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Conceiving of Sex as a Commodity: A Study of Arrested Customers of Female Street Prostitutes

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Abstract: *Framing prostitution as an economic exchange, this paper evaluates some of the consequences of conceiving of sex as a commodity rather than as an aspect of an intimate interpersonal relationship among the customers of prostitutes. Subjects were 700 men arrested while trying to hire street prostitutes. Questionnaires were administered prior to intervention programs designed to discourage re-offense in San Francisco, California (N=588); Portland, Oregon (N=82); and Las Vegas, Nevada (N=30). Significant predictors of conceiving of sex as a commodity included being unmarried, having served in the military, and more frequent visits to prostitutes. Conceiving of sex as a commodity significantly predicted rape myth acceptance, attraction to violent sexuality, less frequent use of condoms while with prostitutes, support for prostitution, and the attitude that prostitution is positive for women. We argue that that conceiving of sex as a commodity has a number of negative implications for the men involved, their sexual partners, and for gender relations in general.*

Keywords: Prostitution; Customers; Male Sexuality

Though researchers and the popular media have shown great interest in prostitution and prostitutes themselves, very little attention has been paid to their male customers. Shrage (1992:42) notes the "relative absence of scientific studies concerned with the motivation and social characteristics of the customers of prostitutes." The scant research that does exist has tended to focus on health-related issues (Freund, Lee, and Leonard, 1991; Freund, Leonard and Lee, 1989) or has relied on small qualitative samples (Armstrong, 1978; Holzman and Pines, 1982; Prasad, 1999) or second-hand accounts (Boyle, 1995; Diana, 1985). There are several explanations for this neglect of male customers. Davis (1993) argues that the neglect of customers by researchers and policy-makers reflects a sexual double-standard in which women are seen as responsible for men's deviance. Prasad (1999) argues that the neglect of customers is consistent with the assumption that demand for prostitution is natural and inevitable among men. Other scholars emphasize the difficulty of collecting data on customers, who often make an effort to conceal their activities (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Special Committee on Prostitution and Pornography, 1985).

Recently there has been increased interest in men's contribution to the problems associated with prostitution.

Several communities now sponsor workshops or classes for men arrested while trying to hire prostitutes. The best known of these "john schools" is San Francisco's First Offenders Prostitution Program (FOPP), which sometimes has classes of over 50 men (Monto, 2000; 2004). This study employs data collected from the men attending these classes. This unprecedented access to a previously hidden population should allow us to step beyond conceptions of prostitution customers based on anecdotal accounts or theoretical assumptions.

Framing prostitution as an economic exchange, this article evaluates the consequences of conceiving of sex as a commodity rather than an aspect of an intimate interpersonal relationship among the arrested customers of female street prostitutes. We explore factors associated with the development of a conception of sex as a commodity and the consequences that such an orientation has on customers' attitudes toward prostitution, prostitutes, sexuality, and violence. While recognizing that conceiving of sex as a commodity is not an inevitable outcome of patronizing prostitutes, we argue that this orientation has a number of negative implications for the men involved, their sexual partners, and for gender relations in general.

PROSTITUTION AS AN ECONOMIC EXCHANGE

Framing prostitution as an economic exchange provides a potentially rich source of insight into the nature of prostitution and the larger contexts in which the prostitution exchange takes place. Prostitution is the exchange of something of value, usually money or drugs, for the sexual use of a person's body. Though this is a basic economic exchange, using an economic model to understand prostitution has become laden with political and ideological implications.

Describing prostitution as an economic exchange has often been associated with calls for decriminalization, legalization, or normalization of prostitution. Posner (1992), in *Sex and Reason*, argues that economic exchanges between consenting adults, such as those involving prostitution, warrant intervention only in circumstances in which the market is not operating efficiently. Jenness (1993) chronicles the prostitutes' rights movement in the appropriately titled *Making it Work*, describing the redefinition of prostitution from sex as sin to sex as work. Among the movement's fundamental arguments is the idea that women have the constitutional right to sex work and to legal protection from violence in the conduct of their work.

Feminist anti-prostitution activists have generally rejected framing prostitution as an economic exchange on the grounds that it tends to normalize an activity that is intrinsically exploitative (Hunter, 1993). Dworkin (1993) rejects the conceptualization of prostitution as work on the grounds that it is used to normalize an activity that constitutes violence against women. Norma Hotaling, director of San Francisco's SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation) Project, turns the old cliché on its head by calling prostitution "the oldest oppression."

However, framing prostitution as an economic exchange need not rule out exploitation (O'Connell Davidson, 2002). Theorists, such as Giddens (1971), point to a fundamental sociological principle developed in the early writings of Marx that economic exchanges must be understood as occurring within a definite set of social relationships. According to Giddens (1971:10):

(It is a fallacy that) purely "economic" relations can be treated *in abstracto*. Economists speak of "capital," "commodities," "prices," and so on as if these had life independently of the mediation of human beings. This is plainly not so....Any and every "economic" phenomenon is at the same time always a social phenomenon, and the existence of a particular kind of "economy" presupposes a definite kind of society.

The prostitution exchange must be understood in a particular social and historical context. Forces beyond the immediate encounter affect the value of the commodities being exchanged as well as the capacities of the parties in

the exchange to impose conditions on the exchange or to refuse the exchange.

