-owned. Another recent film *The Best Man Holiday* 2013 offers an even more nuanced portrayal of sex workers and the sex industry. This film also involves an ensemble cast, but the cast is much larger so Candace's story, while important, is relatively less so than Rose's story in the film *We're the Millers*. In *The Best Man Holiday* Candace, a former stripper, is currently employed as a head of admissions at a prestigious private school and married to the school principal Harper. Candace and Harper's

fortunes take a turn for the worse when one of the school's wealthy patrons decides to withdraw his investment because a video has surfaced of Candace in her younger days at a frat party apparently agreeing to have sex with a partygoer for money. The film thus shows how the former sex worker Candace continues to suffer negative consequences from her association with the sex industry even after she has transitioned completely away. The film handily elicits the audience's empathy for Candace, while portraying the sex industry in a negative light. *Best Man's Holiday* also includes a character that could be interpreted as a sugar baby: Shelby a reality television star in the show *The Real Housewives* is definitely portrayed as a woman who marries for money. Claims are made among the male characters about her sexual skills, and it is implied these skills helped achieve status. However the director does not characterize her as likely to define herself as a sugar baby or sex worker.

Films that include both a positive depiction of a sex worker and the sex industry are often set either in the distant past or an imaginary future. *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* 2001 is an example of a film set in a dystopian future where commercial sex is looked upon as a salve to the wounds of a difficult life. More films with positive depictions of both sex workers and the industry set in the past are *The Lone Ranger* 2013, and *Seabiscuit* 2003. The film *Looper* 2012 has a very short representation of a stripper/escort character in a story about time travel. The sex worker character in that film exists in the dystopian future. Finally, the film *Ocean's Eleven* 2001 was set in the present, but had a distinctly past referential ethic. The lead characters were all upper-class playboys in suits, and the sex workers were portrayed as beautiful performers.

### **Neutral Depictions**

Neutral portrayals of sex workers (n=37) sometimes occurred when porn magazines, pictures, or videos figured into a film plot, for example *Superbad* 2007, *Without a Paddle* 2004, and *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* 2007. These three films were also comedies. Neutral depictions such as occurred in these films were neither critical, nor sympathetic towards sex workers. In *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* the two lead characters are straight

males pretending to be gay to collect an insurance payout. One of the two leads has a pre-teen son who likes to dress as a girl. In one scene the boy finds a pornographic magazine belonging to his father's friend. The two male adults decide perhaps he should be exposed to the magazine's contents, to encourage more straight-seeming behaviors. While the horrific scene is played for comedic effect, the portrayal of sex workers is neither critical, nor empathic. The untrustworthy and hetero-normative lead characters view sex workers as useful to encourage straight behavior in males. Similarly, in *Superbad*, pornographic magazines and Internet sites are viewed as useful for relieving sexual urges, and the sex workers are neither objectionable, nor real human beings. They neither help nor hurt the main characters in the movie. Other comedic films that included neutral portrayals of the sex industry and either neutral or positive portrayals of the sex worker were *Step Brothers* 2008, *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* 2008, *Knocked Up* 2007, *Blades of Glory* 2007, *Norbit* 2007, *The Bucket List* 2007, *Next Friday* 2000, and *American Pie* 1999. A greater proportion of neutral depictions of the sex industry were in comedy films than the proportion of comedies of all films with negative depictions.

Neutral portrayals of sex workers sometimes happened when prostitutes were depicted in a film. The films *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* 2008, *The Bucket List* 2007, *The Passion of the Christ* 2004, *Kill Bill Vol. 2* 2004, *Rat Race* 2001, *Aladdin* 1992, *Unforgiven* 1992 all neutrally referenced and/or depicted sex workers labeled as prostitutes. In *The Wolf of Wall Street* 2013, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* 2008, *Rat Race* 2001, *Evita* 1996, and *Aladdin* 1992 prostitutes are depicted as useful for relieving sexual urges; not particularly worthy human beings, nor malicious. In *Kill Bill Vol. 2* 2004 and *Unforgiven* 1992, the characters who have engaged in prostitution both do things that a viewer can empathize with and make other choices that are vengeful and violent, much more difficult to understand. In *Unforgiven* in particular, the characters labeled as prostitutes are used as a plot device to illustrate not only how incomprehensible sex work is, but also how violent life was in the Old West. In contrast the film *The Lone Ranger* 2013 shows the violent life of the Old West

and the brothel madam Red Harrington bearing the force of society's disapproval when her brothel is burned down by local moralists. The viewer is welcomed to side with Red Harrington, the brothel Madam, and her work and its usefulness in society.

The films *Magic Mike* 2013 and *Striptease* 1996 offered interesting contrasts for how sex workers and the sex industry are depicted. *Magic Mike* 2013 is told from the perspective of a male stripper nearing the end of his career in the sex industry. It is unusual among the 204 films because the protagonist is a sex worker with a normal life, easily relatable to most audiences. The main character Mike has career concerns, his own apartment, aspirations and goals, and he has his health. He has friends that he works with at both of his places of employment where he works day and night. Over the course of the film he befriends a fellow worker at one of his jobs (a roofing gig) and introduces him to the lucrative work of stripping. Two sex work bloggers reviewed this film and found much to appreciate about Mike. They wrote:

Bubbles: I love how Mike... wants to start his own artisanal custom furniture business. That's not Tampa, that's Portland. And how relatable is his bad credit?

A lot of us have been there.

Kat: The bad credit scene almost got me choked up and reminded me of when I was blackballed from the bank system. It also reminded me of when the shop girls were mean to Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*. (Bubbles and Kat,

*TitsandSass.com* 2012).

The film reveals how sex work can be a job, often a low-wage job similar to many others, with parallels to employment in the theater and service industries. I code *Magic Mike's* representation of the industry as neutral. The film does not clearly communicate to the viewer why the industry exists or how it is benefitting anyone other than the six or seven club employees and the owner.

In *Magic Mike* when Mike falls in love his association with the industry is unacceptable to his intended lover, and only when he ends his connection to the strip club does she accept him as a romantic partner. A commenter on the sex work blogger review of *Magic Mike* wrote,

Am I the only one perturbed by Mike's relationship with Brooke-- in addition to her acting? Not once were we told why he might like her and, frankly, why he'd give up his life savings and a well paying job in order to impress someone who clearly despises him. I hate that it became a morality tale in the end and served to validate misconceptions about strippers. (v.j., TitsandSass.com 2012)

This commenter pointed out that in spite of the things the film portrayed accurately, like poverty, and denied access to a bank loan, the end of *Magic Mike* became "a morality tale." In my viewing of the film I too found the last part of the film, that Mike's association with the sex industry is a problem in his romantic relationship, is the part that most resembles the film *Striptease* 1996. In *Striptease* the main character Erin is portrayed as working class and not very smart. Stripping is depicted as the only work available for her and a last resort, rather than one of multiple jobs like it was for Mike. Both Erin's current partner and ex-husband find it extremely problematic that she works in the industry. She is portrayed in the film as the smartest and most respectable dancer amongst all the employees, though outside the club she is one of the least intelligent amongst her friends and associates. The film portrays most strippers as stupid. Finally, the plot resolved with Erin taking her client hostage with a gun until she could be rescued. Like *Magic Mike*, *Striptease* ended with the message that Erin's association with the sex industry was a problem. *Striptease* was a negative portrayal of both sex workers and the sex industry from start to finish.

### **Negative Depictions**

Negative portrayals of sex workers (n=124) and sex work included multiple films where a character was forced to strip (*Fast & Furious 6* 2013, *Final Analysis* 1992, *Candyman* 1992), or

avoids being forced to strip (*Cape Fear* 1991), films where characters were unwittingly caught having sex on tape (*Sliver* 1993, *Road Trip* 2000), and films where characters were forced into prostitution (*Taken* 2009, *Memoires of a Geisha* 2005, *Slumdog Millionaire* 2008, *Waterworld* 1995). Being forced into sex is rape, and by U.S. law being forced into sex for someone else's commercial gain is human trafficking. Popular films that depict being forced into the work of sex work are particularly relevant to the question of whether or not public opinion trends toward approval of sex work, or sex work is shameful. When being forced to strip is an act of malice to another human being, it shows that those who choose to strip harness the force a taboo act. Likewise, when movie characters perform incredible feats of human fortitude to prevent others from seeing a recording of a sex act for pleasure, this illustrates the power pornographic performances have in society. What are the characters afraid of when they are trying to prevent the video of themselves having sex from being seen by people? It must be a very scary thing. Popular film depictions like these help maintain the power imbalance whereby good girls don't. Even those who are forced into acts such as stripping, being recorded having sex, or having sex for money are somehow worthy of social scorn in U.S. popular films.

There were more negative portrayals of the sex industry in popular film (n=143) than negative depictions of sex workers (n=132). In many top grossing films it could be argued that a depiction of the sex industry was a useful way to create a depiction of a bad place or an unjust society. Films including *Kindergarten Cop* 1990, *Carlito's Way* 1993, *Rising Sun* 1993, *The Long Kiss Goodnight* 1996, and *Nutty Professor Two* 2000 showed audiences the sex industry was either the location of criminals with malicious intent, or dumb or fallen women who could not be trusted. The film *Swordfish* 2001, carefully establishes that a sex worker character is a drug addict, bad mother, lazy, and then she vindictively withholds her child from seeing her father while she defends her pornographer boyfriend. It is a short clip, with a bounty of stereotypes and ill-will towards not just sex work, but specifically the sex industry because the character and her boyfriend appear to be shooting porn films out of their lavish home.

The sex industry as it is portrayed in popular film is responsible for child pornography (*Primal Fear* 1996, *Mystic River* 2003, *The X-Files* 1998) and human trafficking, often coded on IMDB as the more emotional term "sex slavery" (*Return of the Jedi* 1997, *Pulp Fiction* 1994, *Crash* 2005, and *Django Unchained* 2012). In the dataset the sex industry is to blame for tarnishing reputations via porn theaters being a place to go to publicly masturbate and find gay sex partners (*The Pelican Brief* 1993, *Blade II* 2002, *The Departed* 2006). Finally the sex industry was negatively depicted in many popular films as the source for sex (mis-)education. Films that include young characters going through puberty often first encountered the taboo of naked bodies intended for sexual pleasure when they found a porn magazine (*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* 2011, *Bringing Down the House* 2003, *Mighty Ducks* 1992, and *Home Alone* 1990). This trope, that the sex industry is mis-educating the youth, is so common that one of the only female directors of a top grossing film who depicted sex work, has a child ask his father if he will have sex, which he knows about because he saw it on TV with "women clawing on the men's backs," (*Sleepless in Seattle* 1993). This scene promotes the idea that the sex industry harmfully depicts women as beautiful and full of sexual desire, setting unrealistic expectations for those young people who haven't yet gained substantial experience to the contrary.

The films involving representations of the sex industry often portrayed other types of illegal or socially questionable forms of behavior in addition to some form of sex work. Examples include *The Hangover* 2009 and *The Hangover Part II* 2011, both of which depict gambling and heavy drinking as a backdrop for occurrences of stripping and prostitution. Of particular note with respect to *The Hangover*, this was one of only two films out of 204 coded in IMDB with both "prostitute" and "escort." A majority of sex workers prefer the term escort to prostitute (Ditmore 2006). The second film coded with both "prostitute" and "escort" was *Pretty Woman* 1990. Sex work bloggers are scathing in one review of *Pretty Woman*. This review from 2011 is a 10-point list entitled "Some of the things that make me cringe, roll my eyes, or just say 'huh?'"



Dead hooker in the dumpster, crack, etc. Every negative stereotype about prostitution is hastily dumped into the first scene that introduces Vivian. A seedy street corner. Crack. A dead hooker. In a dumpster. How perfect! I wonder how many creative and hardworking Hollywood minds it took to come up with that image (Lolo de Sucre, TitsandSass.com 2011).

This review of *Pretty Woman* also contained a searing critique of the character Edward Lewis played by Richard Gere in which he was described as the typical client and "smarmy." As acknowledged in this quote from Lolo de Sucre, sex workers viewing films like *Pretty Woman* see how readily popular films depict stereotypes of sex work. Some of these stereotypes involve drug use, dirty places in the city, and death. This quote also points out a key problem, which is the issue of "creative and hardworking Hollywood minds," that tell the same story so often. Throughout this sex work blogger's review of *Pretty Woman* the most difficult aspects of the film are its inaccuracies about sex work and the sex industry.

Other films that involved high amounts of violence and theft while also portraying sex work included *Tower Heist* 2011, *The Book of Eli* 2010, *The Fighter* 2010, *The Town* 2010, *The Bounty Hunter* 2010, *District 9* 2009, *Exit Wounds* 2001, *12 Monkeys* 1995, *Unlawful Entry* 1992, *Sin City* 2005, and *The Last Boy Scout* 1991. A sex work blogger reviewed the film *Sin City* and made the following observation:

To be clear, the sex workers in both films [*Sin City* 2005 and *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* 2014] are completely stereotypical, unoriginal archetypes. Think damsels in distress and black widows, but with less clothing. The characters are so clichéd, in fact, that one would assume they're meant to pay homage to their noir predecessors (Josephine, TitsandSass.com 2014).

