

SEX WORK

Pretty Woman Ain't Real



**MEET SEVEN
DENVER-
BASED SEX
WORKERS**

**So, What Exactly
is a Prostitute?**

Neither is Prince Charming



**The 'World's Oldest
Profession' as a Profession**



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NOTES

From the photographer and writer



SEX WORK is the culmination of a five-year academic journey. I did not intend to pursue a graduate degree, but encouragement from my partner, and the tantalizing adventure of expanding my knowledge, gave me the nudge I needed.

I call myself a social justice photographer. Previously, I called myself a community activist. I promoted myself to 'social justice photographer' after learning the power of bringing people into an uncomfortable space using imagery, meaning rather than having to use imaginations about a topic, images compel viewers to see real situations and people, which can lead to social discomfort. I find great value in urging people outside of their comfort zone, to think deeply about the lives of others

Attempting to formulate a magazine about sex work that does not fall into the sensationalized category, nor the heavily academic category, is quite challenging. I wanted to catch the reader's eye by offering visuals that are intriguing. I decided to use pop-art images as a contrast to the serious-minded topic of sex work. The pop art images may appear to diminish the importance of the topic, but the intent is to juxtapose media

hype and unrealistic expectations with photographs of real sex workers. Notice the severe lack of diversity and the sexualization of the women in the pop art images? As well, I chose to produce the magazine in black and white to draw viewers into the images, rather than be dazzled and distracted by color. The switch between comic style representation to the photographs of the sex workers is intended to bring viewers into that uncomfortable space of thought. (All pop art is credited to freepic.com)

"A picture is worth a thousand words." I disagree. I believe a picture is worth a thousand interpretations, meaning a viewer will interpret what is happening, or something about the person in an image, based on their experiences, perceptions, and constructed ideas. The photographs of the sex workers are interpreted through the personal lens of the viewer, but the stories of the workers offers an alternative filter to the lens, bringing the viewer into the intimate space of the women.

All articles and photographs are my creations through research and time devoted to immersing into the lives of sex workers. Welcome to SEX WORK: *Pretty Woman Ain't Real*, Neither is Prince Charming.

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Introduction

Walking down Colfax Avenue, a Denver, Colorado street with a short section that is notorious for drugs and prostitution, on a Sunday morning at 10 a.m., I was propositioned twice to provide sexual services, had sexual services offered to me once, and had two offers of, “Wanna have fun?,” which ambiguously were either drug or sexual offers. Sex is a part of human nature and everyday life, either overtly or covertly. Sex is streaming on the Internet, spread out in magazine center folds, embedded into clothing styles, public on the street, private in the bedrooms, hidden in video and print commercials, and blaring through song lyrics. There is a consumer demand for sex. Where there is demand, there is supply. Sex workers satisfy the demand for sex. As much as sex work may be decried by society and legal systems, there will always be sex workers as long as there is consumer demand for sex.

SEX WORK magazine looks at issues in the sex industry, such as sex work as employment, social attitudes toward sex workers, the meaning of the term ‘prostitution,’ provides point-of-view stories of seven sex workers based in the Denver, Colorado region, and explores some legality issues of sex work.

Understanding more about sex work/ers

Prostitution, harlotry, hustling, hooking, and whoring are all synonyms for sex working; commonly referred to as ‘the world’s oldest profession.’ Although socially recognized as a profession, sex workers in the United States (U.S.) do not enjoy the same rights and protections as other employed

citizens. The choices of people to work in the sex industry, particularly women, are often based on the options available for income and support of themselves and/or their families. Too often, socially stigmatized perceptions of sex workers overshadow the reality of sex workers’ lives, their individuality, and their humanity. Media is a significant player in influencing public perceptions of sex workers. Glorified and unrealistic portrayals in movies, as well as sensationalized news reporting, leads to misconceptions and a lack of understanding about sex workers and the sex industry.