Recognizing that the parties in the prostitution exchange often differ in terms of power and resources, Shrage (1992) argues that feminists need to oppose the legal prohibition of prostitution but should support societal regulation on the grounds that some prostitutes are working involuntarily and many are exposed to serious risks. Recognizing the same principle, Gauthier (1999) argues against legalization on the grounds that "consent" to engage in prostitution often takes place under coercive conditions. The prostitute may be compelled to participate because of dire economic circumstances or fear of violence from a partner or pimp. According to Gauthier (1999), just as federal regulations regarding health and safety, administered by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), acknowledge that there are some working conditions that are unacceptably unhealthy or unsafe even if workers "consent" to them, so should prostitution be seen as work that is too risky and harmful to be legally accepted, even if women choose to participate.

We argue that prostitution takes place, not in "a social context," but in a variety of social contexts that affect the exchange relationship. Though we live in a patriarchal society (Anderson, 1993), this macro-social pattern translates into varying degrees of inequality within specific interactions. If a prostitute is a minor, an immigrant, a runaway, a drug addict, is under threat of violence, or is a victim of prior physical or sexual abuse, the prostitution encounter is fraught with greater resource inequality than if the prostitute is economically independent and defines prostitution as a chosen form of sexual expression.

Much of human interaction may be seen as consisting of exchanges. Armstrong (1978) argues that the exchanges involved in prostitution differ little from conventional behavior. Similarly, the distinction between prostitution and other exchanges involving sexuality is not recognized in many societies. However, prostitution warrants special consideration because multiple categories of resources are being exchanged, and because people are products in the exchange. Foa and Foa (1974) defined six categories of resources that can potentially be exchanged, including love, status, information, money, goods, and services. Exchange relations are governed by social norms, and certain categories are more acceptable for exchange than others (Foa and Foa, 1974). The exchange of love for love is generally more consistent with the social norms governing exchange than the exchange of love for money (Foa and Foa, 1974; Prasad, 1999). Prostitution involves the exchange of money for a service, but it is a service often associated with love, especially under their broad conception of love including "expression of affectionate regard, warmth, or comfort" (Donnenworth and Foa, 1974:786).

One of the reasons that prostitution is an issue of public concern is that the sale of this love/service represents a challenge to our social norms regarding exchange and sexuality by redefining the sexual use of the body as a commodity available for exchange. Although Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's (1948) pioneering study seemed to indicate that visiting prostitutes was relatively common among men, with 69 percent reporting at least one visit, prostitution has never gained widespread acceptance in the United States. In fact, more recent, methodologically-sound research conducted as part of the National Health and Social Life Survey in 1992 indicates that only about 16 percent of men in the U.S. have ever visited a prostitute, and that only about 0.6 percent of men in the U.S. visit prostitutes each year (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata, 1994). More recent results from the General Social Survey confirm that less than one-fifth of adult males report ever having had sex with a prostitute (NORC, 2001). While customers themselves may use market-oriented rationale to defend the morality of prostitution (Prasad, 1999), and while pornography has become more acceptable for exchange, the commodification of "hands-on" sexual acts remains illegal and inconsistent with dominant cultural norms.

Most research on the commodification of essentially human qualities sees the process as highly negative, resulting in the dehumanization of the participants, particularly those who are commodified (Altheide, 1987; Erickson, 1986; Hill and Hirschman, 1996). In the extreme, commodification can include slavery or the sale of body parts. Though prostitution is by definition the commodification of sexuality and the human body, men who patronize prostitutes may conceive of sex as a commodity to a greater or lesser degree. Previous research indicates that customers have a range of understandings regarding prostitution (Monto, 2000), with some seeking prostitution because of a desire for intimate relationships with women (Jordan, 1997). Newer research based on internet bulletin boards clearly reveals a consumer mentality among these regular customers (Holt and Blevins, 2007; Kern, 2000). This study attempts to measure the degree to which prostitution customers conceive of sex as a commodity rather than as an aspect of an intimate interpersonal relationship. Rather than taking for granted the negative consequences of commodification, we evaluate this issue by exploring the relationship between conceiving of sex as a commodity and several potentially negative attitudes and inclinations.

What factors might be associated with conceiving of sex as a commodity? Service in the predominantly male military is associated with having visited a prostitute (Sullivan and Simon, 1998). Additionally, military service could promote a male-oriented sexual socialization that sees women as outsiders or "others" and sex as a commodity to be acquired. Childhood physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional trauma caused by divorce could

limit one's ability or inclination to establish intimate relationships and lead to an understanding of sex as a commodity. Indeed, many customers cite a desire to avoid the obligations and intimacy of a conventional relationship (Monto, 2000). An attitude of sexual liberalism, a tendency to be non-judgmental about sexual practices or an "anything goes" attitude, could lead to seeing intimacy as less essential for sexual activity (Monto, 2004) and is present in the published accounts of customers (Loebner, 1998). Being married indicates the capacity to establish at least one relatively intimate relationship and hence might reflect a lesser tendency to conceive of sex as a commodity.

Finally, because prostitution by definition involves the commodification of sexuality, we would expect a strong association between frequency of prostitution visits and conceiving of sex as a commodity. This orientation is clearly present among regular users as evidenced by interviews (Coy, Harvath, and Kelly, 2007) and online accounts (Holt and Blevins, 2007). However, the direction of causality is unclear. A conception of sex as a commodity could lead one to pursue prostitution encounters. Conversely, prostitution encounters could lead to the development of such a conception.