Sex workers in *Sin City* are both the perpetrators and victims of violence. As the quote from Josephine notes, the sex work characters are both "damsels in distress and black widows."

They survive in the life-threatening environment because they are merciless and as bad as any other character. Violence in popular film is an extremely strong trend overall. In the original dataset of 1200 films, violent films outpaced highly sexual films approximately 15 to 1. Violence also plays a dominant role in horror films. Horror films depicting the sex industry included *Disturbia* 2007, *Saw IV* 2007, *Halloween* 2007 and *Candyman* 1992.

Popular films portraying sex work included multiple depictions of forced sex work, more commonly known as sex trafficking. Forced sex work representations occurred in the films *Taken* 2009, *Slumdog Millionaire* 2008, *Crash* 2005, *Memoirs of a Geisha* 2005, *Mystic River* 2001, and *Amistad* 1997. Following the release of *Taken* 2009 a U.S. Coast Guard officer began a speaking tour of the United States claiming the movie had fictionally depicted a real occurrence in his life: the abduction of his white American daughter by foreign sex traffickers. His claims about his daughter were subsequently revealed to be false, and he was additionally convicted of fraud for claiming to have served with the U.S. Special Forces, rather than the Coast Guard.

Academic work about sex work coercion has sometimes linked coercion to poverty. The suggestion made in films like *Slumdog Millionaire* 2008 and *Waterworld* 1995 is that only out of desperation and no alternate forms of employment would one turn to sex work. Thus poverty could be seen as a coercive force. This is also a theme in *Les Misérables* 2012, wherein multiple characters deal with poverty during wartime France in the year 1815. Sex work bloggers reviewed *Les Misérables* after one of the film's stars Anne Hathaway was interviewed and compared her character Fantine to a trafficking victim, someone coerced into sex work (Amos 2012). Sex work bloggers responded:

It is nonsensical to call Fantine a sex trafficking victim, as sex trafficking requires a sex trafficker. Fantine does not have a pimp of any sort; third-party coercion is not a part of this story. This is a story about the criminalization of poverty, as well as poverty itself (Robin D, TitsandSass.com 2013).

Robin D points out that the logic that constitutes poverty as the coercive force for sex work is flawed. Many people experience daily poverty. To engage in sex work is a choice, yes at times it is a choice for navigating poverty, but low-wage forms of employment are chosen because they stave off poverty.

We can take one year as an example of the diversity in type of films one might encounter portraying sex work and the sex industry. 1990 had *Home Alone* as its top grossing film, *Back to the Future Part III*, *Young Guns II*, and *Gremlins 2* all made for family audiences. That same year had *Pretty Woman*, *Total Recall*, *Another 48 Hours*, *Air America*, and *Marked for Death* (all rated R) and all featuring a depiction of sex work or the sex industry. More specifically some of the R-rated portrayals of the sex industry in 1990 were: scenes in a brothel in *Air America*, depictions of prostitution in *Total Recall* and *Pretty Woman*, and a porn movie theater in *Another 48 Hours*. In the film *Home Alone* there is a scene where the main character, a young boy named Kevin, finds a *Playboy* magazine in his older brother Buzz's bedroom. In all 10 films in 1990 portraying sex work, all contained negative portrayals of the sex industry, but three included positive portrayals of a sex worker, and one a neutral portrayal of a sex worker.

In the dataset there were films with major amounts of sexual content integrated into the plot including *The 40 Year Old Virgin* 2005, *Moulin Rouge!* 2001, *Coyote Ugly* 2000, *Eyes Wide Shut* 1999, and *Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo* 1999. *Coyote Ugly* 2000 was not actually a film about sex workers, in that the characters clearly would not self-identify as such. However, I included it in the dataset as an edge case. The protagonist Violet/Jersey Girl went to work as a "Coyote", a bartender at the bar *Coyote Ugly*. The job requirements at this bar included those of a normal bartending job plus extra expectations: workers were not permitted to date the customers, were prohibited from allowing their boyfriends or significant others to patronize the bar, were required to dance on the bar while working, and had to wear provocative clothing while on shift. All workers were young females and presented themselves as sexually available.

The bar was named Coyote Ugly in reference to recovering from a horrible hangover. Scholars of sex work recognize that coyote was an important acronym standing for Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, a sex workers' rights organization from the 1970's. It is unclear whether or not the filmmakers knew this, or whether Liliana Lovell the founder of the non-fiction New York Bar of the same name knew about the C.O.Y.O.T.E. organization.

Some depictions included of sex work in popular film had main characters discussing or mentioning escorts/prostitutes as in the case of *Mona Lisa Smile* 2003, *Life is Beautiful* 1998, and *Scent of a Woman* 1992. Some depictions deploy sex workers for comic relief, for example a pimp in a fancy suit and hat acts as a foil for main characters in the film *Starsky & Hutch* 2004. Coming of age films including a depiction of sex work included *The 40 Year Old Virgin* 2005, *Without a Paddle* 2004, and *Jack* 1996. There are also many films including a depiction of the sex industry, but otherwise focused on the topic of the military or police, for example *Jarhead* 2005, *Bad Boys II* 2003, *Catch Me if You Can* 2002, *Exit Wounds* 2001, *Traffic* 2000, *The General's Daughter* 1999, *Cop Land* 1997, and *Under Siege* 1992.

Far more frequent than the films in which much of the story involved sexuality, were the films in which the appearance of sex work was a minor detail to overall plot, such as a 10-second clip of a character visiting a strip club (*The Interpreter* 2005), main characters referencing prostitutes/prostitution (*My Girl* 1991, *JFK* 1991, *Jungle Fever* 1991, *Hocus Pocus* 1993, *Bean* 1997), or a short clip of a protagonist interacting with a prostitute (*Gangs of New York* 2002, *Any Given Sunday* 1999, *Seven* 1995). In films where the portrayal of a sex worker or the sex industry was for a greater length of time it was often the butt of a joke, as in a protagonist married a stripper during a drunken blackout, lead characters must fake they are strippers, or a protagonist's ex-girlfriend is a frightening dominatrix (*The Hangover Part II* 2011, *Date Night* 2010, *Dinner for Schmucks* 2010). Sometimes the negative depictions of sex workers and the sex industry were minimal, but a comedic aside in a comedic film, such as in the films *Borat* 2006, *Along Came Polly* 2004, *Old School* 2003, *Bringing Down the House* 2003,

and *Naked Gun 2 1/2* 1991. Very few films had sex work as a primary plot point, but some that did are *Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo* 1990, *Striptease* 1996, *The Full Monty* 1997, *Moulin Rouge!* 2001, *Memoirs of a Geisha* 2005, *Magic Mike* 2012, *We're the Millers* 2013, and *The Best Man Holiday* 2013. These films with sex work as a primary plot point were also likely to contain a positive portrayal of the sex worker, along with a negative portrayal of the sex industry, although two of these contained negative portrayals of both the worker and the industry. Trends that we saw in my discussion of *Magic Mike* earlier in this chapter also reappear in *The Full Monty*, and *Deuce Bigalow* where the extended length of time the movie spends depicting the sex worker also leads to a positive portrayal of the person, even if the industry employing the person is negative. It is also notable that some of the most relatable sex worker characters (Mike from *Magic Mike*, Deuce from *Deuce Bigalow*, and the crew in *The Full Monty*) are men. Perhaps it is the sexual double standard at work that makes a male sex worker more worthy of respect in U.S. popular film.

Pornographic magazines, photos, and videos appeared in the sample usually under different circumstances than portrayals of escorts, strippers, and pimps. Films where a male protagonist is coming of age, has a delayed maturation, or is revisiting his past often contained references to porn magazines, porn photos, and videos. Some of these included *Ted* 2012, *Knocked Up* 2007, *Superbad* 2007, *Norbit* 2007, *Final Destination* 2000 and *Jack* 1996. In films where there is deliberate and conscious gender segregation, via the historical moment portrayed or occupationally there are also references to porn, phone sex, and/or prostitutes (*Charlie Wilson's War* 2007, *3:10 to Yuma* 2007, *Brokeback Mountain* 2005, *The Stepford Wives* 2004, and *The Distinguished Gentleman* 1992). *The Stepford Wives* was coded in IMDB with the keyword "gentleman's club", and it is in this area that the characters' plots to control their wives are hatched along with at least one gorgeous woman dispensing cash from her mouth, symbolically referencing a prostitute/pimp relationship.

## Conclusion

From 1990-2013 in the United States film industry, popular films were likely to have on average 8.5 films depicting sex work in the top 50 films of each year. These depictions most commonly referenced sex work through a depiction of prostitution, though stripping, nude modeling, phone sex, and professional domination were all also portrayed. Positive depictions of sex work and the sex industry, showed sex workers as rational and relatable human beings, and the sex industry as a job provider, not unlike other low status occupation options. Neutral depictions of sex work and the sex industry showed sex workers as people without any particular personality characteristics, and the sex industry as a provider of useful services or material to the characters in the film. Negative depictions of sex work and the sex industry were not only the most common, but also the most varied in type. They included criminal behavior, stupid workers, evil workers, violence, excessive violence, aggression, forced sex, child abuse, and rape. Characters who interacted with the sex industry were most commonly also the antagonists in the film. Depictions of sex workers in popular film during this time had a high likelihood of being negative, relative to being neutral or positive. Depictions of the sex industry had an even higher likelihood of being negative relative to being neutral or positive.

Top box office films in the span of these years illustrate the extent of the stigmatization and marginalization of sex work and sex workers. The negative representations of sex work and the sex industry were most evident in: 1) inaccurate storytelling by non-sex workers, 2) censoring of counter-hegemonic storytelling, and 3) inflated numbers of depictions of fraudulent, forced, or coerced sex work relative to elective sex work. Popular film over the past 24 years (1990-2013) most commonly suffers from the first form of stigmatization: inaccurate storytelling. Filmmakers might respond to this critique that popular filmmakers tell fantastic stories. My response would be that fantastic sex storytelling does not have to employ stereotypes. It is a choice film directors and producers make. Much of popular film's power is in its ability to get the

details right, and the details of the sex industry are just as deserving of that accuracy as any other industry.

Though we know in the time period 1990-2013 that film production companies increasingly decided to greenlight low-risk projects, (superhero films, children's films, sequels, and re-makes) relative to other forms, this did not affect the frequency of depictions of sex work and the sex industry. Positive depictions of sex workers and the sex industry remained rare throughout the time period. The inclusion of frequent negative depictions is a market strategy that disadvantages counter-hegemonic depictions and original storytelling, so original storytelling most commonly occurred in films with niche appeal and smaller audiences. The unsettling of monopolies in the communications industry has a good chance of leading to more creative and honest depictions of marginalized populations.

Frequent numbers of depictions of fraudulent and coerced sex work in the dataset serve as a reminder of the importance of decriminalization of sex work. Criminalization of an occupation is a simple and direct way to stigmatize it. Mainstream movies legally portray graphic sex scenes, pornographic films legally contain graphic sex scenes, and in a culture where both of those cases are true, the criminalization of sex acts of consenting adults behind closed doors is contradictory, hypocritical, and most likely economically lucrative for film production companies and the criminal justice system. So what is to be done? Is the solution to that problem to remove all sex from film? If sex work were to be wholly decriminalized, I predict filmic portrayals of escorts, brothels, strippers, and pro-dommes would likely be decoupled from depictions of violent and organized criminal activity. This would be a major benefit to sex work depictions in film, and sex workers lives overall.

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## Chapter 5: Outcall Only: News Media Portrayals of Sex Work and Prostitution

### Introduction

In this chapter I examine the role the news media play as a social force shaping perceptions of sex work, the sex industry, and the stigmatization of both. I consider current research in the sociology of news as it relates to the Internet and public opinion, and I explore ways in which the news media contribute to the continued stigmatization of sex work. News on the Internet comes from a mixture of media sources: some existed prior to the Internet such as newspapers and television stations, while others exist solely on the web. My research shows how this media mixture can be tied to the ongoing depiction of social phenomena, often in ways that make the old seem new. In this chapter I document online news reporting on two longstanding social phenomena, sex work, and prostitution, as well as one newer phenomenon, human trafficking.

I define the key term "sex work" as the exchange of sex or sexual provocation for money. Prostitution is defined by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics as "the unlawful promotion of or participation in sexual activities for profit, including attempts. To solicit customers or transport persons for prostitution purposes; to own, manage, or operate a dwelling or other establishment for the purpose of providing a place where prostitution is performed; or to otherwise assist or promote prostitution," (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2016). Research has documented the news media's tendency to side with the "official" version of events. Schudson (2011: 48) notes that "officialness makes the news 'statist'; that is, it contributes to a tendency to cover government voices rather than nongovernmental or 'civil' ones." This is evident in news media depictions of sex work, because the news media nearly always report on arrests for "prostitution," rather than use the term for the act preferred by those working in the profession, which is "sex work." I use the term prostitution exclusively when discussing another author's work. For my own research I use the term sex work. Human trafficking is defined by the BJS as, "if a person was induced to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or

coercion. Any person under age 18 who performs a commercial sex act is considered a victim of human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion was present" (BJS 2012). Human trafficking scholars define trafficking as coerced, forced, or fraudulent illegal sex work, as well as any illegal sex work performed by a U.S. resident under the age of 18 (Farrell et al. 2010).

