A groundbreaking collection of essays on the sex industry, *Sex for Sale* contains original studies on sex work, its risks and benefits, and its political implications. The book covers areas not commonly researched, including gay and lesbian pornography, telephone sex workers, customers of prostitutes, male and female escorts who work independently, street prostitution, sex tourism, legal prostitution, and strip clubs that cater to women. The book also tracks various trends during the past decade, including the “mainstreaming” and growing acceptance of some types of sexual commerce and the growing criminalization of other types, such as sex trafficking. *Sex for Sale* offers a window into the lived experiences of sex workers as well as an analysis of the larger gender arrangements and political structures that shape the experiences of workers and their clients. The book greatly contributes to a growing research literature that documents the rich variation, nuances, and complexities in the exchange of sexual services, performances, and products. This book will change the way we understand sex work.

**Ronald Weitzer** is Professor of Sociology at George Washington University in Washington, DC. He has written extensively on the sex industry in the United States and abroad, and is currently writing a book on political conflicts over prostitution policies in selected nations. He is frequently contacted by the media for information and comment on issues regarding the sex industry.
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Like the first edition of *Sex for Sale*, this second edition breaks new ground by deepening our understanding of sex work and the sex industry. Some of the chapters are substantially revised and updated versions of chapters that appeared in the first edition, and the other chapters are entirely new to this volume. We present new data on the clients of prostitutes; a chronicle of recent trends in gay male pornography; an analysis of pornography made by and for women; chapters on telephone sex work and on the mainstream porn industry—studies that stand almost alone in research on these two topics; a comparison of strip clubs that cater to men and clubs that cater to women customers; an analysis of street prostitution in different locations in one city and a comparison of street and indoor prostitution in another city; an examination of similarities and differences between male and female escorts who work independently, with no ties to an agency or broker; an updated chapter on Nevada’s legal brothels; an exploration of the “mainstreaming” of the sex industry, seen through the lens of the annual Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas; a chapter on sex tourists and the workers who sell sex to them; and an examination of sex trafficking focusing on both the myths and realities of trafficking as well as public policies regarding this issue.

All of these chapters are based on carefully conducted empirical research and, taken together, they demonstrate the wide variety of sex for sale as well as differences in the structural arrangements and personal experiences of those involved in sexual commerce—the workers, customers, third parties, and businesses that differ tremendously from one context to another and make up a diverse, variegated sex industry.

The book would not have been possible without the hard work of the contributors, who graciously accommodated the demanding schedule I imposed on them and diligently addressed my suggestions regarding their chapters. I am delighted that these experts were willing to contribute to the book, helping to make this second edition as cutting edge and fascinating as the first edition.
Sex work involves the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation. It includes activities of direct physical contact between buyers and sellers (prostitution, lap dancing) as well as indirect sexual stimulation (pornography, stripping, telephone sex, live sex shows, erotic webcam performances). The sex industry refers to the workers, managers, owners, agencies, clubs, trade associations, and marketing involved in sexual commerce, both legal and illegal varieties.

OVERVIEW OF THE SEX INDUSTRY

Sex for sale is a lucrative growth industry. In 2006 alone, Americans spent $13.3 billion on X-rated magazines, videos and DVDs, live sex shows, strip clubs, adult cable shows, computer pornography, and commercial telephone sex.\(^1\) Rentals and sales of X-rated films jumped from $75 million in 1985 to $957 million in 2006.\(^2\) In just one decade, the number of X-rated films released annually more than doubled, from 5700 in 1995 to 13,588 in 2005.\(^3\) There are around 3500 strip clubs in America, and the number has grown over the past two decades.\(^4\) In addition to these indicators of legal commercial sex, an unknown amount is spent on prostitution.

A significant percentage of the population buys sexual services and products. In 2002, 34% of American men and 16% of women reported that
they had seen an X-rated video in just the past year.\textsuperscript{5} As of 2000, 21\% of the population had visited an Internet pornography site (32\% of men, 11\% of women).\textsuperscript{6} The most recent figures on strip club attendance are from 1991, when 11\% of the population said they had done so in the past year; fewer people (0.5\%) had called a phone sex number in the past year.\textsuperscript{7} And a significant percentage of American men have visited a prostitute. The General Social Survey reports figures on the number of men who said that they had ever paid for sex—between 15–18\% in eight polls from 1991 to 2006 (in 2006, 4\% said they had done so in the past year).\textsuperscript{8} Remarkably similar figures are reported for Australia (16\%) and the average within Europe (15\%),\textsuperscript{9} and 11\% of British men say they have paid for sex with a prostitute.\textsuperscript{10} Because prostitution is stigmatized, the real figures may be significantly higher. In some other societies, even more men say they have paid for sex. For example, in Spain 39\% of men have done so during their lifetime, and in northeastern Thailand 43\% of single men and 50\% of married men had visited a prostitute.\textsuperscript{11} An unusual question was included in a recent British survey: respondents were asked whether they would “consider having sex for money if the amount offered was enough”: 18\% of women said yes, as did 36\% of men.\textsuperscript{12}