What are the consequences of conceiving of sex as a commodity among the customers of prostitutes? Such a conception is likely to be related to greater acceptance of prostitution and an inclination to see prostitution as more positive for prostitutes, as is seen in the accounts of regular users (Holt and Blevins, 2007; Loebner, 1998). If conceiving of sex as a commodity reflects a tendency to see the prostitute herself as a commodity rather than as a person, there might be other more negative consequences. Such an orientation could be associated with less frequent condom use with prostitutes, attraction to violent sexuality, and acceptance of "rape myths," attitudes believed to be associated with violence against women (Burt, 1980; Monto and Hotaling, 2001).

METHODS

Subjects

Subjects were 700 men arrested while trying to hire street prostitutes. Questionnaires were administered while men were gathered together immediately prior to intervention programs designed to discourage re-offense in San Francisco, California (N=588); Portland, Oregon (N=82); and Las Vegas, Nevada (N=30). Questionnaires were entirely anonymous. About 80 percent of men gathered for these programs completed questionnaires. Though refusals probably account for the largest proportion of the remaining 20 percent, language problems, late arrivals, and misunderstandings also account for a substantial proportion. The subjects of this study are not a representative sample of prostitution customers. Virtually all were arrested while trying to hire a

street prostitute rather than while patronizing escort services or indoor establishments. Additionally, they were arrested in three Western cities known for the availability of commercial sex. Nevertheless, the data gathered represent an opportunity to move beyond idiosyncratic impressions and anecdotal accounts and to evaluate current understandings of the prostitution customer in light of a large body of data collected from a previously inaccessible population.

Regarding the background characteristics of the sample, 61 percent of the respondents were white, 18 percent Hispanic, Chicano, or Latino, 13 percent Asian, 4 percent Black, and 4 percent some other ethnicity or a combination of ethnicities. Forty-two percent had completed a bachelor's or higher degree, while 35 percent reported attending some college, and 23 percent reported a high school education or below. Forty-one percent were currently married, 36 percent had never married, 16 percent were divorced, 5 percent were separated, and 2 percent were widowed. Ages ranged from 18 to 84, with a mean of 38 and a median of 37. Most were working full-time (81%). About 26 percent reported serving or having served in the military, similar to the proportion of adult men in the United States who have served. Thirty-four percent reported having had their parents divorce when they were children, and a small proportion reported that they were physically hurt for no reason (14%) or touched sexually by an adult (14%) during childhood.

Ninety-four percent of respondents reported having exclusively female sexual partners, while about 1 percent reported having exclusively male partners and 5 percent reported having had both male and female partners during their lifetime. About 10 percent reported having had no sexual partners during the past year, while 34 percent, the largest single proportion, reported having had one sexual partner. Thirty-three percent reported having had from two to four sexual partners in the past twelve months, and 23 percent reported having had five or more partners during this period.

Overall, 64 percent of the men who completed surveys reported that they had sexual relations with a prostitute at least once over the last 12 months. Twenty-one percent reported one episode, while 31 percent reported having had sexual relations with a prostitute more than one time but less than once per month. Nine percent reported having had sexual relations with a prostitute one to three times per month, and 3 percent reported having had sexual relations with a prostitute once or more per week. Seventeen percent claimed never to have had sexual relations with a prostitute, indicating that their only experience had been propositioning the police decoy, while 19 percent reported that they had not had sexual relations with a prostitute during the past year.

Measures

Because of the need to establish a wide range of basic understandings about the customers of street prostitutes, more specific issues, such as the conception of sex as a commodity, were not optimally measured by the questionnaire. For the purposes of this article, the degree to which respondents conceived of sex as a commodity rather than as an aspect of an intimate interpersonal relationship is operationalized by nine indicators. Though the first four of these items ask about behavior, they are intended as indicators of an orientation. The nine items include the following:

1) *Number of sexual partners.* Greater numbers of partners increase the likelihood that some of the sexual liaisons are impersonal exchanges, and having large numbers of partners is one of the motives for seeking out prostitutes among some customers (Monto, 2000). Sex can be seen by customers as an accomplishment attained through purchase, like getting a good deal at a sale or collecting a complete set of some item (Coy, Horvath, and Kelly, 2007; O'Connell Davidson, 1998). Greater numbers also decrease the likelihood that individual partners are close intimates of the respondent.

2) *Having more than one sexual partner but no regular partner.* This indicates that respondents are not participating in a committed sexual relationship and may not see intimacy as a requirement of sexuality, an orientation more likely to be found among customers than among men in the general population (Monto and McRee, 2005). One body may be seen as interchangeable with another (Barry, 1995), with women as products rather than people.

3) *Frequency of pornographic magazine use.*

4) *Frequency of pornographic video use.* Although many men view pornography, frequent use of pornography reflects an inclination to meet sexual needs through purchase. Even more than prostitution, which inevitably involves another human, pornography involves sex as a commodity, and the frequency of its use may reflect a commodified view of sexuality.

5) *Preference for prostitution over conventional relationships.*

6) *The belief that one does not have time for a conventional relationship.*

7) *Not wanting the responsibilities of a conventional relationship.* As described earlier, these three items, often motives for seeking prostitution (Monto, 2000), reflect a preference for interactions with individuals who can meet respondents' needs without demanding time or intimacy. Meeting needs without being obligated to others and