This dissertation has sought to explain the effect of the Internet on sex work, and the sex industry. In so doing I have discussed and documented sex work stigma in the Digital Age. In this chapter I focus on news articles that appear on the Internet to explore the relationship between the news media and stigmatization. I begin by recounting existing social science research on sex work, the Internet, the news, moral panics, and human trafficking. Next I describe my methods and data in the form of vice arrest statistics, news reports, and sex worker interviews. In the findings sections I show how some patterns established in communications media prior to the Internet recur on the Internet because most established news media sources have websites, and because changes in vice policy perpetuate certain reporting patterns. This chapter documents ways in which Internet news sources are affected by the conventions of journalism and also biased towards official, or statist accounts of social phenomena. My research reveals the news media is a social force focused on the criminalized forms of sex work, and prioritizing accounts and actions made by the police over the accounts and actions made by sex workers. This chapter also considers the possibility that while some sex trafficking is undoubtedly real, news media reporting on sex trafficking may also indicate a moral panic building on established fears and prejudices associated with commercial sexuality.

#### The Internet, News Media, and Moral Panics

Queer theorist Gayle S. Rubin (1985) argued the hegemonic American discourse towards sexuality is sex negativity; the only model for personal sexuality that has overwhelming approval, including legal policies to support it, is sex that is heterosexual, monogamous, among married individuals, and with the intent for reproduction. Yet sexuality research shows that

particularly since Supreme Court rulings on obscenity in the 1950's and 1960's, pornography production has been a growth industry. The Digital Age has added to this proliferation with tens of thousands of websites marketing sexual services and/or content, and a major research finding about the Internet is it encourages niche identities by improving access to specialized knowledge, and interest communities (Ruvolo 2011; Jenkins 2006). It is important to understand relationships between social groups within law enforcement, technology, and the media with regards to sex worker populations if we hope to understand shifts in public opinion over time (Lichter 2012, Levin and Peled 2011, Kanouse et al. 2010, Gates 2007). Recent nationwide public opinion shifts towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) communities show the relevance of public opinion shifts over time, and a need for understanding which indicators suggest change. Change in public opinion can occur by a variety of methods: policy change, activism, political action, and news reporting.

Some scholars argue the Internet has enabled some street prostitution to move indoors (Cunningham and Kendall 2011). If the Internet has benefitted sex work in this way, by extending new opportunities to sex workers, and improving the safety of their work, then how does research explain the ongoing stigma affecting sex workers lived experience? I argue certain social forces still need to be accounted for in explaining public opinion towards sex work and the sex industry. Recalling that policy change, activism, and news reporting help create change in public opinion, some analyses of policy change, activism, and news media are necessary. Media analysis offers social science a perspective on the role of news media and activism as it relates to social change. In fact the news offers us a useful tool for revealing trends in our cultural narratives (Bordo 1993). Journalists and broadcasters are expected to understand the pulse of the population they serve in order to tailor information delivery to local interests. Journalists also usually represent the population for whom they write. One trend in journalism during the Digital Age has been for local newspapers to become hyper-local. These factors combine to give news media an ethos that is slanted towards local majority opinion. In a

knowledge hierarchy, the news represents some of the most persuasive, dominant ideology for a group. News is by definition social phenomena that are deemed worthy of reporting to the public. Therein, cultural values are identifiable via news analysis.

News reporting's influence on social groups, culture, and public opinion varies based on several factors. News media reporting is characterized by five biases. "Five kinds of distortion are frequently cited...: News is said to be typically (1) event-centered, action-centered, and person-centered; (2) negative; (3) detached; (4) technical; and (5) official," (Schudson 2011: 41). Additionally, the news can at times be evidence of moral panic, and particularly relevant to studies of sex work and the Internet, the news media under-represents concerns of the poor and working class. To my knowledge no studies currently exist analyzing news media portrayals of sex work and prostitution, so one starting point for analysis could be the extent to which these portrayals are characterized by event-centered, action-centered, and person-centered, negative, detached, technical, and official reporting. For marginalized populations, particularly those whose marginalization stems from criminalization, Schudson's five kinds of media bias and framing are relevant. The way in which sex workers are consistently presented as criminal is a likely social force for the perpetuation of sex work stigma.

Sociologists Joel Best (1999) and Stanley Cohen (1980) are both credited with furthering what we know about the relationship between news media and moral panics. Moral panics are a case of concentrated news media bias towards social phenomena that is event-centered and negative. Cohen (1980:9) describes a moral panic as a social phenomenon that quickly becomes a topic of alarm, "defined as a threat to societal values and interests," where alerts are published, guards of morality go on watch, and then just as suddenly the topic vanishes. The threat to societal values and interests is most often some kind of criminal behavior, and Best (1999) has noted waves of moral panics promoted by news media on the topics of hate crimes, and stalking. The persistence of a moral panic is related to the presence of advocacy groups who keep the topic in the public eye. Additional work on moral panics has noted they are

particularly relevant in newspaper articles, more than other news formats, and in U.S. news reporting deviance from social norms that is sex or drug-related is more likely to be described as the source of a moral panic than other types of deviance (Altheide 2009). By these definitions reporting on commercial exchanges of sex for money is not likely to be characterized by a moral panic, because this behavior has been marginalized as deviant in the United States for the past century. A topic that is much more likely to fit the definition of moral panic is sex trafficking. An investigation into whether news reports on trafficking indicate a moral panic will thus address questions of statist, negative, and event-centered media bias, social forces perpetuating marginalization of sex workers, and the Internet's effect on sex work stigma.

#### Anti-Pornography and Anti-Trafficking Activism's Influence

Before we can assess the likelihood of moral panic, we need to assess whether any advocacy groups are active that might benefit from heightened media attention about an issue of social concern, in this case women's sexual exploitation. Several scholars posit the U.S. anti-pornography movement, a popular activist cause from 1975 to 1985, sought to end the sexual exploitation of women by ending pornography (Bronstein 2011, Shrage 2012, Bernstein 2007, Chancer 1998). Following the early 1980's the popularity of the anti-pornography movement waned, but proponents of this view of sexuality have not disappeared. One feminist philosopher explains how anti-pornography and anti-sex trafficking activism views women's sexuality:

Campaigns against sex-trafficking are once again aligning feminist and conservative agendas.... While anti-pornography feminists generally fail to distinguish non-violent and violent pornography... anti-trafficking feminists typically fail to distinguish trafficking and voluntary sex work, and treat all prostitution as a form of sexual coercion and forced labor (Shrage 2012).

In considering a possible activist shift from fighting pornography to fighting trafficking, it must be remembered that feminism is one of the longest-standing social movements in U.S. history.

Feminists have, through hard-won experience, recognized that policy-focused issues with the

capability to build crossover political alliances are likely to be better funded than ideological issues, and thus have better chances at triggering change in the law. Anti-pornography was a clear and precise policy goal, as is anti-trafficking today.

In Chapter 1 I discussed some social conservative trends in the United States that supported the restriction of women's sexuality. It was not only conservative voices that spoke out against the potential dangers that might be unleashed by women's sexual autonomy. Some feminist voices were raised against the exploitation of women's sexuality that they believed the sexual revolution had made more possible. By the mid-1970's the feminist movement in the United States, which had for some time focused on several different causes opposing women's sexual exploitation (including organized opposition to rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and unjust media representations of women's sexuality) began to also pursue a political strategy of opposition to pornography (Bronstein 2011). In the 1957 ruling of the Supreme Court case *Roth vs. United States* pornography was defined conservatively as content appealing solely to the prurient interest according to the average person. This ruling meant material that met this definition could not be transmitted through the U.S. mail. However, twelve years later the Supreme Court sided with Stanley in *Stanley vs. Georgia* (1969) and upheld the right to possess pornographic materials in the privacy of one's own home. Multiple U.S. feminist organizations (Women Against Violence Against Women, Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM), and Women Against Pornography (WAP)) focused their attention on opposing pornography throughout the 1970's, as did several religious groups (Morality in Media, Citizens for Decency Through Law, and Focus on the Family) (Bronstein 2011).

The U.S. anti-pornography movement of 1976-1986 had many supporters from multiple different sectors of society. From the 1960's many American women were wary of how the "sexual revolution" would actually improve their lives. The women's movement of the 1960's was informed by Friedan's (1963) claims that misogyny persists through education,



psychological theories, and the essentialist ideology that women's primary role should be childrearing. Feminists responded by taking action to advance fundamental change in sex relations. MacKinnon (1997) argued, persuasively for many radical feminists, that all heterosexual sex was affected by a gendered power imbalance that imbued men with power and women as powerless. Taken to its logical conclusion, this implied sex between a man and woman could never have equal power relations, and feminists who desired sexual equality could only be disappointed. The sexual revolution was no helpful revolution at all if it only made sexual relations simpler, while gender-based power dynamics remained unequal and complex.

The view of heterosexuality as the site of perpetually unequal power relations has had an indelible impact on scholarship and policy (Tolman 2012, Crawford and Popp 2003, Risman and Schwartz 2002, O'Sullivan 1995). It galvanized the anti-pornography movement of the 1970's and 1980's towards one symbolic policy goal: ending pornography. We can recall Weber here, and the importance of ideas in explaining social phenomena. The belief was: an end to pornography would positively affect the problem of domestic violence in a visible and meaningful site for gendered power imbalance (Shrage 2012, Bronstein 2011). Those who believed ending pornography would improve gender relations often also believed women in pornography must be universally exploited (Jensen 2007). The possibility that taking a well-paying job away from someone who chose the work and perhaps is quite good at it has not been viewed as equivalent exploitation. The popularity of the sentiment led to the passing of an anti-pornography ordinance in Indianapolis, IN (1983) that was drafted by two of the movement's most vocal supporters, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine A. MacKinnon. The state supreme court later ruled the ordinance unconstitutional.

Within the feminist movement there have been and continue to be widely divergent viewpoints on women's sexuality and sex work (Chancer 1998). A different feminist view of sexuality and sex work was present throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Bronstein has written, "As WAVPM and WAP shifted away from a focus on violence in favor of a focus on pornography --

which included nonviolent sexually explicit images -- feminist community support for the movement began to break down," (2011: 85). Ideas popularized by Queer Theory contrasted with anti-pornography beliefs (Morris and Paasonen 2014, Pisani 2009, Escoffier 2008, Rubin 1984). One of these ideas was that the subjectivity of non-normative sexual orientation for some was tied to openness to other non-normative sexual practices, like the production and consumption of pornography (Morris and Paasonen 2014). A second idea present was that pornographic acting was sex work, along with escorting, and stripping (Escoffier 2008). A third idea was an appreciation for alliances in their approach to the AIDS crisis. Through the lens of the AIDS disease some proponents of Queer Theory saw the need for solidarity amongst populations most at risk for disease transmission including gay men and sex workers (Pisani 2009). Finally, Gayle S. Rubin's (1984) article *Thinking Sex* theorized an alternative view of sexuality, and most importantly argued that non-normative status did not automatically indicate one was fallen, evil, corrupt, or any less of a human than people with normative status, whether via sexual orientation, or other sexual practice.

Rubin cited five "ideological formations" that characterized American cultural attitudes towards sexuality. They were: sex negativity, the fallacy of misplaced scale, the hierarchical valuation of sex acts, the domino theory of sexual peril, and the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation (Rubin 1984, pg. 148). Of these five formations, she highlighted the impact of sex negativity:

Western cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force (Weeks, 1981, p. 22)... This culture always treats sex with suspicion. It construes and judges almost any sexual practice in terms of its worst possible expression. Sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Virtually all erotic behavior is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction, and love (Rubin 1984: 148).

Rubin's claims about sex negativity in American culture are substantiated by and explain findings in much of the contemporary scholarship on human sexuality (Weitzer 2009, Overall 1992; see for example Jensen 2007, Farley 2004, Raymond 1998). If Rubin was right, it would follow that those whose work involved the performance of sexual or sexually provocative labor would be in particular danger of treatment with suspicion, negativity, and guilt.

By portraying sex workers as victims the anti-pornography and anti-trafficking movements gain the moral high ground as activists attempting to save sexual deviants, drug users, and desperate job seekers from the fate of the fallen. The sex worker-as-victim standpoint has power in part because reputational ruin and criminal prosecution remain real threats for many current and former sex workers. The anti-trafficking movement such as it exists now unites some feminists, many religious activists, and conservative immigration reformers (Hoang and Parrenas 2014). One well-known proponent of anti-trafficking legislation is Kansas Governor Sam Brownback, who co-authored House Resolution 3244, the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000:

The sex industry has rapidly expanded over the past several decades. It involves sexual exploitation of persons, predominantly women and girls, involving activities related to prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, and other commercial sexual services... (H.R. 3244 ENR).

According to this federal policy, sex industry expansion is not due to the sexual revolution, increased female sexual autonomy, a growing service industry workforce, or the pervasive spread of the Internet. Rather, expansion of the sex industry is due to an increase in sexual exploitation and trafficking; an argument consistent with Rubin's claims that sexual expressions outside marriage, reproduction and love occur in a climate of sex negativity and suspicion.