A steady trend is toward the privatization of sexual services and products: porn has migrated from the movie house to the privacy of the viewer’s house. Video, Internet, and cable TV pornography have exploded in popularity, almost totally replacing the adult theaters of decades past. The advent of the telephone sex industry and escort services also has contributed to the privatization of commercial sex. And the Internet has changed the landscape tremendously—providing a wealth of services, information, and connections for interested parties. Internet-facilitated sex work has grown as a sector of the market, while street prostitution has remained relatively stable over time, although it has declined in some areas.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite its size, growth, and numerous customers, the sex industry is regarded by many citizens as a deviant enterprise: run by shady people and promoting immoral or perverted behavior. There has been some “mainstreaming” of certain sectors of the sex industry (as documented in Chapter 12 by Lynn Comella), but it would be premature to conclude that sex for sale has now become normalized, as some claim. Polls show that 72\% of Americans think that pornography is “an important moral issue for the country,”\textsuperscript{14} and 61\% believe that it leads to a “breakdown of morals.”\textsuperscript{15} The most recent poll (in March 2008) reported that fully half the population defined viewing porn as “sinful behavior.”\textsuperscript{16} And almost half the population thinks that pornography is “demeaning towards women” (one-quarter disagreed and the remainder were undecided).\textsuperscript{17} When asked about the idea of “men spending
an evening with a prostitute,” 61% of Americans consider this morally wrong, and two-thirds believe that prostitution can “never be justified,” while 25% considered it “sometimes justified” and 4% “always justified.” (The term “justified” in this question is somewhat opaque, and we can only speculate as to what respondents have in mind when they say prostitution can “sometimes be justified.”) Two-thirds of the British population believe that “paying for sex exploits women,” and young people are even more likely to hold this opinion: 80% of those aged 18–24.

Regarding public policies, most Americans favor either more controls or a total ban on certain types of commercial sex. More than three-quarters (77%) of the public think that we need “stricter laws” to control pornography in books and movies, and half believe that pornography is “out of control and should be further restricted.” In 2006, two-fifths of Americans (39%) felt that pornography should be banned, and this figure has remained about the same for two decades (41% held this view in 1984). A huge majority of women (70%) want porn outlawed today, compared to 30% of men. Stripping and telephone sex work also carry substantial stigma. Almost half of the American public believes that strip clubs should be illegal, while an even higher number (76%) thought telephone numbers offering sex talk should be illegal. Despite these personal opinions, people seem to think that the country is headed in the direction of increasing tolerance. There are no national polls on this question, but a 2002 survey of Alabama residents found that 73% believed that “society as a whole” sees stripping as an occupation for women to be “more acceptable today than ten years ago.” Many Alabama residents are dissatisfied with this trend, however. In the same poll, 54% felt that “stripping as an occupation is degrading or demeaning to the women,” and only 24% thought that it was not, with the remainder undecided.

What we have, therefore, is a paradox: a lucrative industry that employs a significant number of workers and attracts many customers but is regarded by many people as deviant and in need of stricter control, if not banned outright. The sex industry continues to be stigmatized, even when it is legal.

**COMPETING PARADIGMS**

When I mentioned the topic of prostitution to a friend recently, he said, “How disgusting! How could anybody sell themselves?” A few weeks later an acquaintance told me that she thought prostitution was a “woman’s choice, and can be empowering.” These opposing views reflect larger cultural perceptions of prostitution, as well as much popular writing on the topic.
Many people are fascinated, entertained, or titillated by sex work; many others see it as degrading, immoral, sexist, or harmful; and yet others hold all these views. Indeed, some prominent people have simultaneously condemned and patronized the sex industry, and have been caught in hypocritical behavior:

- Gov. Eliot Spitzer (D-NY) prosecuted prostitution rings when he served as the state’s Attorney-General, but resigned the governorship in disgrace after it was revealed in March 2008 that he had spent $4300 on an escort employed by the exclusive Emperor’s Club agency. Shortly thereafter, it was reported that he had also been a client of another escort agency, Wicked Models. Prosecutors later determined that Spitzer had paid for sex “on multiple occasions,” yet they declined to press criminal charges against him.27

- In 2007, Senator David Vitter (R-La) was linked to a Washington, DC, escort agency. He refused to relinquish his Senate seat, but nevertheless issued a public apology: “This was a very serious sin in my past for which I am, of course, completely responsible.” He was also accused of repeatedly visiting a New Orleans brothel in the late 1990s, according to both the madam and one of the prostitutes. Vitter is well known for his conservative, “family values” positions.

- In 2006, the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Rev. Ted Haggard, resigned after revelations that he had frequently paid for sex with a male prostitute and had used methamphetamine with him. The Association claims to represent 30 million evangelical Christians in the United States.

- In 1988, a prominent television evangelist, Rev. Jimmy Swaggart, resigned his church leadership after photos were released of him with a call girl in a New Orleans hotel (she later appeared on the cover of Penthouse magazine). He continued his television ministry. Three years later, when stopped by a police officer in California for a traffic violation, a prostitute in his car told the officer that Swaggart had propositioned her for sex.

- In Britain, Anthony Lambton, the Under-Secretary for Defense, resigned in May 1973 after being photographed in bed with a call girl. A few days later, another Cabinet member and the leader of the House of Lords, George Jellicoe, resigned after confessing his own liaisons with call girls, what he called “casual affairs.” Jellicoe had been in Parliament for 68 years, and he and Lambton were members of the Conservative Party.