Table 1. Response Frequencies for Items in the Sex as Commodity Measure

Item	Percentage Each Response	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
How many sex partners have you had in the last 12 months?		.32
None	10.1	
One	34.0	
Two	15.2	
Three	10.2	
Four	7.3	
Five to Ten	14.9	
Eleven to Twenty	5.4	
Twenty-one to 100	2.3	
More than 100	.4	
(For those with more than one partner) Was one of the partners your husband or wife or regular sexual partner?		.23
Yes	88.4	
No	11.6	
On the average, how often do you look at pornographic magazines?		.31
Never	31.6	
Less than once a month	39.8	
One to a few times a month	19.8	
One to a few times a week	6.9	
Every day	1.6	
Several times a day	.3	
On the average, how often do you watch pornographic movies or videos?		.32
Never	35.6	
Less than once a month	34.6	
One to a few times a month	20.7	
One to a few times a week	5.8	
Every day	3.0	
Several times a day	.3	
I would rather have sex with a prostitute than have a conventional relationship with a woman.		.42
Agree Strongly	4.2	
Agree Somewhat	15.1	
Disagree Somewhat	18.1	
Disagree Strongly	62.6	
I don't have the time for a conventional relationship.		.41
Agree Strongly	14.0	
Agree Somewhat	19.3	
Disagree Somewhat	19.7	
Disagree Strongly	47.0	
I don't want the responsibilities of a conventional relationship.		.39
Agree Strongly	11.4	
Agree Somewhat	18.1	
Disagree Somewhat	17.5	
Disagree Strongly	53.0	
I like to be in control when I'm having sex.		.26
Agree Strongly	12.3	
Agree Somewhat	29.5	
Disagree Somewhat	31.1	
Disagree Strongly	27.1	
I need to have sex immediately when I am aroused.		.33
Agree Strongly	8.2	
Agree Somewhat	27.9	
Disagree Somewhat	30.3	
Disagree Strongly	33.6	

without their being motivated by a sense of obligation is consistent with impersonal commodity exchange.

8) Wanting to be "in control" during sex.

9) The belief that one needs to have sex immediately when aroused. These two attitude items reflect a conception of sex as a need to be met rather than as an aspect of an intimate relationship. Getting what one wants immediately and being in control are more consistent with a purchase at the convenience store than with the complexity and unpredictability of an intimate or romantic relationship (Blanchard, 1994; Coy, Harvath, and Kelly, 2007).

The items were selected conceptually, based on the rationale described above as well as exploratory factor analysis and correlation analyses, which were used to evaluate relationships between variables. It should be

noted that, because of strong correlations between particular pairs of variables within the measure, the items do not load primarily on one factor. As Kim and Mueller (1989) note, while factor analysis can be a useful tool for scale creation, the inclusion of minor factors that are of little theoretical or conceptual concern can have significant effects on the results. Each item was transformed into a z-score and added together. Though individually, these items reflect a variety of issues, together they form an adequate measure of the degree to which respondents conceived of sex as a commodity. Using a collection of indirect indicators to measure a construct is consistent with other efforts to measure social psychological issues, such as modernity (Inkeles, 1974) and many others. The alpha reliability coefficient for the measure was .66. Given the exploratory nature of this study and the fact that the questionnaires were not originally designed to study

commodification, we see this as adequate reliability. Table 1 depicts the response frequencies as well as the corrected inter-item total correlations after standardization.

Five of the six variables that were evaluated as possible predictors of conceiving of sex as a commodity were measured using single items and dichotomous coding, including whether or not respondents were

married, whether or not they had been touched sexually by an adult while they were children, whether or not they had been hit for no reason as children, whether or not their parents had been divorced as children, and whether or not they had ever served in the military (See Table 2). A sixth variable, sexual liberalism was measured using four items from the General Social Survey. Each item asked whether

Table 2. Complete Wording for Multi-Item Measures and Their Correlations with Sex as Commodity

Correlation with Sex as Commodity	Items
.11*	Sexual Liberalism There's been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex are changing in this country. If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, do you think it is... What if they are in their early teens, say 14 to 16 years old? In that case, do you think sex relations before marriage are... What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex--do you think it is... What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner--is it...
.24***	Rape Myth Acceptance What percentage of women who report a rape would you say are lying because they are angry and want to get back at the man they accuse? What percentage of reported rapes would you guess are merely invented by women who discovered they were pregnant and wanted to protect their own reputation? A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex. When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble. In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation. If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her. Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve. A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson.
.25***	Attraction to Violent Sexuality I like rough hard sex. Sex is more fun if the woman fights a little. Some women like to be smacked around a little during sex. Being angry makes me more likely to want sex.
.22***	Support/Normalization of Prostitution Prostitution creates a lot of problems for the world. (reversed) I think that the cops should crack down on prostitution. (reversed) Prostitution doesn't really harm anybody. There is nothing wrong with prostitution. If I were thinking about getting married, I wouldn't mind marrying a prostitute. Prostitution should be legalized. Prostitution should be de-criminalized. It would be OK if my daughter grew up to be a prostitute. It would be OK if my son went to prostitutes. Most men go to prostitutes once in a while.
.16**	Prostitution Positive for Women I think prostitutes like sex more than other women. Most prostitutes make a lot of money. Women are prostitutes because they want to be. It's their choice. Prostitutes enjoy their work. Prostitutes genuinely like men.
-.15**	Married
.04	Divorced as a Child
.08	Sexually Touched as a Child
.11*	Physically Hurt as a Child
.11*	Military Service
-.19***	Frequency of Condom Use with Prostitutes

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

certain sexual behaviors were wrong, including sex before marriage, sex between adults of the same sex, sex between teenagers, and sex with someone other than the marital partner while married. Responses ranged from "always

wrong" to "never wrong," with higher scores given to "never wrong." The items were standardized and added to form a measure of sexual liberalism with an alpha reliability coefficient of .67. The items comprising the

sexual liberalism measure as well as the correlation of the measure with conceiving of sex as a commodity are presented in Table 2.