To what extent has opposition to human trafficking become a social movement in the past decade? As of 2016 there were more than one hundred active organizations dedicated to ending human trafficking (wikipedia.org 2016). Two of the most well-known were the Polaris

Project and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. Founded in 2002 The Polaris Project hosted an online heatmap of statistics from their anti-trafficking hotline, and asked site visitors to "Join the Fight" and "Take Action." They also noted "37 states passed new laws to fight human trafficking in the past year," (polarisproject.org 2016). The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women pursued campaigns for Aiding Victims, Prevention, Ending Demand, Redefining Laws, and Human Rights. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center hosted a hotline at 1-888-373-7888. Organizations working to end trafficking hosted websites with the domain names NotForSaleCampaign.Org and Rescue.org. The U.S. State Department had a webpage dedicated to "20 Ways You Can Help Fight Human Trafficking," that included the suggestion "Be a conscientious consumer. Discover your Slavery Footprint," (state.gov 2016). These were a few of several indicators that opposition to human trafficking was a popular social movement from 2010 to 2015.

There are relatively quite few arrests for human trafficking annually in the U.S. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2011 that though federal task forces opened 2,515 cases of suspected trafficking between January 2008 and June 2010, only 144 of those opened cases led to arrest (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011). Why would the number of suspected human trafficking incidents be so high relative to the number of actual arrest? Many anti-trafficking organizations also support an End Demand approach to trafficking. End Demand is defined by one anti-human trafficking organization as follows:

The Nordic Model, the world's first law to recognize prostitution as violence against women and a violation of human rights. It criminalizes the purchase of commercial sex by criminalizing the buyers and offering exit services and assistance to those exploited through prostitution (CATWInternational.org 2016).

Just as the Shrage quote earlier indicated, there is in this explanation of the End Demand policy a conflation of trafficking and voluntary sex work, accomplished by the statement that "prostitution is violence against women." When prostitution has been defined in this manner,

then law enforcement throughout the United States has been justified for opening task forces targeting voluntary sex workers. Were it to do so, law enforcement would also eventually need to close such task forces because none of the three requisite elements for human trafficking as it is federally defined could be established. Those three requisite elements are "coercion, force, or fraud." Voluntary sex work rarely results in coercion, force, or fraud.

It is difficult to pinpoint the origins of the human trafficking focus in the United States, but two early influential figures in the movement were U.S. sociologist Kevin Bales and Canadian journalist Victor Malarek, and their work has been carried forward into the present by the influential *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristoff. Bales published his first book about global human trafficking, though he called it "slavery," in 1999. Subsequent books in 2005, 2007, and 2008 all continued to include some version of the word "slave" in their titles and all continued to discuss fraud, force, or coerced employment. In 2003 Malarek released the book *The Natasha's* (full title *The Natashas: The Horrific Inside Story of Slavery, Rape, and Murder in the Global Sex Trade* reveals Malarek's use of evocative negative language depicting sex trafficking). This book put a very specific white face on the trafficking movement, arguing eastern European women were primary targets of traffickers. Between the publication of these two books, the U.S. federal government passed "The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act (TVPA)" in 2000. Since then journalism has continued to play a major role in the anti-trafficking movement, as *New York Times* op-ed columnist Nicholas Kristoff has from 2012-2014 made human trafficking an issue of focus in his articles.

Since the passage of the TVPA, critiques of the anti-trafficking movement have also emerged (Hoang and Parrenas 2014). Some scholars argue the U.S. policy has been influenced by Protestant religious movements and this was the source of the abolitionist anti-trafficking movement from in the 1990s as well as its largest constituent at present (Shrage 2014; Bernstein 2007b; Soderlund 2005). Multiple authors have argued Europe's anti-trafficking movement is a thinly veiled attempt to monitor and maintain national borders (Davydova 2013;

Agustin 2007; Bernstein 2007a), which may also apply to the U.S. anti-trafficking movement. Scholars also argue the anti-trafficking movement sides with anti-immigration and anti-sex movements when migrant women workers are portrayed as trafficking victims (Desyllas 2007; Kempadoo 2001; Doezema 2000). Historically, the United States experienced a social movement opposed to so-called white slavery in the early 1900's that shares many parallels with today's anti-trafficking movement. The lessons of history are that even then fear of white slavery was tied to anti-immigration, worker deportation, and the criminalization of prostitution (D'Emilio and Freedman 2012; Spencer and Broad 2012; Donovan 2005; Doezema 2000; Stienstra 1996). Scholars have noted the anti-trafficking movement's creation of an "ideal victim" in need of – and, more importantly, worthy of – rescue. By portraying all sex workers as victims, some in the anti-pornography and anti-trafficking movements appear to claim the moral high ground as activists attempting to rescue women from sex trafficking.

Farrell, McDevitt, and Fahy (2010) define human trafficking in the following manner, "the illicit movement of people for exploitive commercial sex, or labor". They note that this is how the term is "commonly known" (Farrell et al. 2010). This differs from the Bureau of Justice (B.J.S.) definition:

Human trafficking has occurred if a person was induced to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or coercion. Any person under age 18 who performs a commercial sex act is considered a victim of human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion was present (B.J.S. 2012).

There is clear disagreement between these two definitions, which may help to explain some other anomalies around the topic. While most people may believe that human trafficking involves movement, the legal definition focuses on coercion. There are at least two reasons why this confusion persists. First, the most common U.S. use of the word "traffic" refers to cars on streets. Second, two of the other federal statutes addressing immoral activity refer to travel: the 1875 Page Act, which forbade immigration for the purpose of prostitution, and the 1911 U.S.

Supreme Court ruling on *Hoke v. United States* that charged states with regulating prostitution and retained only interstate travel relating to immoral activity as the province of the federal government (ProCon.org 2012). So while the existing federal statute on human trafficking has no mention of travel, the pattern from historical statutes may cause people to believe that it does. Furthermore, very few people are aware that whenever an underage person exchanges sex for money, it is also legally trafficking.

Sex workers and sex work activists claim trafficking legislation is a new way to further demonize and criminalize the exchange of sex for money. The exchange of sex for money has not always been illegal in the United States. Prior to the 1920's a variety of different forms of sex work, including working in brothels, treating, and exotic dancing were legal. As Petersen notes,

Although operated and controlled by the scorned class of madams and ordinary prostitutes, the sex industry exerted a surprising influence on the civic life of Minneapolis. In 1868 the necessity of a commercial sex trade forced extremely reluctant city leaders into a partnership with vice (2013: 5).

Since the criminalization of some types of sex work, many U.S. city leaders have no longer had to form partnerships with vice, instead they have been able to make arrests. Human trafficking arrests are a new and additional way to criminalize vice. While it seems human trafficking laws would specifically and only criminalize tricking a person into commercial sex in exchange for immigration opportunities, the actual reach of these laws is far more extensive. Sex work activists claim regional police forces across the U.S. have used the TVPA as a pretense for arrests of indoor sex workers, such as escorts and sensual masseurs (Bernstein 2007b).

To show they do not wish for anyone to be coerced into the job they are doing of their own volition, some sex workers have discussed the difficult position they are put in by anti-trafficking initiatives, as in the following sex worker quote:

Sex workers are just as against trafficking as anyone else is. In fact, if prostitution were decriminalized or legalized, we could help to fight it better. Police wouldn't

be spending all their time busting willing workers and could more easily find the non-wiling ones and we could report the ones we come across without repercussions (happyhookernw.tumblr.com 2012).

This is why many 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave and pro-sex feminists want to solve the issues around sex work before dealing with sex trafficking. Decriminalizing and regulating sex work in the United States would help demographers get a better sense of who is actually doing the work by choice and who has been coerced into it, or trafficked. These delineations are crucial before a just program of public policy against sex trafficking can be pursued. The criminalization of sex work leads to a climate of silence and fear that may have contributed to the statistic that “less than 10% of police agencies identified human trafficking cases from 2000 to 2006,” (Farrell et al., 2010) even taking into account that the legal definition is broader than the popular definition. A second possible explanation for suppressed trafficking statistics is that many police have the same definition of the crime as the common definition; that it must involve movement. A third possibility is that some police who know the legal definition only selectively pursue arrests, based on egregious vs. harmless or ignorant commission of the crime, a kind of street-level bureaucracy (Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010). Finally, perhaps trafficking statistics have not been suppressed at all, and it really is not a common crime. These possibilities are why research on advocacy groups, social movements, moral panics, and stigmatized populations is particularly relevant.

### Methods

I pursued three methodological strategies in order to answer the research question regarding the news media's role in sex work and sex industry portrayals. One strategy I used was to compare over time frequency of reports on human trafficking in three major newspapers, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. I selected these three news sources because they each have a wide readership, they are some of the most well-known newspapers in the United States, and they all have online archives of their articles. In terms of



representing widespread public opinion, these three newspapers represent important sources for news media portrayals contributing to public opinion. I checked for frequency of portrayals at the beginning of the Digital Age, 1990 and compared that data to frequency of portrayals in 2012.

In a second strategy for understanding news media portrayals of sex work, the sex industry, and stigma I constructed a convenience sample of news articles by setting up Google News Alerts on the terms "sex work" and "prostitution." I kept the volume of the default setting, which is "Only the best results." Google's definition for "Only the best results" is: "Google Alerts tries to filter the results so that they are relevant to your query and high quality," (Google Alerts 2012). The searches were delivered from the period of 10/21/12 – 12/05/12, resulting in 353 usable articles. These articles were from English-language newspapers with online access. I did not restrict location of coverage. I excluded blogs and opinion pieces. I read each news article and noted the location, topic, and use of search term. The media was delivered daily to my inbox via Google news searches. As a result, the articles originate from a variety of journalistic sources, with the common thread that they are among the 10 most relevant news items of the day for my keywords.

In my third strategy I follow the research mandate of Weitzer (2009) that more scholarly attention should be directed towards indoor prostitution as opposed to street prostitution in order to "enrich our understanding of contemporary sex work," (Weitzer, 2009). I supplement the newspaper articles data with documentation of sex worker populations collected through in-depth interviews. A full description of my interview research methods appears in Chapter 2. In brief, I interviewed 36 sex workers about their perceptions of the Internet's effect on sex work, the sex industry, and stigma. I asked each interviewee about interactions with law enforcement. I have brought some of their responses about experiences with law enforcement into this chapter to show the range of sex worker experience that is not evident in news media reports.

## Findings and Analysis

### U.S. Prostitution Arrests in the Digital Age

If the Digital Age, having made faster and broader communication more widely accessible has affected sex work by making it easier to engage in illegal sexual activity out of the public eye (shifting some street prostitution to indoor prostitution), then a decrease in prostitution arrests during the time period of increasing Internet use should be evident. In terms of occupational risk and reward, perhaps increased reliance on digital technology has reduced the risk of illegal forms of sex work, such that even if the reward for sex work (economic capital) stayed the same over time, that reward would seem greater in relation to diminished risk. Figure 5 below shows U.S. prostitution arrests from 1980 to 2012. Figure 5 also presents a puzzle to reconcile possibly positive effects of the Internet, such as a connection to decreasing prostitution arrests, with ongoing sex work stigma.

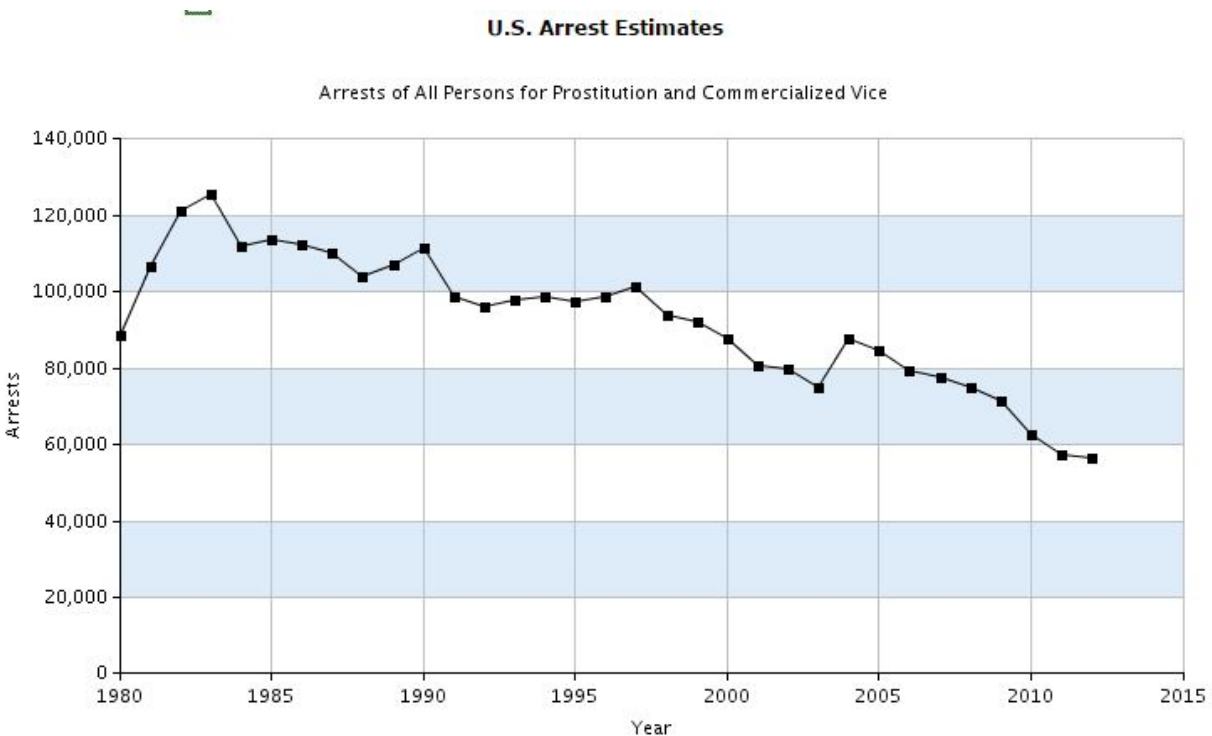


Figure 5: U.S. Arrests for Prostitution Annually 1980-2015  
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Arrest Statistics 2015.