- Another member of the British Parliament, Mark Oaten, resigned in 2006 after it was reported that he had a year-long relationship with a male prostitute.
These are just a few of the many examples of public figures who have purchased sex illicitly. And, in addition to political and religious elites, the clients include officials in the criminal justice system, with police chiefs and prosecutors sometimes caught buying sex even as they are obligated to enforce the laws against prostitution.28

The poles of condemnation and normalization are reflected in two paradigms in the social sciences.29 One of these, the oppression paradigm, holds that sex work is a quintessential expression of patriarchal gender relations and male domination. The most prominent advocates of this position go further, claiming that exploitation, subjugation, and violence against women are intrinsic to and ineradicable from sex work—transcending historical time period, national context, and type of sexual commerce.30 These indictments apply equally to pornography, prostitution, stripping, and other commercial sex. The only solution is elimination of the entire sex industry, which is precisely the goal of those who adopt the oppression paradigm.

In addition to these essentialist claims, some writers make generalizations about specific aspects of sex work: that most or all sex workers were physically or sexually abused as children; entered the trade as adolescents, around 13–14 years of age; were tricked or forced into the trade by pimps or traffickers; use or are addicted to drugs; experience routine violence from customers; labor under abysmal working conditions; and desperately want to exit the sex trade.31 These writers often use dramatic language to highlight the plight of workers (“sexual slavery,” “prostituted women,” “paid rape,” “survivors”). “Prostituted” clearly indicates that prostitution is something done to women, not something that can be chosen, and “survivor” implies someone who has escaped a harrowing ordeal. Customers are labeled as “prostitute users,” “batterers,” and “sexual predators.” As shown later, these labels are misnomers when applied to most customers and most sex workers.

Violating a core canon of scientific research, the oppression paradigm describes only the worst examples of sex work and then treats them as representative. Anecdotes are generalized and presented as conclusive evidence, sampling is selective, and counterevidence is routinely ignored. Such “research” cannot help but produce tainted findings and spurious conclusions, and this entire body of work has been severely criticized.32 Unfortunately, the writings of oppression theorists are increasingly mirrored in media reports and in government policies in the United States and abroad.

A diametrically opposed perspective is the empowerment paradigm. The focus is on the ways in which sexual services qualify as work, involve human agency, and may be potentially validating or empowering for workers.33 This
paradigm holds that there is nothing inherent in sex work that would prevent it from being organized for mutual gain to all parties—just as in other economic transactions. In other words, coercion and other unseemly practices are not viewed as intrinsic aspects of sex work. Analysts who adopt this perspective tend to accent the routine aspects of sex work, often drawing parallels to kindred types of service work (physical therapy, massage, psychotherapy) or otherwise normalizing sex for sale. Eileen McLeod argues that prostitution is quite similar to other “women’s work,” and that both sex workers and other women “barter sex for goods,” although the latter do so less conspicuously. Writers who adopt the empowerment perspective also argue that the tenets of the oppression paradigm reflect the way in which some sex work manifests itself when it is criminalized. Much less is known about prostitution in legal, regulated systems. It is important, therefore, to avoid essentialist conclusions based on only one mode of production.

This kind of work may enhance a person’s socioeconomic status and provide greater control over one’s working conditions than many traditional jobs. It may have other benefits as well: “Many prostitutes emphasize that they engage in sex work not simply out of economic need but out of satisfaction with the control it gives them over their sexual interactions.” Some writers who adopt the empowerment paradigm go further and make bold claims that romanticize sex work. Shannon Bell describes her book, Whore Carnival, as “a recognition and commendation of the sexual and political power and knowledge of prostitutes,” which sounds rather celebratory.

Both the oppression and empowerment perspectives are one-dimensional and essentialist. While exploitation and empowerment are certainly present in sex work, there is sufficient variation across time, place, and sector to demonstrate that sex work cannot be reduced to one or the other. An alternative perspective, what I call the polymorphous paradigm, holds that there is a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and worker experiences. Unlike the other two perspectives, polymorphism is sensitive to complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and workers’ control. Within academia, a growing number of scholars are researching various dimensions of the work, in different contexts, and their studies document substantial variation in how sex work is organized and experienced by workers, clients, and managers. Together, these studies undermine some deep-rooted myths about prostitution and present a challenge to those writers and activists who embrace monolithic paradigms. Victimization, exploitation, choice, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and other dimensions should be treated as variables (not constants) that differ between types of sex work, geographical locations, and other structural and organiza-
tional conditions. The chapters in *Sex for Sale* provide additional evidence in support of the polymorphous paradigm.

## TYPES OF SEX WORK

A brief discussion of different types of sex work will illustrate the polymorphous approach.

**Prostitution**

Prostitutes vary tremendously in their reasons for entry, risk of violence, freedom to refuse clients and particular sex acts, dependence on and exploitation by third parties, experiences with the authorities, public visibility, number and type of clients, relationships with coworkers, and impact on the surrounding community. Table 1.1 presents a typology of prostitution. (Excluded from the table are borderline cases, such as lap dancing, “kept” women or men, geishas, etc.)

Before proceeding to a description of the different types of prostitution, it is important to note that individual workers may cross one or more categories. For instance, independent call girls may also accept regular or occasional appointments from an escort agency, and massage parlor or brothel workers sometimes moonlight by meeting customers in private and keeping the earnings for themselves. It is rare, however, for workers to experience substantial upward or downward mobility. As a general rule “the level at which the woman begins work in the prostitution world determines her general position in the occupation for much of her career as a prostitute. Changing levels requires contacts and a new set of work techniques and attitudes.”