Frequency of prostitution encounters was measured by a single item that asked how often respondents had visited prostitutes over the past year, with responses ranging from none to five or more times per week. Variables that were evaluated as possible consequences of conceiving of sex as a commodity were all ordinal. Frequency of condom use while with prostitutes was measured by a single item with five responses ranging from never to always. The other variables were all measured using multiple items that were standardized then added. The items comprising each measure as well as the correlation of each measure with the "sex as commodity" measure are presented in Table 2. Rape myth acceptance, a set of attitudes believed to be associated with violence against women, was measured using eight items from Burt's (1980) scale, yielding an alpha reliability coefficient of .85. An attraction to violent sexuality was measured with four items including 1) liking rough hard sex, 2) liking it when a woman fights a little, 3) believing that some women like to be smacked, and 4) admitting that being angry makes sex more appealing. The alpha reliability coefficient for this measure was .62. Support for prostitution was measured using ten attitude items, such as "prostitution doesn't really harm anybody"

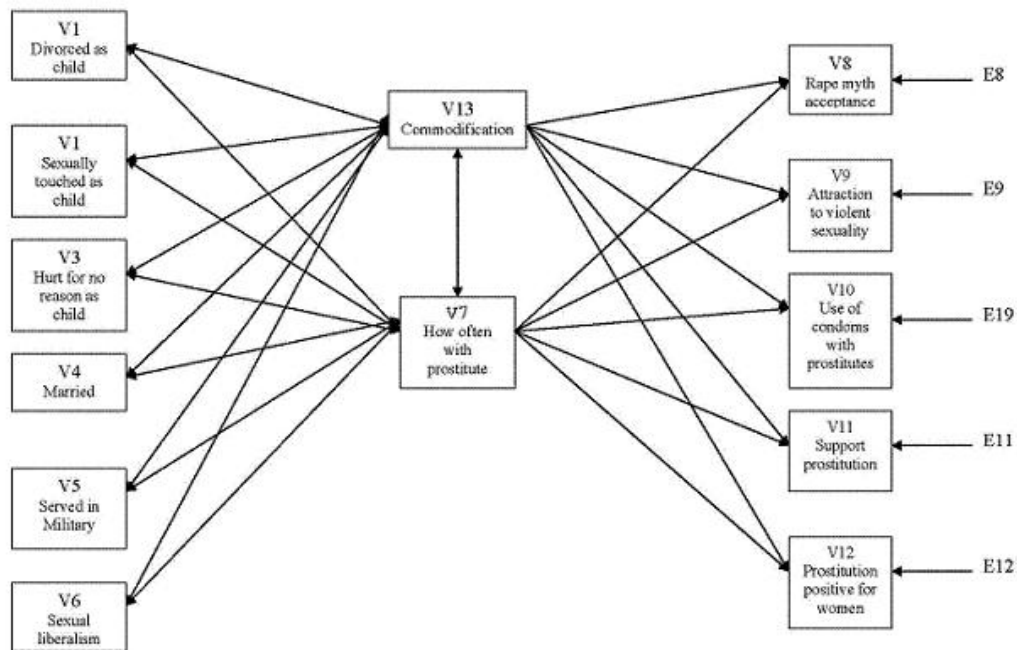
and "it would be okay if my daughter grew up to be a prostitute," many developed by Sawyer, Rosser, and Schroeder (1998). The measure had an alpha reliability coefficient of .82. Finally, seeing prostitution as positive for women was measured by four items including "prostitutes enjoy their work" and "most prostitutes make a lot of money," yielding an alpha reliability coefficient of .69.

Analysis

Simple frequencies of the items comprising the sex as commodity measure were calculated to provide information about the distribution of indicators and the degree to which respondents conceived of sex as a commodity (see Table 1). The correlations between this orientation and all of the other variables of interest were also calculated (see Table 2). Correlations between the background characteristics of the respondents and conceiving of sex as a commodity were also conducted. None of these was statistically significant, and they are excluded here for the sake of brevity.

A path model (see Figure 1) was created to evaluate the relationship between the six variables being evaluated as possible predictors of conceiving of sex as a commodity and the five variables being evaluated as possible

Figure 1. Initial Path Model
Elliptical Re-weighted Least Squares Method



consequences of this orientation. Predictor variables included whether the respondent's parents divorced when he was a child, whether he was sexually touched by an adult while a child, whether he was physically hurt by an

adult for no reason while he was a child, whether he was married (and non-separated) at the time of the survey, whether he had ever served in the military, and his level of sexual liberalism. These six variables were also evaluated

as predictors of the frequency of prostitution encounters. Covariance between the sex as a commodity measure and frequency of encounters was also evaluated. Variables potentially predicted by conceiving of sex as a commodity and by frequency of prostitution encounters included acceptance of rape myth attitudes, attraction to violent sexuality, frequency of condom use while with a prostitute, level of support for prostitution, and degree to which prostitution was seen as positive for women.

The dichotomous predictor variables (whether they were married, whether they had served in the military, whether they were physically punished for no reason as children, whether they were sexually touched by an adult while children, and whether their parents divorced while they were children) were dummy coded 0 for the negative response and 1 for the affirmative response and treated as ordinal variables, which is not an ideal practice but necessary for their inclusion in the path model. The model was evaluated using EQS, a structural equation modeling program. One of the advantages of this program is that it allows for the evaluation of data that is not normally distributed. Parameters were calculated using an elliptical re-weighted least squares method. This method relaxes the requirement that data be distributed normally and recalculates the weight matrix following each iteration, rather than calculating it once from the input data. However, re-weighting was not an issue because the model converged in one iteration. The conventional maximum likelihood solution was run for comparison, yielding virtually identical results (not reported here).