We cannot use arrest rates as a measure of crime; rather arrest rates are a measure of police action towards perceived criminal activity. A decrease in arrest rates shows that police action in response to the perceived criminal activity of commercial sex has decreased over time.

Recall from Chapter 1 that In 1995 about 14% of American adults were using the Internet according to statistics released by the Pew Research Center. In that year the Netscape Navigator web browser became the world's number one web browser and Netscape stock became available for purchase on the market, with a successful initial public offering (Lashinsky 2015). Figure 1 shows that from that year to 2012 prostitution arrests have mostly steadily declined. Some scholars theorize this is because for the majority of the 20th Century street prostitution was the most common target for police (though escorting, street prostitution, sugaring, and sensual massage were all illegal). In the final decade of the 20th Century a combination of the World Wide Web, mobile computing, and local area wireless computer networking made it possible for some workers who used to recruit clients on the streets to move indoors (Cunningham and Kendall 2011). None of my interview participants claimed they had engaged in street prostitution and then altered their business to use Internet advertising of their services, so I cannot verify this scholarly theory is correct. I can confirm that during the time period portrayed in Figure 1 there have been no prostitution laws repealed in any region of the United States. The only legislative change in the time period shown in Figure 1 was the passage of the TVPA in 2000, and it's renewal in 2003, 2006, and 2008.

### **News Reports on Prostitution, Sex Work, and Trafficking**

The archives of three major U.S. newspapers show the frequency of articles on trafficking in 1990 compared with frequency of articles on trafficking in 2012. I consulted the news archives of the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and the New York Times. Here are the findings:

Table 2: U.S. Newspapers Reports on Human Trafficking Over Time

|                   | Articles on "Human Trafficking" in 1990 | Articles on "Human Trafficking" in 2012 |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Chicago Tribune   | 1                                       | 29                                      |
| Los Angeles Times | 0                                       | 39                                      |
| New York Times    | 0                                       | 116                                     |

Table 2 shows articles on human trafficking were uncommon at the dawn of the Digital Age. The complete absence of articles in two out of three newspapers stands in contrast to the high numbers of articles in 2012. Table 2 indicates that social concern over human trafficking, as seen in news media reporting has risen over time. The TVPA passed in 2000, so perhaps there was virtually no reporting about the crime of human trafficking in 1990 because it wasn't yet a crime. It has been federally illegal since 1948 to coerce individuals to engage in prostitution (Title 18, Part 1, Ch. 117, Section 2422), so the change over time in number of articles on human trafficking shows the increase in the use of the term "human trafficking" to describe coerced or forced commercial sex. If it is the case that news reporting about prostitution consistently draws attention to it as a criminal act, and with some frequency affiliates prostitution with an even more socially reprehensible act of human trafficking, then these articles indicate public opinion about prostitution is not likely improving. At least for the public that reads news articles, both via paper and the Internet, negative depictions of sex work in the news may suggest sex workers are worthy of marginalization and criminalization.

The current climate of media attention towards sex work is divided, representing many parties. Some of these social groups include advocates for sex worker rights, victims of human trafficking, arresting officers, concerned citizens, and those accused of the crime of prostitution. The anti-trafficking movement keeps pressure on this reporting. Anti-human trafficking legislation and interest groups have grown in numbers nationwide. Some examples include a Human Trafficking, Prostitution & Sex Work Conference 2012 in Toledo, OH; Proposition 35 passed in November 2012 in the state of California; and the Kansas Conference on Slavery and

Human Trafficking utilizing funds from Governor Sam Brownback occurred in 2013. President Obama on September 25, 2012 stated, "Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time" (Whitehouse.gov, 2012). This claim accompanied the promotion of a new White House initiative aimed at stopping human trafficking.

I read 353 news articles in total returned through the Google News alerts. In this sample 239 of the articles discussed sex work or prostitution in the United States. 201 of the 239 U.S. articles used the term "prostitution," 14 used the term "sex work." 67 of all 239 U.S. articles also referenced "trafficking." 114 English-language articles discussed prostitution and/or sex work outside the United States.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the pattern in the United States, in the 114 international articles the term sex work was used about as often as the term prostitution, though the sample size of International articles was too small for me to make claims about International English-language news reporting patterns. In the United States news reports about prostitution, sex work, and trafficking also referenced moral judgment, police prosecution, and loss of livelihood for sex workers. By far the majority of news articles in my sample documented arrests made for prostitution. In contrast, the voices of sex workers, their allies, and victims of trafficking in the media were muted at best.

During the time of my news media analysis (October through December 2012) three major events domestically and internationally affected the results. Domestically there were presidential and state elections. A state-wide proposition (Prop. 35) to increase penalties for those convicted of human trafficking was on the ballot in California (Associated Press 2012, Nahmod 2012). Internationally the Supreme Court of Canada was considering a ruling on the "legal right to work in brothels and hire bodyguards and drivers," (Stechyson 2012). Articles discussing the potential ruling were present in the data set (Houston 2012). Finally, a third event, also International, occurred when the United Nations released a report on sex work

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<sup>11</sup> In the sample of news articles I collected, 24 articles had to be discarded because they did not include portrayals of sex work, trafficking, of prostitution.

regulation and HIV transmission/prevention practices in Asia and the Pacific (Godwin 2012). Their report found criminalization of sex work negatively affects HIV prevention practices in these countries, and furthermore sex workers in many of the 48 countries they studied were the targets of police harassment (Farisz 2012). Though my sample of international articles was not representative, these three events all arguably affected news media reporting on prostitution and sex work in the United States during the time period, since California is in the U.S., Canada neighbors the U.S., and the United States is a member state in the United Nations.

News reports discussing trades that many sex workers would not classify as prostitution were nonetheless labeled by the news media and police as prostitution. For example this San Mateo, CA newspaper report implicates a masseuse in claims of prostitution:

After receiving multiple tips that a female masseuse was illegally prostituting herself through her job at the Asian Spa Massage Parlor at 1275 Woodside Road in unincorporated Redwood City, deputies from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office conducted an undercover sting operation Tuesday, resulting in her arrest (van der Kleut 2012).

Of particular note in this quote is how the journalist labels the trade of sensual massage as criminal and actually prostitution. Also of note is the rhetorical turn that the worker "was illegally prostituting herself," seemingly indicating that she was in some way a victim of her own poor judgment. In no part of this article is it indicated that this woman was a worker, doing her job. Hence the rift between pro-sex work and anti-prostitution proponents plays out in the news media with the rhetoric that different types of sex work are actually just prostitution.

On the Sulphur, Louisiana news website klfy.com, I located the article "Six arrested in prostitution sting at Sulphur motels," contributed by Laura Heller (accessed online here: <http://tinyurl.com/naffifg> Heller 2015). Scrolling down after the title the reader would see a grid of photos assembled 2-down, three-across. Three white women, one black woman, and two black men were pictured and the photo was captioned with their last names. Following the photos the

article consisted of five short paragraphs in which the author stated, "Contact was made with the suspects using the website Backpage.com," (Heller 2015). This news article was similar to many in a variety of major news sources (Internet, television, or paper).

In some geographical areas, it was highly likely that articles containing the term prostitution would also contain the term trafficking, for example California, Iowa, New York, Texas, Ohio, and Nebraska. A portion of my study window was a number of days leading up to election day. Several articles during this time period discussed a California ballot initiative to increase penalties against human trafficking. The results for California are inflated due to reporting on the ballot issue. Nebraska, Iowa, and Texas are notable for a different reason. These are locations where the content of the articles indicates a fear of finding trafficking drove initiatives to target sex workers in police stings. Even in states without many articles about prostitution, journalists were still likely to draw a connection between prostitution and trafficking. In a Northeast Columbia Patch article entitled "Illegal Immigrants Plead Guilty in Interstate Prostitution Ring," the author writes:

Maria Garcia-Moreno, 42, of Mexico, Ruben Cabanas-Torres, 30, Mexico, and Esteban Acosta-Munoz, 51, of Honduras pleaded guilty to transporting females from Atlanta to South Carolina for the purpose of prostitution, a US Attorney's Office press release stated. The females, also illegal immigrants, were transported for the purpose of prostitution with migrant workers in Aiken County (Gable 2012).

It is unclear in this article whether police concern over trafficking, immigration, or prostitution was the primary motivation for targeting these three people. It is clear that the report unites the marginalization of race and occupation as an item worthy of news. This mixture of police searching for trafficking and targeting prostitutes and immigrants raises ethical issues since it disadvantages the sex worker population in order to privilege potential trafficked victims.

*Prostitution*, particularly in U.S. media accounts appears as an umbrella term to refer to sex workers and victims of sexual trafficking (a type of human trafficking). News articles describing prostitution busts or stings, in addition to being largely from the U.S., often list human trafficking included in a list of the crimes caught by a sting as evident in this quote from an article on 10/26/12,

Robert Kennedy, 56, of Peoria, Ill., was charged with felony human trafficking.

Frederick Jenkins, 40, of Phoenix, was charged with prostitution and felony possession of a firearm by a felon.

Three people were charged with prostitution and conspiracy: Rebecka Castaneda-Valadez, 21, of East Moline, Ill.; Cassie Amans, 26, of Marshalltown; and Bret Cary, 39, of Davenport.

Twenty-two others were charged with prostitution. They range in age from 23 to 76 (Aschbrenner 2012).

As illustrated, human trafficking is grouped together with the charges of prostitution and other criminal activity resulting from the sting. In this excerpt the charge of trafficking is listed first, and the crimes are fitted to a hierarchy, with prostitution at the bottom of the list and connected with the majority of defendants while human trafficking is at the top of the list. Articles like this promote the idea that human trafficking happens alongside prostitution, but they also reveal that trafficking is rare, and seemingly viewed by the reporter as among the most criminal allegations.

In a few articles (from Oregon and Kansas) the text clearly revealed a motivation to stop human traffickers had generated interest in stopping prostitution. For example, one article about a sting in Albany, OR began,

One of the reasons Albany police conducted an undercover prostitution sting Friday night at the Phoenix Inn was to gather information to help determine the amount of human trafficking occurring in Albany, said Albany police Det. Brad Liles (Ingalls 2012).



The detective's comment is consistent with reporting about human trafficking in some of the other articles for this study. Police departments are unsure if human trafficking is a problem in their community, and if so, to what extent.

The article about the police sting in Albany, OR was longer and included more direct quotes from police than most news articles in my sample. It went on to say,

Friday's sting was a dual investigation to try to catch women posting ads in the escort section on the Internet under Backpage.com, Liles said, and to pick up men who responded to the ads... Liles said the prostitution seen in Albany is directly related to the Internet. The meetings are negotiated by cell phone (Ingalls 2012).

According to this quote, the police in Albany, OR both used the Internet to aid their investigation and blamed the Internet, more specifically Backpage.com, for playing a role in the exchange of sex for money. Several other articles about the U.S. referred to the police using the Internet to identify potential criminal activity. In an article about a case in Springfield, IL:

Undercover Springfield police officers arrested 10 women Tuesday during a prostitution sting that, for the first time ever, targeted women who had placed ads on a website (Reynolds 2012).

Quotes such as these reveal some police departments are policing the Internet much in the same way they would have policed a street for solicitors in the past. News items documented stings during the study period of 42 arrested in Orlando, FL; 27 in Muscatine, IA; 20 in Cudahy, CA; 35 in Birmingham, AL, and 17 in Paterson, NJ as a few of the many.

Two more sets of articles in my sample demonstrate the stigma of sex work, and the need for more use of the term *sex work*. Moreover, these articles demonstrate the need for more pro-sex work advocacy in the U.S. These cases occurred in Alabama and Maine.

Thanksgiving was celebrated in the U.S. during my study period and articles in my sample reported on a beating suffered by out lesbian Mallory Owens while attending her girlfriend's

family's Thanksgiving celebration. This quote from a news article links the beating to prostitution,

Ally Hawkins, 20, Owens' girlfriend, told the news station that her brother attacked Owens because he found out the couple was "heavy into drugs" and had worked as prostitutes (Seiger 2012).

This excerpt suggests that the culture of sex negativity and suspicion theorized by Rubin is still evident in the U.S. today. One way to combat this negativity is to support advocacy for the workers targeted in the manner that Owens was on Thanksgiving Day. There was also this quote about an occurrence in Maine during the study period,

A resident named as a bad client on two "escort" Web sites is charged with engaging a prostitute in Old Orchard Beach, Maine.