Occasionally, an upper or middle-tier worker whose life situation changes (e.g., because of aging, drug addiction) is no longer able to work in that stratum and gravitates to the street. But transitioning from street work to the escort or call girl echelon is quite rare, because most street workers lack the education and skill set required for upscale indoor work. Likewise, very few call girls and brothel workers have previously worked on the streets. If a move takes place, it is usually lateral and of limited mobility, such as from the streets to a down-market peep show or from a massage parlor to an escort agency or from an escort agency to independent work.

The most consequential division in Table 1.1 is that between street prostitution and the various indoor types. In street prostitution, the initial transaction occurs in a public place (a sidewalk, park, truck stop), while the
## Table 1.1 Characteristics of Types of Prostitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Business Location</th>
<th>Prices Charged</th>
<th>Exploitation by Third Parties</th>
<th>Risk of Violent Victimization</th>
<th>Public Visibility</th>
<th>Impact on Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CALL GIRL</td>
<td>Independent operator; private premises/hotels</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low to none</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESCORT</td>
<td>Escort agency; private premises/hotels</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROTHEL WORKER</td>
<td>Brothel</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None, if discreet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASSAGE PARLOR WORKER</td>
<td>Massage parlor</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Little, if discreet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAR OR CASINO WORKER</td>
<td>Bar/casino contact; sex elsewhere</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Equivalent to impact of bar/casino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STREETWALKER</td>
<td>Street contact; sex in cars, alleys, parks, etc.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Adverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table refers to female workers. The brothel and massage parlor workers depicted here do not include those who have been trafficked against their will or otherwise forced into prostitution, whose experiences differ from those who have entered this work consensually.

Exploitation by third parties means third party receipt of at least some of the profits.

Risk of violent victimization refers here to victimization of prostitute, not of customer.

Impact on community refers to effects on the surrounding neighborhood’s quality of life.
sex act takes place in either a public or private setting (alley, park, vehicle, hotel, etc.). Many street prostitutes are runaways who end up in a new locale with no resources and little recourse but to engage in some kind of criminal activity—whether theft, drug dealing, or selling sex. Many street workers, both runaways and others, experience abysmal working conditions and are involved in “survival sex.” They sell sex out of dire necessity or to support a drug habit. Many use addictive drugs; work and live in crime-ridden areas; are socially isolated and disconnected from support services; risk contracting and transmitting sexual diseases; are exploited and abused by pimps; and are vulnerable to being assaulted, robbed, raped, or killed on the streets. This is the population best characterized by the oppression paradigm. Other street prostitutes, especially those free of drugs and pimps, are in less desperate straits but still confront a range of occupational hazards. Judith Porter and Louis Bonilla’s chapter in this volume (Chapter 7) offers a close look at street prostitution and documents differences between three prostitution zones in Philadelphia.

When most people think of prostitution, they are thinking of street prostitution, but off-street sexual transactions are just as important and, in many countries, far more common than street work even though we lack data on the exact numbers in each sphere. (In Thailand, for example, an estimated 0.7% of prostitutes work the streets, while the figures for the United States, Holland, and Britain are reportedly closer to 20%.) We do know that ads for escort agencies and for independent call girls on the Internet are abundant and ever increasing.

Indoor prostitution takes place in brothels, massage parlors, bars, hotels, and private premises. Compared to street prostitutes, indoor workers are much less likely to have a background of childhood abuse (neglect, violence, incest), to enter sex work at a young age, to engage in risky behavior (e.g., to use addictive drugs and to engage in unprotected sex), and to be victimized by others. Off-street workers who have not been coerced into prostitution are much less likely to experience assault, robbery, and rape. A British study of 115 prostitutes who worked on the streets and 125 who worked in saunas or as call girls found that the street prostitutes were much more likely than the indoor workers to report that they had ever been robbed (37 vs. 10%), beaten (27 vs. 1%), slapped/punched/kicked (47 vs. 14%), raped (22 vs. 2%), threatened with a weapon (24 vs. 6%), or kidnapped (20 vs. 2%). Other studies similarly find disparities in victimization between street and off-street workers, with some reporting high percentages of indoor providers who have never experienced violence on the job. Although random sampling was not possible in these studies, the fact that they consistently document significant
street–indoor differences lends credence to the general conclusion. In addition to differences in *ever* being victimized, street workers are more likely to experience *more frequent* and *more severe* victimization.

This does not mean that indoor work is risk free: structural conditions are a key predictor of vulnerability—conditions that include workers’ immigration status, drug dependency, third-party involvement (as protectors vs. exploiters), etc. Moreover, indoor work in the Third World usually exists under harsher conditions than in developed countries, even when it is legal.\footnote{Having said that, there is no doubt that indoor settings are generally safer than the streets. Overall, “street workers are significantly more at risk of more violence and more serious violence than indoor workers.”\textsuperscript{42} Moreover, it appears that legal context makes a difference: that is, the safety of indoor work increases where prostitution is legal (see later).