Two variations of the model were run. The first (results not shown) included all six potential predictor variables, each co-varying with both the sex as commodity measure and the frequency of prostitution encounters. The sex as commodity measure and frequency of prostitution encounters were each allowed to predict the five dependent variables. A second model included only significant paths. All of the variables and paths that were removed from the complete model were statistically insignificant.

RESULTS

As mentioned earlier, although prostitution is by definition the commodification of sex, prostitution customers differ in the degree to which they regard sexuality as a commodity. For each individual item comprising the measure of the degree to which respondents conceived of sex as a commodity, the responses of the majority of these men arrested for trying to hire street prostitutes did not indicate conceiving of sex as a commodity. Table 1 reports the frequencies for each response. For four of the five attitude items (not having time for a conventional relationships, not wanting the responsibilities associated with conventional relationships, wanting to be in control during sex, and the need to have sex immediately when aroused), fewer than half of the respondents agreed strongly or somewhat. For the fifth attitude item (preference for prostitution over conventional

relationships), only 19.3 percent agreed somewhat or strongly. Pornographic magazine and video use was reported to have taken place "less than once per month" or "never" by about 70 percent of respondents. Fifty-nine percent of respondents reported two or fewer sexual partners over the past year, and of those with more than one partner, only 12 percent report having had no regular sexual partner.

If a large number of respondents had answered all nine of the items in ways that did not indicate conceiving of sex as a commodity, then the measure would lack the variability ideal for most analyses of ordinal variables. Fortunately, the measure showed adequate variability. Only 76 of 700 respondents chose responses on all nine items that did not indicate conceiving of sex as a commodity. Not surprisingly, only three chose responses that reflected conceiving of sex as a commodity on all nine indicators.

Four of the six variables evaluated as possible predictors of conceiving of sex as a commodity had statistically significant correlations with that construct, though correlations were small. Table 2 presents these correlations. Being married was associated with a lesser degree of conceiving of sex as a commodity ($r=-.15$; $p<.001$). Sexual liberalism ($r=.11$; $p<.05$), being hurt for no reason as a child ($r=.11$; $p<.05$), and having served in the military ($r=.11$; $p<.05$) were all associated with a greater degree of this conception.

Higher scores on the sex as commodity measure were moderately correlated with more frequent visits to prostitutes ($r=.40$; $p<.001$). Part of this relationship may be explained by measurement effects, as "number of sexual partnerships" was one of the indicators of conceiving of sex as a commodity. However, in separate analyses measuring sex as commodity minus this indicator, the relationship between conceiving of sex as a commodity and frequency of prostitution visits remained moderate ($r=.32$; $p<.001$).

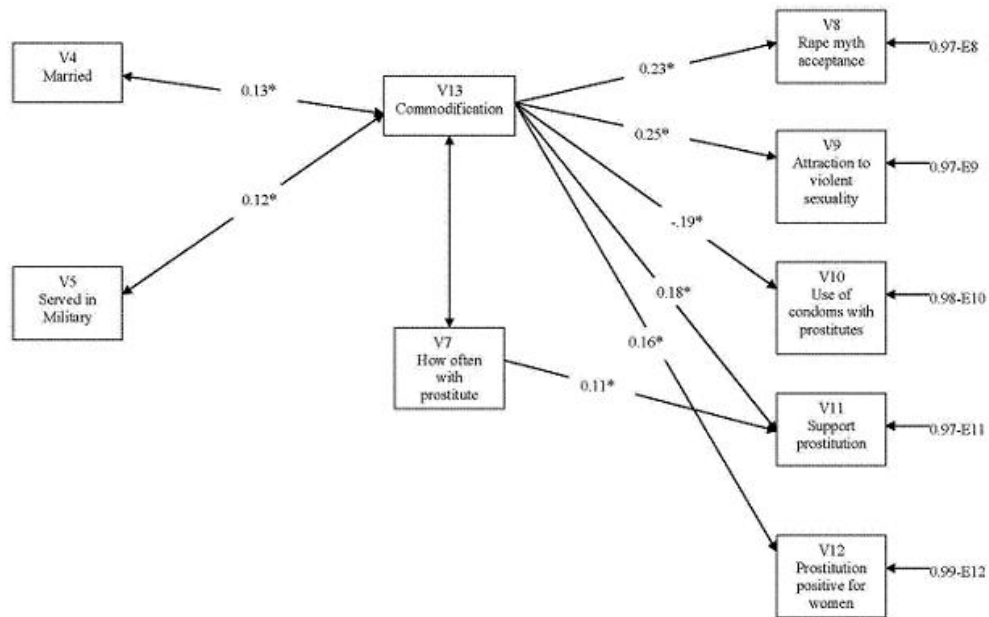
Relationships between the sex as a commodity measure and the variables being evaluated as consequences of this orientation were also moderate. Conceiving of sex as a commodity was significantly correlated with rape myth acceptance ($r=.24$; $p<.001$), attraction to violent sexuality ($r=.25$; $p<.001$), and less frequent use of condoms while a prostitute ($r=-.19$; $p<.001$). Not surprisingly, conceiving of sex as a commodity was also associated with support for prostitution ($r=.22$; $p<.001$) and the attitude that prostitution is positive for women ($r=.16$; $p<.01$).