The Old Orchard Beach Police Department announced Monday that Scott Pipher, 34, of 358 Court St., has been arrested on a prostitution charge and is scheduled to be arraigned Jan. 30 (Dinan 2012).

The article goes on to state that two prostitutes were also arrested. This news item was unusual in that rather than referring only to websites where sex workers advertise, it documents websites a site sex workers notified one another about clients to avoid. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation I explore further the ways sex workers work together to provide for their own and fellow workers safety. In this news quote we see sex workers do not trust others to interdict on bad clients, so they work to effectively blacklist some people. This article argued in this particular case sex workers claims about bad clients were respected by the police, though not respected enough to prevent sex workers own arrest as well as the client's.

### **Sex Workers Accounts of Law Enforcement Experiences**

Thus far in this chapter we have considered declining U.S. arrest rates for prostitution, increased news media reporting rates on human trafficking, and examples of news articles on prostitution, sex work, and trafficking. We have answered the question of whether the news

media could be considered a social force contributing to the ongoing criminalization and marginalization of sex work. The data thus far reveals that while police arrests have decreased, there remains a steady stream of news media reports about criminal commercial vice, and an increase in reporting on coerced, forced, and/or fraudulent work. Further, there is a high coincidence of articles referring to trafficking also referring to prostitution. If we compare these indicators with Schudson's five types of media bias, it is apparent in new media reports about sex work, prostitution, and trafficking that event-centered, negative, and official biases are present. The data indicates sex workers should be reporting decreased attention from police, and increased occurrences of human trafficking. In in-depth interviews 36 sex workers I asked, "Have you ever had any experience with law enforcement?" In the following section I will show that sex workers responses ranged from having had no contact with law enforcement to having been arrested. In considering sex worker interview data we should not lose sight of the fact that from 1990 to 2016 the commercial exchange of sex for money has been illegal in 99.990 percent of U.S. counties<sup>12</sup>. Changes in commercial sex policy during this time have been characterized by consistent increases in punitive and criminal restrictions, such as the passage of the federal TVPA, multiple state-level anti-trafficking statutes, and Measure B in the city of Los Angeles.

Many sex workers I interviewed had never had any contact with law enforcement, in spite of the fact that all of my interviewees worked throughout the United States in places where the exchange of sex for money is illegal. Interviewees who worked primarily as porn performers, cam workers, and phone sex operators were particularly unlikely to mention having experience with the police. Here's an example of one interviewee who said she had very limited experience with law enforcement:

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<sup>12</sup> As of 2013 the U.S. Census Bureau reported 3007 counties in the United States. According to *The State of Sex* by Brents, Hausbeck, and Jackson (2010) just 10 counties in the state of Nevada have legalized the exchange of sex for money.

Not directly. I got pulled over for speeding, and he's like "Where are you going?"

"Portland." "Wow! That's a long ways away. What are you doing there?" "I'm dancing." "You can't dance in Arizona?" (Anica, Interview Transcript 2014)

Anica, aged 25, who had worked both in camming and stripping, reported having been pulled over for speeding. Her reason for travel was work-related. When she admitted her reason for travel to the arresting officer she was asked for more information. This was a relatively light exchange, compared with some other interviewees experiences, but also representative of the sex workers who had little or no experience with law enforcement.

Some police that sex workers remembered coming into contact with had used the sex worker identity as a reason for negative treatment. For example one interviewee who had worked as a dancer, and in power-play-for-pay recalled a time she dealt with law enforcement before she started working in the industry, but when her residence seemed to indicate otherwise:

The one time I've had experience with law enforcement before was before I was dancing. It was like, um they came to my house because of a domestic dispute, and I had a pole up in my house. The guy definitely looked at me sideways for sure. (Piper, Interview Transcript 2014)

Piper, age 29, after the experience described in the quote went on to work several years in the sex industry with no further contact with law enforcement. At the time of our interview she had been working as a dancer for many years. She was vigilant about living some distance away from the club where she danced, being careful and consistent about regimes of self care such as taking time off from work during burnout, and consistently policing her disclosure to others about her work in the sex industry. As a mother, she reported being careful to not tell other mothers what she did for a living. Piper's quote shows she had the early experience of sex work stigma via the presence of a symbol for sex work in her house, and she remained wary afterwards of parts of her identity that might trigger unfair or negative treatment.

A former sex worker who had worked in six of the fourteen sex work trades discussed in this dissertation offered a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between law enforcement and sex work, which I was able to confirm through my analysis of news media. She stated:

I think there are waves of it, especially in New York City, there are different waves depending on the election cycle usually. And also what other press is happening. Like you know we had a big crackdown in late January/early February because of the Super Bowl. So it's usually tied to news media events and the election cycle (Frida, Interview Transcript 2014).

Here Frida, age 34, had observed through her personal history of sex work as an escort, nude model, pornographic actress, fetish model, sensual masseur, and as a receptionist at a dungeon that while police arrests may be going down over time, they still occur and tend to happen in waves. Her quote took a systematic view of law enforcement tactics, and she was also systematic in her exploration in multiple different sex work trades. My research supports the theory that police arrests of sex workers as reported in the news goes in waves, and those waves are related to claims made in the media, entertainment events, and election cycles. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter one cluster of the 353 total articles centered on an election cycle in California. Those articles drew connections between human trafficking and prostitution, as Proposition 35, which was passed by California voters, increased penalties against those found guilty of trafficking. Another cluster centered on news of a Zumba instructor also engaged in sex work where local media reports triggered national media reports.

Interview data established that those sex workers who have a public place of business were likely to have had some experience with law enforcement. As one interviewee mentioned:

Some people in the sex industry have certain types of jobs where they see literally law enforcement once a week or once a month. That they're kind of just

always driving by or always in the area. Certain clubs get targeted (Grace, Interview Transcript 2014).

Grace, age 26, had worked as a stripper during her employment in the sex industry. Her quote indicated spillover between policing of the illegal forms of sex work and the legal forms such as stripping. While her club and the other clubs she described are sources of legal employment, some were still monitored by the police. The fact that strip clubs are public places makes it easier for police to access than other forms of sex work employment. Grace's quote is reminiscent of the news item quoted earlier about the massage parlor targeted by law enforcement. Once again we see according to sex workers some businesses are targeted more by police than others and the focus of the police can be frequent. This type of monitoring is enabled when sex work businesses are public establishments. It is not the case that police only target street prostitutes. Sex workers and the news media confirm massage parlors, dungeons, and strip clubs are also targeted by police. We see that criminalization of even a small number of sex work trades (street prostitution, escorting, sensual massage, and sugaring) still extends suspicions of journalists and police to other legal trades (stripping and power-play-for-pay).

The interview data indicates that workers engaged in escorting, street prostitution, and sensual massage are the most common targets of law enforcement. Charmaine, age 29, said one popular website for posting sex work advertisements was "crawling with cops." Some escorts I spoke with were able to evade law enforcement completely, while others had different experiences. Here an interviewee discussed her experiences with the police:

If anything I think alot of [law enforcement] have become more petty, more controlling. And just because alot of them may think that it's a waste of time to do this, doesn't mean that they're not often getting a real kick out of it. I've been arrested, I've been jailed. I've never been formally charged. Another one of those advantages of whiteness there that played out for me. (Britney, Interview Transcript 2014)

Britney, age 34 had worked in camming, escorting, and writing erotica. Her quote is representative of several interviewees who deeply mistrusted law enforcement. Both Frida's quote about the waves of police attention, and Britney's claim that police "get a real kick" out of arresting sex workers shows sex workers have reasons to mistrust the police. There was not a sense in any of the interviews that the police could be trusted. As in this quote, several sex workers I spoke with indicated white privilege at times mitigated the force of police intervention. Minority sex workers in my interview pool did indicate they were targeted with greater regularity than white workers. The intersection of race and occupation did relate to the level of police intervention.

Interview data expressed an array of sex worker experience with law enforcement. Consistent with the statistic that arrests have declined over time, several sex workers had minimal experience with the police. However, those that did report contact with the police reported treatment consistent with entrenched sex work stigma. So while arrests may have gone down, given that policy restricting sex work has only increased since 1990, sex workers consistently reported a climate of police mistrust. I was also looking for statements in the interview data that indicated the interviewees had been victims of human trafficking or knew someone who had been a victim. Two of 36 interviewees reported experience consistent with human trafficking: one had been the victim of fraud when she replied to a classified ad and engaged in a week's worth of escorting only to be cheated out of money she was promised. She did not report the fraud to the police. A second interviewee reported she continued escorting and camming longer than she wanted because she was pressured by her boyfriend at the time to keep working. This could be considered coercion, given that they were in a romantic relationship. Neither of these two workers stories was consistent with the rhetoric of human trafficking, which prefers stories where vulnerable people have been lured into commercial sexual practices and actively prevented from quitting. Both of the two workers with experiences somewhat consistent with the letter of the law on human trafficking had begun working in the

sex industry of their own accord, later experienced fraud and pressure not to leave, and after experiencing fraud and pressure went on to voluntarily work in the sex industry for years.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I documented the following four main points. Annually U.S. prostitution arrests have decreased. News media reports on human trafficking are a relatively new phenomenon. News media reports marginalize sex workers by focusing on police arrests, police stings, and the race/ethnicity and gender of those arrested. Workers in both legal and illegal sex work trades are targeted by law enforcement. All of these points confirm news media bias that privileged state accounts of sex work over workers accounts, was negative, and was event-centered relative to Schudson's (2011) five types of distortion. Consistently, reporting on prostitution arrests centered on the event of the arrest. I have shown that in news media reports of sex work, prostitution, and trafficking, reports on trafficking in the United States were more common than reports on sex work, and reporting on prostitution was by far the most common. Reports on trafficking were frequently embedded in reports on prostitution, which likely contributed to a conflating of trafficking with prostitution, specifically for those outside the sex industry.

This research occurred within the greater political context of a popular anti-trafficking social movement. The anti-trafficking cause has benefitted from heightened awareness and attention to the issue of sex trafficking. Many indicators served as evidence the anti-trafficking movement and the U.S. news media have encouraged a moral panic towards the issue of sex trafficking. My small sample of articles revealed the spread of trafficking concern. Several articles acknowledged that local police had not yet seen evidence of trafficking, but alerted to the cause they were now looking. A comparison of the rate of reporting on trafficking in 1990 to the rate of reporting in 2012 in three major U.S. news papers revealed dramatic growth. The growth in popularity of anti-trafficking organizations was also consistent with sociological expectations regarding a moral panic.



Several parallels exist between the anti-pornography movement of the 1970's and 1980's and the anti-trafficking movement today. The findings assembled here indicated sex worker activism was having notably smaller effect in comparison to anti-trafficking activism and support relative to the U.S. news media. U.S. media reports on sex work, that is to say news articles that recognize the exchange of sex for money is work, were highly infrequent. If prostitution is a stigmatized term, then media reporting on the topic engaged in sex work stigmatization to a large extent (201 out of 237 articles in a 6-week convenience sample). The frequent co-occurrence of reports on trafficking being located within news articles about prostitution, the ongoing arrests of sex workers, and the increase in news reports on trafficking overall from 1990 to 2012 all indicate sex work stigma is perpetuated by the news media.

There are many possible directions for future research. Media reports may reveal cultural attitudes, but they are rarely able to systematically depict processes of police, sex workers, and/or activists. Future research on this topic should connect directly with these populations to get a better sense of sex work from the affected populations. The 2012 Dissertation of the Year awarded by the American Sociological Association was Kimberly Kay Hoang's "New Economies of Sex and Intimacy in Vietnam", which applied the theory of Pierre Bourdieu to an analysis of class-stratified Vietnamese sex workers. Future research could be informed by Hoang's work and work to further document sex work as a global commodity. One of the strengths of her research was the connection of class to the issue of sex work. Future research should be attentive to race, class, occupation, gender, and sexual orientation. My research in this chapter illustrated the clear need for demographic information on the sex worker population. As one quote suggested, it will continue to be a hugely difficult task for police departments to stop human trafficking so long as those in the sex work industry who were not involved in trafficking endanger their livelihoods by cooperating with the police.

The findings in this chapter provide evidence of three of the five types of media bias described by Schudson (2011). News articles on sex work, prostitution, and trafficking are

biased towards action-centered, negative, detached, technical, and official reporting, yet negative, action-centered, and official reporting were the three most consistent forms of bias. While the laws against some forms of sex work in the United States remain unchanged, the news media consistently used those laws as guidelines for the tone of reports. The media analysis in this chapter showed there was very little ideological space for journalists to report on sex work as simply work, regardless of how many workers have fully embraced this reality. So long as police departments throughout the United States continue to make daily arrests for the crimes of prostitution and trafficking, the news media continues to prioritize those events over the activism, civil disobedience, and legal work of sex workers.

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## Digital Desire Conclusion

I have sought in this dissertation to answer the question, what effect has the Internet had on sex work, sex workers, and the sex industry? This research has improved our understandings of how marginalized populations have used and can hope to use the Internet in the future to shift perceptions about group affiliation and status. Exploring this question also improved our understandings of some of the least respected, most stigmatized forms of occupation in the United States. The question has offered us the chance to consider a key concern of organizational sociology: how two influential industries, telecommunications and the sex industry, have affected one another over the past 22 years.