Those who work collectively indoors—in brothels, massage parlors, saunas, clubs—have the advantage of the presence of gatekeepers and coworkers, who can intervene in the event of an unruly customer. Indoor venues often have some screening mechanisms, video surveillance, and alarm systems. Call girls and escorts are more vulnerable given their isolation when doing outcalls at hotels or clients’ residences. But they also have a greater proportion of low-risk, regular clients (see Chapter 8, by Janet Lever and Deanne Dolnick) and they have their own methods of vetting potentially dangerous customers (though these methods are not foolproof). They share with other workers stories of bad clients who are then blacklisted, and they routinely check in by phone with the agency or a friend at a designated time before and after a visit. As one agency booker stated: “The girls call to check in when they first get to an appointment. We had code words, like ‘Red Bull.’ If I heard her say she needed a Red Bull, I’d try to distract the guy on the phone so she could get out of there.”\textsuperscript{43} The autobiography of former prostitute Dolores French describes her unique ways of alerting her agent (Sarah) that she was in danger in a man’s hotel room:

Sarah told me certain code names that were to be used for cops and crazies. . . . “Judy” meant a cop; “Phyllis” meant a crazy . . . . So I called Sarah and said: “Everything is fine here. By the way, has Judy been in the office lately? Well, if Judy comes by, tell her I’d like to meet her for coffee.” [Sarah said] “Did he ask you to have sex?” “Oh yes, he’s lots of fun.” Any positive answer I gave meant yes, any negative answer . . . meant no. It was amazing how wonderfully this all worked. As soon as Sarah understood there was danger, she was on full alert . . . She knew I was in a bad situation, and she knew it was up to her to help get me out of it.\textsuperscript{44}
Such providers learn ways of screening their clients before they meet as well. A study of independent call girls noted that they develop “a sensitivity to detecting potential danger in the caller’s attitudes, manners, tone of voice, or nature of the conversation.”

It is not widely known that indoor and street prostitutes differ in the services they provide. Because street workers spend little time with customers, their social interaction is fleeting. As one street worker remarked, “Usually, they’re not even interested in talking to you. What they want is quick sex.” Indoor interactions are typically longer, multifaceted, and more reciprocal. Diana Prince, who interviewed 75 call girls in California and 150 brothel workers in Nevada, found that most of them believed that “the average customer wants affection or love as well as sex.” Consequently, indoor workers are much more likely to counsel and befriend clients, and their encounters often include a semblance of romance, dating, friendship, or companionship—what has become known as a “girlfriend experience” and the counterpart “boyfriend experience” offered by male escorts (see Chapters 8 and 9). As one study of call girls discovered, “for many men, sex is the pretext for the visit, and the real need is emotional.” Indeed, escort agencies and independent call girls increasingly advertise their expertise in providing non-sexual benefits to clients. The Emperor’s Club escort agency, for instance, billed itself (on its website) as offering an experience that would make life “more peaceful, balanced, beautiful, and meaningful.” In a sense, the customer buys a kind of “relationship” with an escort rather than just sex. Some customers who become “regulars” have long-term relationships with providers and develop a real emotional connection, albeit one that is paid for.

The nature of physical contact also differs, in the sense that it is more varied and more “romantic” than what a client and provider experience on the street. Indoor workers are more likely than street workers to be caressed, kissed, massaged, or hugged by, and to receive oral sex or manual stimulation from, a client (see Chapter 8). Indeed, in at least some indoor venues, the workers expect and request such sensual and sexual behavior from clients as a routine part of the encounter.

Indoor workers tend to be more adjusted and satisfied with their work than street workers, and the former differ little from non-prostitutes in mental health and self-esteem. The stress and danger associated with street work contribute to psychological problems. By contrast, escorts and call girls tend to have the “financial, social, and emotional wherewithal to structure their work largely in ways that suited them and provided . . . the ability to maintain healthy self-images.” Although call girls generally express greater job satisfaction than do those employed by third parties (brothels, massage
parlors, escort agencies) and are subject to employer demands, the latter are nevertheless more satisfied than street workers. An Australian study found that half of call girls and brothel workers felt that their work was a “major source of satisfaction” in their lives, while seven out of 10 said they would “definitely choose” this work if they had it to do over again.\textsuperscript{52} And a worker in one of Nevada’s legal brothels remarked: “I’ve always been a sexual person. I enjoy doing it. I mean, the money’s wonderful but, hey, I enjoy what I do for a living too. I love the people, it’s safe, it’s clean.”\textsuperscript{53} A majority of indoor workers in other studies similarly report that they enjoy the job, feel that their work has at least some positive effect on their lives, or believe that they provide a valuable service.\textsuperscript{54}

Prince’s comparative study of streetwalkers and call girls in California and legal brothel workers in Nevada found that almost all of the call girls (97%) reported an increase in self-esteem after they began working in prostitution, compared with 50% of the brothel workers but only 8% of the streetwalkers.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly, a study of indoor prostitutes (most of whom worked in bars) in a Midwestern city in the United States found that three-fourths of them felt that their life had improved after entering prostitution (the remainder reported no change; none said it was worse than before); more than half said that they generally enjoy their work.\textsuperscript{56}

Why would self-esteem be high or increase among those working in the upper echelons? Psychological well-being is associated with a range of structural factors, including education, income, control over working conditions, relations with third parties, and client base. Income is a major source of self-esteem among call girls. While middle range call girls earn $200–$500 an hour, top-tier workers charge between $1000–$6000 an hour (or a session) and they are also lavished with fringe benefits, such as expensive gifts and paid travel to meet clients.\textsuperscript{57} Escort agency, brothel, and massage parlor employees make considerably less because a large share (30–50%) goes to the agency. Another reason for an increase in job satisfaction is revealed by indoor workers who describe “feeling ‘sexy,’ ‘beautiful,’ and ‘powerful’ only after they had begun to engage in sexual labor and were receiving consistent praise from their clients.”\textsuperscript{58} In other words, in addition to the material rewards of high-end sex work, positive reinforcement and other good experiences may help enhance workers’ self-images.