The path model also yielded results consistent with predicted relationships. Figure 2 shows the selected model as well as the standardized path coefficients. Being married and having served in the military were significant predictors of the degree to which respondents conceived of sex as a commodity. Interestingly, with sex as a commodity included in the equation, none of these variables was a significant predictor of frequency of prostitution encounters. Frequency of prostitution

encounters was however, strongly associated with the sex as a commodity measure, indicating that, although men who visit prostitutes vary in the degree to which they conceive of sex as a commodity, more frequent prostitution encounters reflect and possibly contribute to commodification. Conceiving of sex as a commodity was a significant predictor of rape myth acceptance, attraction to

violent sexuality, less frequent condom use while with prostitutes, seeing prostitution as acceptable or normal, and seeing prostitution as positive for women. Interestingly, with sex as a commodity in the model, frequency of prostitution encounters was significantly associated only with seeing prostitution as positive or normal.

Figure 2. Selected Model
Standardized Parameter Estimates
Elliptical Re-weighted Least Squares Method



DISCUSSION

The nature of prostitution and the social policies related to it have been the subject of impassioned debate reflecting conflicting understandings of sexuality, gender relations and the exchange itself (Giobbe, 1994; Weitzer, 1991, 1993). Supporters of prostitution and the sex industry argue that women should be allowed to freely make decisions concerning their bodies and that prostitution is a legitimate form of sexual expression (Jenness, 1993). Opponents argue that the decision to enter prostitution is often not made freely or that prostitution is intrinsically exploitative and degrading (Dworkin, 1993; Hunter, 1993; MacKinnon, 1987). The purpose of this article is not to resolve these ethical disputes but to shed light on a neglected aspect of the phenomenon, the customers of prostitutes. If prostitution is conceived of as an economic exchange, one of the glaring omissions in

prostitution research and theory is on the demand side of the supply-demand equation.

Using an economic orientation to understand sexuality is not a new idea in the social sciences. Exchange theorists have pointed out that heterosexual partnerships may be based on the exchange of wealth and power for beauty and sexual access (Davis, 1990). Most articles invoking the concept of "commodification" tend to treat it as a problematic quality of some contemporary phenomenon (Castile, 1996; Martin and Hummer, 1987). Consistent with this perspective, the present study acknowledges that prostitution is, by definition, the commodification of sexuality. However, this article makes creative use of the concept of commodification by reconceiving it as a social psychological variable reflecting the degree to which male customers of female street prostitutes conceive of sex as a commodity rather than as an aspect of an intimate interpersonal relationship.

If, as Prasad (1999:205) claims, "the degree of opposition to prostitution in any society is an index of the lack of universality of liberal commodity exchange ideals," then these ideals have clearly not been embraced wholeheartedly in the United States. Based on interviews with 26 people who had purchased sexual services from prostitutes and 13 who had considered doing so, Prasad (1999) demonstrates that prostitution customers often use market-oriented rationale to justify their behavior. Using ideals of commodity exchange to justify prostitution is clearly consistent with the conception of sex as a commodity evaluated in this study. However, indicators used in the present study, though imprecise, suggest that customers vary greatly in the degree to which they conceive of sex as a commodity.

While it may seem that prostitution would be consistent with the norms of a capitalist society like ours and the trend toward greater commodification of essentially human qualities, prostitution remains marginalized (Prasad, 1999). Perhaps opposition to prostitution reflects its inconsistency with another apparent social trend, the movement toward sexual norms based on individual consent and pleasure. Frank and McEneaney (1999) argue that while sexual norms have historically focused on preserving the family, there has been a more recent shift toward norms based on protecting the right of individuals to participate in sexual activities they find pleasurable and to be free from sex that is non-consensual. Because prostitutes are not motivated by sexual pleasure (Gauthier, 2000) and because the issue of consent is problematic, especially for women who are minors or victims of abuse, prostitution occupies an uncomfortable place within our culture.

Results indicate a significant relationship between frequency of prostitution encounters and conceiving of sex as a commodity. Instead of seeing one as a cause of the other, conceiving of sex as a commodity and patronizing prostitutes may be mutually reinforcing. If sex is depersonalized and conceived of merely as a need to be met, then prostitution would seem to follow. Additionally, men with a conception of sex as a commodity might have difficulty establishing the intimate relationships that are often prerequisite to sexuality. On the other hand, impersonal sexual encounters, in which the customer is no more than a customer, no more than his money, could lead the customer to internalize that attitude and see sexuality as an economic exchange.

While one would expect to find a relationship between prostitution encounters and conceiving of sex as a commodity, not all men who have been arrested for trying to hire a street prostitute display this orientation. In fact, about 11 percent of the respondents did not respond to any of the indicators in ways that reflect a conception of sex as a commodity. How can it be that some of these men, arrested while trying to exchange money for sex, did not conceive of sex as a commodity? For many arrested

customers, prostitution is an occasional activity rather than their primary way of meeting their sexual needs. Most are involved in conventional sexual relationships with a regular partner. Others may downplay the monetary exchange present in prostitution, preferring to think of prostitutes as women who find them personally appealing or who have sex because they enjoy it (Holzman and Pines, 1982; Jordan, 1997). Additionally, there are many possible motives for seeking prostitution. Some include the desire for companionship, intimacy, or love (Jordan, 1997). More often, men are attracted to prostitution by the desire to participate in sexual acts that they could not receive from their partners, the desire to have sex with a larger number of sexual partners, an attraction to specific physical characteristics, an interest in only limited emotional involvement, and excitement due to the illicit nature of the act (Holzman and Pines, 1982; Jordan, 1997; Monto, 2000), motives that are compatible with a conception of sex as a commodity. But even men who seek prostitution for these reasons may desire sexuality with an intimate partner as well.