My research initially had three parts. First I planned to analyze 22 years of popular films to gain a view into media representations of the sex worker population and industry, and to explore one possible mechanism for stigma. Second, I planned to analyze more than 300 news articles to consider non-fiction representations of the population as a second possible mechanism for stigma, and to learn of events affecting the population. Third, I planned to interview workers in the industry to hear how they thought their work was perceived, and the effect of the Internet on sex work.

As I began to execute this research it became clear the first and second parts of my plan (for popular film analysis and news article analysis) were fruitful. One problem I encountered was although interviews with sex workers gave me a view into the sex industry, they did not fully illuminate it, as the viewpoints of consumers and producers were somewhat missing. To address this gap, in the second year of the dissertation, as I continued to complete in-depth interviews, I traveled to two different sex industry events to collect industry-level information pertaining to my research question. This was a fantastic choice, and I cannot stress enough for future researchers into any occupation, that, first it is important to consider the worker's experience of the industry. Bringing industry-level data to bear on the worker's perspective,



however, can be a great boon to the research. Industry-level data allow the researcher to situate the worker's experience in a larger social, political, and economic context and can reveal structural patterns and changes that are only partly visible in the day-to-day lived experiences of workers. For instance, after attending the Feminist Porn Conference it was clear to me that though many feminists are creating pornographic books, films, websites, and other creative products, there remains the perception both within the industry and outside of it that feminist porn is a niche market.

This research produced several main findings. First, I found the Internet improved worker fellowship, skills acquisition, and advertising. These are the findings one might classically predict for a communications technology, and use of the Internet held up well as a variable leading to outcomes of these three types. Next, I found the Internet has not led in any significant or detectable way to increases in worker safety, increases in worker profits, or decreases in sex work occupational stigma. As I analyzed the data, I saw that workers expressed concerns for their safety, and I noted the absence of any claims that digital technology improved worker safety. When I asked the workers whether they thought they earned a fair wage in the sex industry the vast majority said no they did not, and many spoke about their impression that fees and wages were stagnant.

The question of stigma was checked and documented in three different ways. I asked sex workers during in-depth interviews a series of questions designed to measure perceptions of the work and stigma towards the work. All sex workers I spoke with stated they had experienced some form of harassment, exclusion, or social isolation resulting from their work in the sex industry. Family, friends, or acquaintances caused the vast majority of marginalizing experiences. Clients or other industry employees caused very few marginalizing experiences. I found many sex workers tended to be guarded about who they told about their work. I also found consistent fears of arrest and frustration about carceral policies amongst sex workers. I also checked the question of stigma by considering fictional representations of sex work and the

sex industry by looking at popular film portrayals. I found trends in popular film are to represent sex workers at a rate of about 3.3 negative representations to every 1 positive representation, and 3.4 negative representations for every 1 neutral representation. I found the trend in popular film has been to represent the sex industry at a rate of approximately 16 negative portrayals for every 1 positive portrayal, and 3.2 negative representations for every 1 neutral representation. I could conclude from these findings that popular films work to maintain the stigma associated with sex work and the sex industry, regardless of change in perceptions of the work that might have resulted from the Internet. Finally, I looked at representations of sex work in the news media. I found the news media use the term *prostitution* in reports about arrests, incarceration, and criminal activity, the term prostitution is commonly found in articles that also mention trafficking, police raids and stings. I found that the term *sex work* is infrequently used by the U.S. news media, though when it does appear in news articles it is found in articles reporting on sex work politics or advocacy. These findings led me to the conclusion that news articles also contribute to stigmatizing sex work and the sex industry, regardless of changes in the work that might have resulted from the Internet. I concluded that stigma towards sex work is ongoing in the Digital Age, and I found no evidence stigma has abated due to the Internet.

The question of whether or not the Internet has led to increased safety for sex workers is particularly salient because some influential publications have argued it has (Cunningham and Kendall 2011), and safety has been a pertinent issue in a great deal of research on sex work (Weitzer 2009, Rosen and Venkatsh 2008). My dissertation speaks directly to the issue of safety and shows how studies that find the Internet increases safety for sex workers are likely to overly limit their conceptualizations of sex work. Certainly it is possible that rates of street prostitution might have undergone reductions because mobile devices with Internet access have made it possible to recruit clients online. Nonetheless many workers, quite possibly the majority of sex workers engage in sexual acts and sexual provocation for money and have never advertised their work by standing out in public. It is imperative that we consider all of these workers in our

calculus of increased safety, and if safety has not increased for 13 of 14 trades, then can we really conclude that the Internet has done much to protect sex workers?

This dissertation has extended our knowledge about interactions among the Internet, sex work, the sex industry, and stigma such that I can offer and endorse some recommendations for research into these topics. I recommend to anyone studying occupations or status in the United States that it is important to gather data from workers. It is a tenet of feminist methods that we as researchers let members of marginalized social groups tell their stories. Where possible do two levels of data collection, for example research workers and managers, or workers and owners, or workers and businesses. Two levels of data collection will enrich your primary findings and improve explanations of any social phenomenon. Specific to sex research, hold fast to the understandings that incredible variation is characteristic of human sexuality, and the large majority of human sexual variation is benign (Rubin 1984). As such, if your research participant discloses a sexual practice that is not harmful to herself or others, it is your duty as a researcher to refrain from judgment. To judge a practice on the basis of your own unwillingness to engage in that practice is the role of an ideologue, and better predictions come from evidence than ideology (Silver 2012). There have been many studies on the topic of street prostitution. Still today indoor sex work, sex work done by men, and sex work done by trans\*people remains under-researched (Weitzer 2009). More research is needed reflecting these populations experiences. For those of us with the resources to employ a current or former sex worker looking for work outside the sex industry, your willingness to give these workers a chance is extremely important and valuable. Criminalization is a powerful force in the maintenance of stigma towards sex work. Policies affecting sex workers or the sex industry are best when they are co-authored or informed by sex workers. Policies that result in incarceration of sex workers or their clients are highly problematic and unlikely to improve the lives of sex workers in any way.

I have had the pleasure of giving several presentations on every empirical research chapter in this dissertation. Currently I have two article manuscripts using two different original data sets I created for this dissertation submitted for publication at two different journals. I hope see both of those manuscripts published. I have a clear vision for two more article possibilities stemming from this dissertation; one using the third original empirical data set, and one policy analysis article comparing legal and illegal forms of sex work. Future research into the Internet, sex work, the sex industry, and stigma could use the extensive archive of the trade publication Adult Video News at the University of California Santa Barbara library. Another avenue for future research could be partnering with sex industry business leaders to gain access to anonymized user data.

During the course of this research I became interested in the topic of harm reduction. Some harm reduction policies are in place within our legal system in the United States, and they contrast with the punitive policies. When there are sex work policies in the United States, most are punitive. To work in the sex industry is to be in danger of punishment. I am interested in issues in the United States are treated with harm reduction rather than punishment because I believe innovation of this sort may be one future direction for policy changes for sex workers. Harm reduction when it has been applied to drug users has been intended to stop self-harm, and reduce the corollary damage that can extend from a drug addiction. Illegal sex work is such a different crime because based on my research there is rarely an injured party, and there were no reports in the interviews I did of corollary damage like theft or vagrancy. The only corollary damage came from the way others treated the workers. I am therefore interested in harm reduction and ways we could conceptualize it quite specifically to the work of sex work.

My findings suggest the key U.S. policy change that would lead to improvements in lives of workers in the sex industry is the decriminalization of prostitution. My research indicates a high likelihood that workers in the industry have performed paid labor in more than one sex work trade. One of the greatest difficulties these workers face is navigating the policies that make one

type of sex work legal, another partially illegal, and another fully illegal. Workers are also frustrated with the lack of protections they receive relative to laborers in other industries (porn film actresses decried porn piracy, escorts stated they would probably not report if a client got violent for fear of being arrested themselves, strippers said the protection they received from bouncers and club staff was dependent on how well they tipped those employees, and the list went on). Research participants in my study also indicated they had experienced a somewhat high level of collateral damage in their lives related to the stigma of sex work. Some had been outed at school, some had been asked to leave school, some had been outed at work outside the sex industry, some had been rejected by friends, and some had been rejected by family members. In all these cases, it would be a beneficial policy change for consensual sex work in all forms (camming, power-play-for-pay, escorting, sugaring, etc.) were to be decriminalized.

Decriminalization is a policy change I recommend, but I have found it difficult to do so in conversations with academics because the general assumption is there is no proof of its effectiveness. In fact there are multiple instances in which decriminalizing sex work has proven effective at lowering stigma, increasing trust between sex workers and support system workers (health, education, occupation, and police), and decreasing rates of disease transmission and rape. New Zealand decriminalized prostitution fully in 2003 and an evaluation of the policy change released in 2008 found rates of prostitution did not increase, and sex workers were more willing to report when they had been victimized as a result of the policy (New Zealand Ministry of Justice 2008). The state of Rhode Island decriminalized prostitution for 6 years from 2003 to 2009 and researchers found this led to decreases in counts of rape and disease transmission (Cunningham and Shah 2014). Workers in multiple counties in the state of Nevada are licensed to work as escorts at legalized brothels. "The Nevada Administrative Code... requires customers to wear condoms. Prostitutes are to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases... before they can be employed and periodically after employment," (Brents et al. 2010, pg. 8). Some human trafficking researchers claim the United States must consider an alternative

to the abolition of prostitution for police to effectively help human trafficking victims (Farrell and Cronin 2015). In all of these cases the decriminalization of voluntary sex work either has lowered stigma, decreased the incidence of rape, decreased disease transmission, and helped trafficking victims, or could do so if enacted.

I believe the findings presented in this dissertation either contradict assertions of the "pornification" of U.S. culture from 1990-2013 or specifically delimit the extent of pornification. First, I find that pornographic films, those tools of enculturation decried in *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, are mainly a media product. They exist within a universe of many other media products that are used for primarily two ends: communication and entertainment. Porn films are an outcome of the sex industry, and the sex industry in the United States is much more diverse and different on the whole from the specific sector of films analyzed in *Pornland* as gonzo films. Many media products of the sex industry are feminist, are not recorded, but rather are performed live, are designed by the sex worker, involve explicit consensual exchange between the worker and client, and are supplementary or complete sources of income for sex workers. The sex industry in the United States encompasses a broader universe of exchanges of sex or sexual provocation for money than typically are portrayed. Some sex workers are fully clothed the entire time they're working in the sex industry. Some sex workers appear in films, direct films, and consume them. Some sex workers run their own businesses. Some sex workers could be your colleague without your knowledge of that identity. The very definition I use of sex work, "the exchange of sex or sexual provocation for money" illustrates how sex work cannot be accurately understood by an analysis of gonzo films.

Arguments that the Internet has led to a "pornification" of culture not only mislead readers about the sex industry, but also overestimate the sexualization of the World Wide Web. The Internet, as I have shown in Chapter 2, is less an agent of the sex industry's growth and more a tool, like many other media tools that have come before, that has enabled the sex industry's diversification, and in some ways even the industry's demise. I have shown that strip

clubs can and do have cultures that encourage the workers to engage in some self promotion. The easiest and cheapest way many strippers approach this task is via the Internet. Yet strippers also reported a flattening of wages. Porn actors are also likely to see the Internet as both a benefit and a threat to their employment. They perform in video recordings of their participation in the industry and those recordings are transmitted through the Internet. Some of the transmissions of pornographic films on the Internet are legal and generate income for the works' producers. Many other Internet transmissions of pornographic films are illegal and generate little or no income for the works' producers. An increase in the practice of filing for copyright by porn producers, increased defense of porn copyrights by their holders and the U.S. justice system, and increased prevention of porn piracy by the U.S. justice system are also institutional and policy changes I recommend. Research by Sivan et al. (2014) showed "users are more likely to purchase legally when legal links are promoted in search results, and users are more likely to pirate when pirated links are promoted." The industry giants of Internet search in the United States influence media piracy. I recommend the Federal Communications Commission incentivize Internet search engines to promote legal links to media content, a change that would help not only the producers of pornography, but media producers of all types.

The rise of the Internet and its effects on any industry cannot accurately be understood without considering larger trends in the U.S. work force. These include an increase in the time period of 1990-2013 of temporary labor and a decrease of union representation in the workplace. Here are some things we know about temporary and part-time workers. They often work more than one job. Because they work multiple jobs they interface with more than one social group via their occupations. They are usually not unionized. Because they are not unionized they have no one to fight on their behalf if an occupational environment is opposed to one of their identity statuses. Temporary and part-time laborers are also increasingly common in all industries in the U.S. Thinking back to the interviews with sex workers, I confirmed through my interviews that many U.S. sex workers had multiple forms of employment. Many worked

more than one job within the sex industry, but also they often worked in the sex industry and in a completely different industry. Some of the other types of paid work done by the workers I interviewed are hotel and restaurant work, healthcare, student employment, technology industry employment, and theater work. Work in the U.S. sex industry considered in the context of these larger trends is therefore extremely important to continually understand relative to its marginalizing and stigmatizing effects. The U.S. workforce apart from the sex industry is already an environment of inherent instability. Stigmatized workers are particularly vulnerable. I hope this research has shown the relevance of studies of the Internet when studying occupations. These two issues are intertwined regardless of the occupation type.