At the same time, prostitutes of all types experience stigma from the wider society, as shown by opinion polls and by public condemnation during sex scandals involving public figures. This disapproval compels sex workers to engage in various normalization strategies, including: compartmentalizing their deviant work persona from their “real identity”; concealing their work
from family and friends; distancing themselves from clients; using neutral or professional terms to describe their jobs ("working woman," "provider"); and viewing their work as a valuable service (providing pleasure or sex therapy, comforting lonely men, keeping marriages intact).

The studies reviewed here and by other scholars provide strong evidence contradicting some popular myths and the central tenets of the oppression paradigm.\textsuperscript{59} While certain experiences are generic to prostitution (coping with stigma, managing client behavior, avoiding risks), the literature indicates that other work-related experiences, as well as the harms typically associated with prostitution, vary greatly. The prostitution market is segmented between the indoor and street sectors—marked by major differences in working conditions, risk of victimization, and job satisfaction and self-esteem.

### Other Types of Sex Work

Some sex workers specialize in one type of work, but others transition between different sectors or work in two arenas simultaneously. Examples include strippers who meet clients outside the club for sex; porn stars who tour strip clubs where they are the "featured" entertainer and command much higher prices than local talent; dancers and porn stars, male and female, who advertise online for personal sexual encounters with their fans; and, as mentioned earlier, prostitutes who work in more than one venue.

The variation characteristic of prostitution is no less true in other types of sex work. Strip clubs and their dancers have been studied fairly thoroughly, largely because of easy access to the clubs.\textsuperscript{60} One finding is that club structure and norms are a strong predictor of workers' job satisfaction and experiences with both customers and managers, with some clubs being highly exploitative and disempowering for dancers and others affording them substantial control over their working conditions. In other words, the social organization of a club shapes the degree to which workers are exploited by managers, DJs, bartenders, and bouncers, as well as the routine experiences they have with customers. One study distinguished three types of clubs—"hustle clubs" where dancers get little protection from management and have fairly stressful relations with other dancers (because of intense competition) and with customers (because managers instructed dancers to mislead and "hustle" the men to extract money from them); "social clubs" that resemble the sociability of neighborhood bars and are marked by supportive relationships between the workers and friendships with many of the patrons; and "show clubs" that are more upscale, highly regulated by management, where a premium is placed on putting on a "good show," and where dancers are taught
to personify a “goddess” seeking adoration from and exercising power over male customers.61

Clubs vary in the amount of customer violations of dancers’ personal boundaries (such as uninvited touching and kissing, pulling off clothes), insults, and rejection. Over time, the accumulation of such experiences can deflate one’s self-esteem and result in job burnout.62 On the positive side, many dancers find the work exciting, validating, empowering, and lucrative. Customers may lavish them with compliments, tips, and gifts, and dancers develop a genuine liking for at least some of their regulars.63 In terms of empowerment, one study reported that dancers “derive a sense of satisfaction at the power they felt they had over men” including manipulating men’s fantasies and the “thrill of the chase” in the pursuit of money when they engage in “strategic flirting” and perhaps lap dancing with individual audience members.64 At the same time, and like other sex workers, dancers often attempt to normalize their work by trumpeting stripping’s “therapeutic” and “educational” effects on the audience.65

Few studies compare male and female strip clubs, but those that do suggest that female audiences tend to be more aggressive toward male dancers than male audiences in female strip clubs,66 and that female patrons attended clubs in groups as a bonding ritual or as part of a celebratory gathering, whereas male patrons are more likely to seek an individualized experience and are much more likely to be repeat customers.67 It also appears that male strippers experience less stigma than their female counterparts.68 Relations between customers and dancers in same-sex clubs have their own distinctive patterns, as indicated by a study of gay male clubs69 and by Katherine Frank and Michelle Carnes (Chapter 5) in their analysis of clubs featuring African-American female dancers and customers, where the atmosphere is one not only of sexual performance but also cultural bonding between the black women involved. Of course, in both gay and straight clubs alike, power struggles over personal boundaries are evident.70

Much of the literature on pornography is psychological, confined to laboratory experiments in which (usually male) subjects are exposed to images and then tested to see if exposure affects their attitudes toward women. Most of these studies find that the key variable is violent content, not sexual content, in increasing the viewer’s negative views of or aggressive disposition toward women. Nonviolent pornography, like other nonviolent images, either does not have such effects on viewers or has a weaker effect—depending on the study.71 The main pitfall of such experimental studies is their problematic external validity—that is, whether the findings in a lab are meaningful and can be extrapolated to the real world. Laboratory experiments are highly
artificial conditions within which to watch and react to pornography; they are radically different from the private settings where viewers typically view porn; and the experimental subjects are typically male college students who may be unrepresentative of the larger population of real-life porn consumers. In light of these serious problems, it is surprising that so many lab experiments on pornography have been conducted.