Rather than assuming the "essentialist perspective" (Satz, 1995) that there is something intrinsically wrong with impersonal sex or the exchange of sex for money, this article looks at the empirical consequences of conceiving of sex as a commodity. As might be expected, this orientation is associated with support or acceptance of prostitution and the belief that prostitution is positive for women. Were these variables unrelated, it would be reasonable to question the construct validity of the measure. More disturbing are the strong relationships between conceiving of sex as a commodity and rape myth acceptance, attraction to violent sexuality, and less frequent use of condoms while with prostitutes. All of these would seem to indicate that this orientation could be linked to a lack of respect for prostitutes or even violence against them.

Previous research indicates that acceptance of rape myths or rape supportive attitudes is associated with reported participation in sexual assault, willingness to commit rape if one would not be caught, and aggression against females in a laboratory setting (Malamuth, 1983; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, and Tanaka, 1991). Perhaps most powerfully, Marolla and Scully (1986), in their comparison of the attitudes of convicted rapists with the attitudes of other felons, found an association between status as a rapist and the support of rape myths.

Though the measure of attraction to violent sexuality has not been used in other studies, it would also seem to indicate a greater inclination toward violence. Consistent with this inclination, the failure to use condoms while with prostitutes may reflect a lack of concern over whether the prostitute is exposed to risk of pregnancy and disease. Additionally, while customers may or may not know that sexually transmitted diseases are more easily transmitted to women than men and often cause more severe problems

for women, they may well recognize that failure to use a condom while with a prostitute may expose their wives or regular partners to infection.

Empirical research and narrative accounts consistently reveal that prostitutes are frequent victims of violent crime, including beating and rape (Horgard and Finstad, 1992; Silbert and Pines, 1982), most of which is never reported to police (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Silbert, 1981). This is not to say that most customers are violent. Because of the large number of encounters prostitutes have with customers, it is probable that only a small proportion of customers are violent (Monto, 2004). The tendency for men who more frequently patronize prostitutes to conceive of sex as a commodity may help to explain this violence. Interestingly, frequency of prostitution encounters was not significantly independently associated with rape myth acceptance, attraction to violent sexuality, or failure to use condoms while with prostitutes when the sex as a commodity measure was also included in analyses. The results seem to indicate that it is not prostitution itself, but the orientation that often goes along with it, that is associated with these negative consequences.

The policy implications of these findings could be interpreted in many ways. One could argue that the current legal status of prostitution supports the cultural distinction between good and bad women, marginalizing prostitutes, reinforcing the idea that they are merely commodities, and ultimately making them more vulnerable to violence. Making prostitution illegal has forced it underground, removing it from public scrutiny and leaving prostitutes with little legal protection.

On the other hand, proponents of legalization or decriminalization must acknowledge that prostitution is strongly associated with conceiving of sex as a commodity, which in turn is associated with other disturbing attitudes. Experiments with legalization, like those in some counties of Nevada, do little to contradict the idea that prostitution is associated with commodification. Legal brothels are large businesses in which prostitutes are reduced to mere fast food workers, appearing periodically as part of the menu to be chosen on the basis of appearance alone. While conversation and the expression of emotion are part of the performance, genuine intimacy and sharing are not typically aspects of the exchange.

Prostitution policy has emerged haphazardly in the United States, as police target the most visible forms that cause the greatest nuisance to neighborhoods (Weitzer, 1999). However, new strategies have emerged over the past ten years specifically targeting the customers (Monto, 2004), including public shaming by publishing the names, pictures, or license plate numbers of arrested customers on television or on the web. The most thoughtfully conceived of these new strategies focusing on the demand side of the supply-demand equation are "john schools," post-arrest programs designed to discourage customers from re-

offending. Conceiving of sex as a commodity is associated with a number of problematic attitudes and behaviors. The findings of this study, suggest that john schools are on the right track in their efforts to humanize prostitutes and break down the pervasive belief among some men that prostitution is merely a harmless exchange between consenting adults. A recent evaluation of San Francisco's program, funded by the National Institute of Justice, indicates that this particular program is effective in reducing demand (ABT Associates, 2008).

Though this article has focused on the consequences of conceiving of sex as a commodity among the customers of prostitutes, it is likely that coming to define their bodies to a lesser or greater degree as commodities has a host of implications for prostitutes themselves. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that internalizing the observer's (or in this case, the consumer's) perspective toward one's body can contribute to habitual body monitoring, shame and anxiety, and mental health problems. Future research should evaluate the degree to which prostitutes internalize an understanding of their bodies as commodities and the consequences of such an orientation.

When prostitution is treated as an abstract issue, a mutually beneficial exchange of the sexual use of someone's body for something of value, its problematic qualities may not be readily apparent. However, the strong relationship between prostitution and conceiving of sex as a commodity reveals that prostitution is not merely an abstract exchange. Conceiving of sex as a commodity is associated with a host of disturbing attitudes that may well have a negative impact on the lives of women, both prostitutes and non-prostitutes alike, and the customers themselves. The measure used in this study reflects a conception of sexuality that would tend to objectify and dehumanize women and reduce sex to a consumer exchange. It is associated with an attraction to violence, belief in rape myths, decreased use of condoms, and the naive belief that prostitution is positive for the women involved. Though one can legitimately argue on ethical grounds that people should have the legal capacity to make decisions about their bodies, including the decision to sell sex, proponents of legalization should consider the social implications of the commodification of sexuality and its social psychological concomitants that would almost certainly accompany such legitimation of prostitution.

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