Amnesty International published a policy in May 2016 that calls for the protection, respect, and the fulfillment of human rights for sex workers. The policy states, “People who face multiple forms of discrimination and structural inequalities, such as women and those who face discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, caste, ethnicity, Indigenous identity, migrant or other status, are often over-represented in sex work.”¹ Why is this distinction about who constitutes the majority of sex worker population important? Why is this distinction especially important when discussing sex work as a legitimate profession? For women who qualify for government assistance programs, such as welfare in the U.S., the public and political discourse that occurs around these programs influences choices of participation. For example, if a woman is in need of an assistance program, but feels that she will be deemed irresponsible and lazy, the choice of sex work may seem more viable and

sustainable, and less socially criticized. Sex work has flexible hours, which is helpful for single mothers, and has the possibility of income that may exceed other low-income jobs.² The choice of sex work offers the individual the ability to be an economic provider and adopt a feeling of entrepreneurship despite opposing social perceptions. Anita is a former sex worker profiled in *SEX WORK*. When the profile was written, Anita's household was composed of herself, her ex-military brother, a young female sex worker, and a male drug dealer. Anita received support through government programs, her brother had military benefits, and the other two brought in goods and money to support the household. Although Anita was no longer working in the sex industry, a member of her household actively supported the 'family' through sex work.

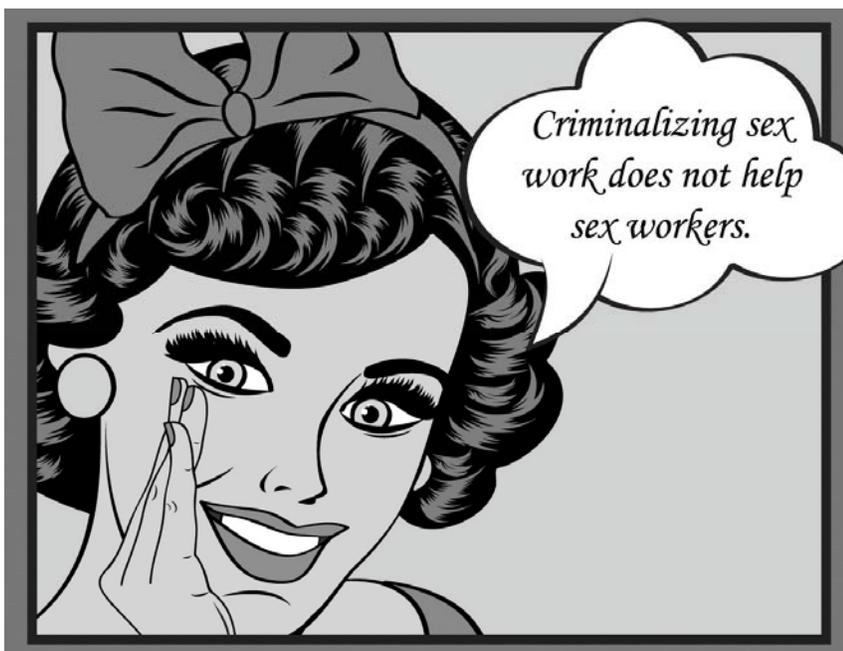
Many countries recognize sex work as a legal profession and some have established regulations and protections for sex workers. The Netherlands, Germany, Mexico, and Argentina have legalized, regulated, and/or decriminalized prostitution, discussing sex

work not as a moral concept, but rather an issue of labor rights. The unfortunate reality about the negative socially constructed perception about sex work in the U.S., which results in stigmatization and criminalization of sex work, is that workers are forced to operate on the edges of society in potentially dangerous environments with little or no protection by authorities and always the fear of incarceration. Without legalization, regulation, and/or decriminalization, sex workers face violence and abuse which go unreported and unpunished. Labor rights for sex workers would aid in reshaping the socially constructed perceptions of the sex industry, recognize personal agency of sex workers, and promote equality for discriminated groups in society³