Parallel studies examine whether pornography has effects on the real-world treatment of women. Such research examines (1) whether places with high availability of pornography (magazines, adult theaters, video rentals) have higher rates of sex crime than places where pornography is less available or (2) whether increased availability over time in one state or nation increases rates of sexual offenses. A comprehensive review of the literature concluded that macro-level associations between pornography and sexual aggression were dubious:

■ These studies are bedeviled by their inability to control for all potentially relevant influences on male behavior.
■ Some studies find that an apparent correlation between pornography and sex crime disappears after other variables are included in the model.
■ Other studies report that increased availability of pornography coincided with a decline in sexual offenses, precisely the opposite of what the oppression hypothesis predicts. And some countries with an abundance of porn, such as Japan, have low rates of victimization of women.\(^72\)

Part of the explanation for these findings may be the fact that most pornography in videos and magazines is nonviolent, as documented in several content analyses.\(^73\) One study found that the most sexually explicit or hardcore videos contained the least violence and the most reciprocal, egalitarian behavior between the actors.\(^74\) If violence is rare in porn, it is unlikely to promote sexual violence: “In the absence of any actual element of coercion, viewers would not have any messages about sexual coercion to process and would not be expected to change any of their attitudes in this area.”\(^75\)

The abundance of narrow, statistical “effects” studies skews the literature in one direction. Few researchers have investigated the deeper meanings of pornography in the real world—to men and women, consumers and nonconsumers. The neglect of actual consumers (as opposed to lab subjects) is remarkable in light of the sweeping claims that are often made about pornography’s impact on viewers. Still, a handful of studies have shown that both men and women decode and use sexually explicit materials in a wide variety of ways. Some women dislike the portrayal of women’s bodies in porn
and fear that men might compare them unfavorably to porn models, whereas other women find pornography to be educational, entertaining, or stimulating. Some women who have little familiarity with pornography nevertheless hold very negative views of it. Likewise, men interpret porn in multiple ways: exposure reinforces callous or sexist views of women for some men, while others interpret it quite differently. A study of 150 men by David Loftus found that most of them experienced porn as being about fun, beauty, women’s pleasure, and female assertiveness and power. They did not like depictions of domination or aggression against women on “the rare occasions they see it in pornography, and most haven’t even seen any.” It is “important to male viewers that the women really do seem to be enjoying themselves, that they are utterly involved in the sex for their own pleasure too, and not just serving the interests of the male actors and onlookers.” They also recognized porn as a fantasy world quite different from the real world in terms of people’s behavior and appearance. Men with this orientation, who distinguish the fantasy world of porn from the real world, seem to contradict some popular assumptions about such men as well as laboratory studies that hypothesize a unilinear, stimulus–response pattern when one is exposed to pornography.

Surprisingly, in-depth research on the porn industry and its workers is almost nonexistent. This gap is partly filled by two unique chapters in this book, both of which go behind the scenes with ethnographic studies of actors and producers. Sharon Abbott (Chapter 2) interviewed male and female actors in heterosexual films, documenting both positive and negative aspects of their work experiences, their views of their work and their audiences, and how they manage stigma. Jill Bakehorn (Chapter 4) had inside access to another sector of the industry—pornography made by women for women. She finds that female producers are often motivated by loftier goals than their counterparts in the mainstream porn industry. Instead of just seeking to make money, many of these female artists are motivated by feminist objectives, sex worker activism, and a desire to create materials that are an alternative to conventional representations of heterosexual sexual relations. This sector of the industry is ignored by writers who view pornography as inherently objectifying and demeaning toward women, and Bakehorn shows how this genre challenges simplistic and monolithic characterizations of pornography.

Studies of male sex workers are growing, but much more research is needed. These studies point to some important differences in the ways male and female sex workers experience their work, but few of these studies are truly comparative—examining male and female workers in the same work tier and asking them identical questions. Juline Koken, David Bimbi, and Jeffrey Parsons’ study (Chapter 9) helps to fill this gap. Not only does it compare male
and female workers but it also sheds additional light on the work experiences of independent escorts. Similarly, little is known about gay male pornography. Joe Thomas (Chapter 3) examines how gay male video porn has changed over time. Thomas also draws contrasts between gay male and straight pornography, specifically the radically different meanings of porn in gay and straight cultures. Pornography holds a fair amount of esteem within the gay community, but carries substantial stigma in the straight world.

Finally, little is known about telephone sex agencies and their employees. Kathleen Guidroz and Grant Rich (Chapter 6) show that telephone sex workers hold a mix of negative and positive impressions of their work. They are troubled by callers who appear to be misogynists or pedophiles but they also feel that the calls can be therapeutic, as in other lines of sex work. The operators believe that they educate male callers about female sexuality and that they help to deter those with perverse or violent tastes from acting on those fantasies; the workers see this as providing a valuable “community service.”

**POLICIES AND CONFLICTS**

*Strip Clubs and Pornography*

Strip clubs and adult video stores are governed by local ordinances in America, which means that what is permitted varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and over time. Some places have ordinances restricting the location of such establishments, stipulating where videos can be displayed in a store, or regulating strippers’ attire and contact with customers. Many cities and counties restrict sexually oriented businesses to nonresidential areas or prohibit them from being near schools, parks, churches, and residences.