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### Appendix A - Interview Participant Demographics

| Name      | Source | Age  | Race                        | Occupations   | Education        |
|-----------|--------|------|-----------------------------|---|------------------|
| Marline   | T      |      | White                       | Stripper, Nude model  | BA               |
| Britney   | T      | 1979 | White                       | Camgirl, Escort, Erotica<br>Writer  | MA               |
| Lurline   | T      | 1978 | Black                       | PSO, Sugar baby, Camgirl  | BA               |
| Charmain  | T      | 1985 | White                       | Stripper, Escort, Sugar baby  | MA               |
| Deanne    | SS     | 1988 | White                       | Stripper  | BA               |
| Grace     | SS     | 1988 | White                       | Stripper  | Some C           |
| Anica     | SS     | 1991 | White                       | Stripper, Camgirl, Nude<br>model  | Some C           |
| Elsabet   | T      | 1987 | White                       | Dominatrix, Escort, Sugar<br>baby, Camgirl, PSO, Fetish<br>model, Stripper                          | BA               |
| Isabel    | SS     | 1986 | Half White,<br>Half Iranian | Stripper, Fetish model, Power<br>play for pay   | Some C,<br>VTECH |
| Frida     | R      | 1980 | White                       | Escort, Nude model, Porn<br>acting, Fetish model, Sensual<br>massage, Phone girl @<br>dungeon       | MA               |
| Katherine | Tw     | 1988 | Asian Indian                | Escorting, Power play for pay   | BA               |
| Halle     | Tw     | 1980 | White                       | Pornographer, Pornographic<br>Actor, Nude model, Nude<br>dancer, BDSM model (Power<br>play for pay) | Some C           |
| Merilyn   | T      | 1989 | White                       | Formerly Escort   | BA               |
| Natasha   | To     | 1986 | White                       | Sugarbaby, Formerly<br>Stripper, Fetish Model,<br>Domme   | MA               |
| Piper     | Jo     | 1985 | Mixed: Latina<br>/ white    | Stripper, Power play for pay,<br>Sold panties on the internet                                       | Some C           |
| Quinn     | R      | 1991 | Asian                       | Cam play for pay (webcam<br>model)  | Some C           |
| Rebecca   | QS     | 1988 | White                       | Power play for pay, Sensual<br>massage  | MA               |
| Trina     | R      | 1986 | Asian                       | Pornographic acting, Nude<br>modeling   | Some C           |
| Seraphine | QS     | 1989 | White                       | Stripping   | MA               |
| Una       | FP     | 1985 | Nat.Am.                     | Escort, Pornographic acting,<br>Pro-domme, Sensual<br>massage, Nude dancing,<br>Cam-play-for-pay    | BA               |
| Violet    | T      | 1986 | Black                       | Stripper, Cam-play-for-pay  | BA               |
| Westlyn   | T      | 1991 | White                       | Sugar baby  | BA               |
| Xara      | T      | 1993 | White                       | Escort  | Some college     |
| Yasmin    | T      | 1990 | White                       | Stripper, Sugar baby,<br>Camgirl, Escort  | MA               |
| Zephyr    | T      | 1994 | White                       | Stripper, Cam girl, Fetish<br>modeling  | Some C           |
| Ava       | Tw     | 1993 | White                       | Cam play for pay, Stripper  | Some C           |

|          |    |      |              |   |                  |
|----------|----|------|--------------|---|------------------|
| Bella    | T  | 1988 | White        | Cam play for pay  | Votec            |
| Cailin   | T  | 1992 | White/Jewish | Stripper, Cam play for pay  | Some college     |
| Daya     | T  | 1994 | White        | Nude model, Pornographic actor                                      | Some college     |
| Elijah   | T  | 1988 | White        | Pornographic actor, Cam play for pay, Escort                        | BA               |
| Farin    | T  | 1991 | White        | Sensual massage, Fetish model, Pornographic actor, Cam play for pay | Some high school |
| Giselle  | T  | 1989 | White        | Phone sex operator, shopping an Erotica ms                          | MA               |
| Heather  | QS | 1985 | White        | Pornographic actress, Stripper                                      | Some college     |
| Iris     | T  | 1981 | White        | Stripper, Cam play for pay  | BA               |
| Juliette | FL | 1972 | White        | Pro-domme   | MA               |
| Linnea   | FL | 1973 | White        | Sex surrogacy, Escort, Nude model                                   | BA               |

Source key: T = Tumblr, Jo = Jones, R = Requested, To = TheToast, SS = Stripper snowball, FP = FeministPornConf, Tw = Twitter, QS = QuadS, FL = Fetlife

## Appendix B - Oral Consent Form

I am a PhD student in the University of Kansas Department of Sociology. I am conducting a research project about Sexuality, Sex Work, and the Internet. I would like to hear your views on the Internet's affect on people's sexuality, the sex work industry, and the ways that sex work and sex workers are viewed by society. If you agree to participate in this research, I'll need about 60 minutes of your time. You have no obligation to participate, and you may discontinue your involvement at any time.

Your participation may cause discomfort or risk from disclosing information pertaining to illegal activity, information relating to sexual activity, and information that could otherwise damage reputation and or employability. Although participation may not benefit you directly, the information obtained from the study will help us gain a better understanding of the impact of the Internet on the sex industry. Any information that will identify you will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, (b) you give written permission, or (c) I am compelled to involuntarily disclose such information (e.g. subpoena).

This interview will be recorded. Recording is not required to participate. You may stop the recording at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by me within two weeks of their creation. Only I and my faculty supervisor will have access to recordings which will be stored in a secured location. Recordings will be deleted immediately following a transcription and transcripts will not contain identifiable information.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. If you have any questions about this project or your participation in it, you may ask me or my faculty supervisor, Joane Nagel at the Department of Sociology at the University of Kansas. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at the University of Kansas at 785-864-7429 or email at [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

Do you consent to this interview?

## Appendix C - Digital Desire Interview Instrument

### Demographics

- 1) What year were you born?
- 2) What is your race/ethnicity?
- 3) How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- 4) What is your gender?
- 5) What is/are your occupation(s)?
- 6) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- 7) In which of the United States did you practice sex work?

### Qualitative Data Collection

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1) | <p>Can you tell me about your sex work background, including how you got started?</p> <p><i>I'm listening for:</i> Yr. started? <span style="margin-left: 150px;">Types of sex work?</span></p> <p>Current or Former sex worker?</p>  |
| 2) | <p>Can you describe for me a day in the life of your job at each of the types of sex work you've mentioned?</p> <p>Type 1:</p> <p>Type 2:</p> <p>Type 3:</p>  |
| 3) | <p>Were things different when you started in the sex industry than they are now?</p> <p><i>I'm listening for:</i> Any mention of Internet presence, absence?</p> <p>Other trends?</p>   |
| 4) | <p>When you first began work in the sex industry, did you tell others about your participation? Why or why not?</p> <p><i>I'm listening for:</i> Who knows? <span style="margin-left: 150px;">Who doesn't?</span></p> <p>Does the Internet affect disclosure decisions?</p> |
| 5) | <p>Has whom you would tell changed from when you first started to now?</p> <p><i>I'm listening for:</i> Did it become easier or more difficult?</p> <p>Does the Internet affect disclosure decisions?</p>   |
| 6) | <p>What do you think others thought about your sex work—at first and then over time?</p> <p>Clients:</p> <p>Family:</p> <p>Friends:</p> <p>Law enforcement:</p> <p>Coworkers:</p> <p>Public:</p>  |
| 7) | <p>Has your participation in this work led to threats to your safety, harassment, exclusion from jobs, education, or social services? If so, can you provide an example?</p>  |

|     |  |
|-----|--|
|     |  |
| 8)  | Did you feel differently about different forms of sex work when you first got involved?<br>Do you feel differently now?  |
| 9)  | Have you had any experience with law enforcement?<br><br><i>I'm listening for:</i> Arrested for sex work, when?<br>Was the arrest for work on the Internet?  |
| 10) | Over time in the industry have you found that law enforcement were more, less, or about the same in terms of strictness and enforcement of laws against sex work?<br><br><i>I'm listening for:</i> Law enforcement perception of Internet sex work different from other forms? |
| 11) | How would you describe the general atmosphere surrounding sex work today?  |
| 12) | Is the current atmosphere around sex work any different from 20 years ago (1990)?<br><br><i>I'm listening for:</i> More liberal? <span style="margin-left: 150px;">More conservative?</span>   |
| 13) | Do you feel that the rate of pay is fair for the labor required in each of the types of sex work you have done?  |

14) Is there anything else about **sex work**, **the role of the Internet**, or **stigma** you would like to add?

### Appendix D - Defining Sex Work

For the purposes of this dissertation research I define the key term, *sex work* as “the commercial exchange of sex or sexual provocation for money”.

This broad definition recognizes links between several widely differing forms of labor in the United States sex industry. The chief trades covered by my definition of sex work are as follows:

|    |                     |   |
|----|---------------------|---|
| 1  | Cam play for pay    | The act of operating a web cam, often from home, and selling time on the web cam for private sex shows  |
| 2  | Escorting*          | The act of selling time for sexual acts indoors, and can be in-call (at the escort's place of business) or out-call, at the client's choice of location     |
| 3  | Fetish modeling     | Selling photos of oneself in fetish gear or activities, such as leather, bondage, age play, etc.  |
| 4  | Nude modeling       | Selling photos of oneself in sexually suggestive poses and sexual acts, such as in nude magazines, and on the Internet                                      |
| 5  | Nude dancing        | Usually occurs at peepshows, where one or more naked women dance in a sexually suggestive manner on a stage with windows that roll up if coins are inserted |
| 6  | Phone sex           | Selling time at a telephone number for sexually suggestive conversation   |
| 7  | Pornographic acting | Performing sexual acts usually recorded for sale, sometimes in the context of a film with plot, sometimes without, and sometimes live on a stage            |
| 8  | Power play for pay  | The act of dominating or submitting to a client in a sexual manner  |
| 9  | Sensual massage     | Usually occurs in a massage parlor and involves the same services as a traditional massage, but with the inclusion of sexual acts                           |
| 10 | Sex surrogacy       | A form of therapy that involves sexual acts with a paying client who has special needs due to impairment of some kind                                       |
| 11 | Street prostitution | The act of selling time for sexual acts in a public geographical location, such as a street corner  |
| 12 | Stripping           | Dancing and undressing in a sexually suggestive manner for customers at a place of business   |
| 13 | Sugaring            | The sale sexual acts in exchange for goods, gifts, and/or money to a very limited clientele, sometimes only one client, known as the sugar mommy/daddy      |
| 14 | Writing erotica     | The practice of crafting stories with the intent provoking a sexual response from a paying clientele, often via a publication or website                    |



\*Women who exchange sex for money have variously been labeled call girls, escorts, hookers, ho's, prostitutes, and whores. For the purpose of building a typology, I confine these varied labels into two basic trades of escorting (both in-call and out-call) and street prostitution.

The consistent theme that appears in all of these trades is the exchange of sex or sexual provocation for monetary gain.

## Appendix E - Sex Work Keywords in the Internet Movie Database

|                          |                                   |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| adult bookstore          | falling in love with a prostitute | phone sex             |
| adult magazine           | fetish                            | phone sex operator    |
| bdsm                     | fetishism                         | phone sex service     |
| black prostitute         | fondling                          | pimp                  |
| bondage                  | forced prostitution               | playboy               |
| bordello                 | forced to strip                   | playboy magazine      |
| brothel                  | gay porno theater                 | playboy model         |
| brothel madam            | gentlemen's club                  | playboy playmate      |
| burlesque dancer         | gigolo                            | playmate              |
| burlesque theater        | go go dancer                      | pole dance            |
| burning a porno magazine | go go girl                        | pole dancer           |
| burning a porno video    | hooker                            | pole dancing          |
| call girl                | hooker with a heart of gold       | popping out of a cake |
| callboy                  | human trafficking                 | porn                  |
| celebrity skin magazine  | internet pornography              | porn actress          |
| child pornography        | lap dance                         | porn magazine         |
| child prostitute         | male prostitute                   | porn movie            |
| child prostitution       | male stripper                     | porn star             |
| concubine                | male stripping                    | porn video            |
| courtesan                | mistaken for a prostitute         | porno magazine        |
| dominatrix               | model                             | porno movie           |
| erotica                  | nightclub                         | porno theater         |
| escort                   | peep show                         | porno video           |
| exotic dancer            | penthouse magazine                | pornographer          |

|                       |                     |                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| pornographic video    | sex trade           | stripper pole        |
| pornography           | sex trafficking     | stripping            |
| propositioned for sex | sex with a client   | striptease           |
| prostitute            | showgirl            | striptease male      |
| prostitute killer     | smut                | teenage prostitute   |
| prostitutes           | street prostitution | teenage prostitution |
| prostitution          | street walker       | topless dancing      |
| prostitution ring     | strip bar           | watching porn        |
| reference to playboy  | strip club          | watching pornography |
| s&m                   | strip club owner    | white slavery        |
| sex scene             | strip joint         | woman trafficking    |
| sex shop              | strip show          |                      |
| sex slave             | stripper            |                      |