Such curbs do not satisfy those who want such establishments totally banned. Local-level struggles occur periodically throughout the country. Tactics include picketing outside an adult business, lobbying municipal officials, petition drives, and videotaping customers entering clubs and stores. Such efforts can pay off in convincing local officials to impose stringent controls on adult entertainment venues. In addition to instrumental efforts to change policy, groups use symbolic tactics as well: an Indiana group, for example, recently erected a billboard with a red slash through a triple-X symbol next to a picture of a young woman. The caption read: “Someone’s Daughter”—an attempt to personalize the threat posed by porn.

It is often claimed that adult stores and strip clubs have negative “secondary effects” on surrounding communities, such as increased crime. This argument was used successfully in the 1990s in New York City to justify the
closure of many establishments in the Times Square area. A detailed discussion of the evidence supporting or contradicting the alleged adverse secondary effects is not possible here, but research studies give little credence to this claim. In fact: “Those studies that are scientifically credible demonstrate either no negative secondary effects associated with adult businesses or a reversal of the presumed negative effect.”86 The most sophisticated study found that crime was much more prevalent in the immediate vicinity of bars and gas stations than in the area near strip clubs, partly because of the security measures (bouncers, video surveillance) implemented by strip clubs.87

Pornography is legal in America as long as it does not depict minors and is not obscene. The prevailing test of obscenity remains the Supreme Court’s landmark 1973 Miller v. California decision, which held that local “community standards” are to govern definitions of what constitutes obscene materials. Local prosecutors decide whether to prosecute a producer or distributor for a particular sexually explicit film, magazine, or other work; if prosecuted, the item is presented to a jury that decides whether it is obscene. Miller stipulated that the obscenity test would be whether the average person in a community would find that the work appeals to “prurient interests,” depicts sexual conduct in a “patently offensive way,” and lacks literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.88 The community standards rule means that a work that is considered obscene in one jurisdiction may not be deemed obscene in another place. The only national standard on obscenity is the blanket prohibition on producing, possessing, or distributing child pornography.

Antipornography campaigns have been launched at various points in American history, with mixed success. In the early 1980s, activists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon succeeded in getting the city councils of Minneapolis and Indianapolis to approve far reaching antiporn ordinances. The laws allowed any woman “as a woman acting against the subordination of women” to initiate a lawsuit or file a complaint against anyone involved in the production, exhibition, sale, or distribution of pornography. The individual would not need to demonstrate direct harm to oneself or others from pornography; instead, the claimant could simply act on behalf of women. The ordinances defined pornography vaguely as “the sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted.”89 To be actionable, the work would have to include one of nine features, including images of women “presented dehumanized as sexual objects,” women “presented as whores by nature,” or women “presented in scenarios of degradation.”90 The terms “dehumanized,” “objects,” “whores by nature,” and “degradation” are extremely elastic, and some people see all pornography in these ways. In Minneapolis, the proposed ordinance was vetoed by the mayor but the Indianapolis ordinance became law only to be
overturned in the courts on the grounds that it would prohibit a range of materials that were legal under *Miller*.91

These municipal campaigns were followed by the equally controversial 1986 national commission appointed by Attorney-General Edwin Meese. The commission distinguished itself with its politically stacked membership, unfair procedures, and neglect of evidence running counter to its agenda.92 Almost all of the material presented in support of a government crackdown on porn was anecdotal, based on the testimony of self-described victims recruited to appear before the panel.93 It was therefore no surprise that the commission concluded that exposure to pornography contributed to sex crimes and other abuses of women.

The Meese Commission marked a turning point in the government’s approach to pornography and demonstrated how quickly official policy and enforcement practices can change in the field of sex work. The U.S. Justice Department formally accepted the commission’s recommendations and produced a report outlining steps the department was taking to implement them.94 With a new Obscenity Enforcement Unit and its “Project Postporn,” the Justice Department assumed a leading role in the campaign against the industry. Drastic changes were envisioned, as the new unit proclaimed: “Only by removing whole businesses from society . . . will significant progress be made against the existing industry.”95 The unit used antiracketeering (RICO) forfeiture laws to close adult book and video stores and relied on the novel tactic of simultaneous, multidistrict prosecutions of pornography distributors in order to bankrupt and close these businesses. Under this innovative strategy, a company was charged with violations of federal criminal law in several states at the same time. The goal was to force a company out of business under the weight of logistical demands and legal costs incurred in fighting numerous court cases in various jurisdictions. The targets were not confined to child pornography or extreme porn (e.g., featuring bestiality or simulated rape scenes) but included mainstream porn as well.96 Prosecutors in the obscenity unit typically included Utah as one of the jurisdictions for multiple prosecutions, because its archconservative climate virtually guaranteed a conviction.

Enforcement against the pornography industry increased dramatically after the publication of the Meese report.97 Whereas only 100 individuals had been prosecuted for violations of obscenity statutes between 1978 and 1986, the number of indictments quadrupled between 1987 and 1991. A top official in the obscenity unit revealed, “From 1988 to 1995, we [the Justice Department] got 130 convictions, took in $25 million in fines and forfeiture, and convicted most of the kingpins of the pornography industry at least