Why understanding is important

There are many influences that occur in childhood that establish how young people develop their self-esteem and influences their self-worth both interpersonally and in society. Factors include childhood bullying, emotional dependency, family criminal activity, parentally unstable homes, poverty, and

sexual molestation. The social values attached to these factors influence how young people develop their identities and how they determine their positions in society's structure. As an adult, these same factors continue to influence how sex workers view and interpret the world around them.⁴ Media, again, is a significant influence. An example is the portrayal of sex workers as icons in





popular culture, despite the realistic social stigmas attached to being a sex worker. There is a romanticized idea of an enduring presence in social history, the brave harlot in the wild west, *Pretty Woman* and the savior millionaire, or the prostitute in a video game, that leads to contradictory views of sex work represented in media and sex work in real life.⁵ Popular culture latches on to traditional narratives about sex workers, reinforcing stereotypes and unrealistic scenarios. Episode 18, season 19 of *Law & Order: SVU* (April 11, 2018) posed a storyline about an internet-based sex worker who was beaten and raped. The intention of the plot was to humanize the sex worker and make a statement about everyone deserving basic rights of protection. Unfortunately, the episode also reinforced stereotypical notions of sex workers as constant victims, unreliable liars, and undeserving of respect. The proposed support of law enforcement for the sex worker was unrealistic, as sex work is illegal in the U.S. and the worker would have been arrested for prostitution, with little effort by law enforcement to find and convict her attacker.

Stepping away from stereotypes and socially constructed viewpoints, which provide basic assumptions and ideas that shape how we think about others, allows a society to embrace equality. Having a comprehensive understanding about diverse, non-traditional, and non-dominant groups in a society offers alternate narratives that challenge basic assumptions and changes how we think about others. My articles will provide different ideas and approaches to thinking about sex work and sex workers.

About the articles

“So, What Exactly is a Prostitute?” uses framing and social construction theories to define prostitution in terms of different types of sex work, differentiation of sex work from sex trafficking, and exploring three common social viewpoints about sex work. Framing theory is the process of defining and redefining issues for the public.⁶ Framing can be episodic, short term with no staying power, or thematic, where viewpoints are repeated many times with depth and multiplicity for a long-term effect. Media generally uses episodic framing to define and reinforce

concepts about who sex workers are and what sex work entails, employing sensationalism to tantalize consumers by playing into the social taboos that are generally attached to sex. This article reframes prostitution by providing definitions and practical knowledge that is a counter narrative to the stories generally observed in media.

Social construction theory is the idea that society is actively and creatively produced by human beings, producing constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality and to provide clarity.⁷ Generally speaking, reality is what we make it. A simplification of the theory but applicable when discussing sex work. A reality built by many sex workers is that they are self-employed citizens providing valuable service work that fulfills a consumer demand. Based on a constructed reality, this is a true statement for many sex workers. A counter reality for other members of society is that sex workers are criminals whose actions and behaviors are immoral and a detriment to society. Based on a constructed reality, this is a true statement for many members of society. So, which reality is true or correct? Is there only one true reality or can there be multiple realities? Multiple realities exist every day *because* realities are constructed by society. The reality of living in the U.S. for an African American male is different than the reality of a White male because of the shared understandings that have been constructed by society. An example is an African American male walking down a public street with a rifle slung across this shoulder in a community where open carry is legal. There is a high probability that man will be stormed by police and arrested, although he has committed no illegal act. A White man walking down the

same street with a rifle slung over his shoulder may be questioned by police but would most likely not be stormed nor arrested. The current constructed reality in the U.S. is that armed African American men are dangerous and armed White men are not. There is a different reality for the African American man than for the White man.

“‘The World’s Oldest Profession’ – Working to Pay the Bills” article uses social construction and standpoint theories to discuss sex work as legitimate employment. A reality in the U.S. is that sex workers are criminals because of legal policies. Using the social construction concept that realities are formed by humans (societies) and humans formulate legal policies, and the legal policies regarding sex work are the building blocks of a sex worker’s reality, then a change to policies would change sex worker’s realities. Simply put, sex workers would not be criminals but rather legitimate workers if legal policies were changed, which would be a drastic alteration to their realities. There are various legal policies in countries across the world, meaning there is no standard reality for sex workers, realities are dependent on societal construction. One argument of this article is that sex workers are only shamed, stigmatized, and criminalized because the society builds that reality for them.

Ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and other social categories influence aspects of people’s lives, including wealth, social standing, and general experiences. Standpoint theory seeks to include perspectives and narratives by all people, specifically those who are disenfranchised.^{8 9} Oppression and subjugation are frequently exposed when marginalized people share their experiences as a contrast to the narrative of

privileged and powerful groups. The view, standpoint, of a person is dependent on their location in the hierarchy of a society. For sex workers, they are at the low end of U.S. social hierarchy, yet their viewpoints on legal policies are different and more important than the viewpoints of policy makers because they are the affected populace whose lives and realities are influenced and modified by those policies. This article addresses sex work as a discussion of labor rights rather than a moral issue, giving validity and authority to the viewpoint of sex workers rather than U.S. policy makers. By sharing the standpoints of sex workers, social perspectives on the sex industry can be influenced by genuine experiences rather than the incomplete and false beliefs of the privileged.

The “Social Perceptions of Prostitution and Pornography” article uses framing and social construction theories to discuss opinions of prostitution and pornography workers, specifically the amount of stigma toward the respective workers. The results of an online survey indicated less stigma towards pornography workers than

prostitution, citing the status of sexual role-model that many pornography workers fulfill for consumers. Through social construction, prostitutes are criminals in the U.S. and most people do not aspire to be criminals. Whereas, pornography is considered a form of free speech and a seemingly realistic example of sexual expectations. As well, pornography is a commercialized industry, giving workers credibility as legitimate employees, a social construction that offers a level of protection against stigmatization that prostitution workers do not enjoy. The article also discusses the role media plays in scripting social viewpoints about the respective workers. If pornography workers are scripted as being desirable and accomplished, in contrast to prostitutes who may be depicted as oppressed, drug abusers, and immoral, then the portrayals of the workers through framing influences public opinions.

The “When I Grow Up I Want to be a...” article discusses influencing factors in the lives of the seven sex workers profiled in *SEX WORK*. The women shared stories of



childhood molestation and low self-esteem as influencing factors on their choice of entering the sex industry. Humans learn from observations and experiences. Social learning theory supports the idea that people imitate observed behaviors and model their identity on the characteristics and actions of their observed models.¹⁰ The women learned at a young age that their greatest asset was their body, their sexuality, although at a young age they would not have that understanding in sophisticated terms. Instead, they would know they received extra attention and possibly told they were special and a favorite over other children, establishing their value and conditioning them to seek that same 'affection' and attention throughout their lives. It is not an extraordinary leap to say that these women then suffer from varying levels of mental health issues because of their childhood abuse, influencing their abilities to function in society and traditional work places. This article also views the women through a lens of oppression, bolstering a connection between familial, gender, and social oppression to entry in the sex industry. That connection is commonly seen in outdoor prostitution, as discussed in "So, What Exactly is a Prostitute?", but other factors include childhood physical abuse, parental drug problems and substance abuse, being a teenage runaway and youth homelessness, and economic need.¹¹

I conducted a photo-ethnography project of sex workers in the Denver, Colorado area in 2015. Seven women participated in that project and they are profiled in *SEX WORK*. The profiles use standpoint theory to focus on their experiences through their personal narratives without the filter of a social lens, meaning the women's stories are written with

their voices and point of views rather than applying a socially constructed lens. Grammar and sentence structures of the profiles are based on the women's narratives, keeping authenticity of their stories. The original exhibit of the women has been received positively by most viewers. Audiences expressed finding insights about sex workers and the sex industry that they had not thought of before, allowing them to humanize the women rather than categorize them. The narratives also address in the process of essentialism. Essentialism is the generalizing of a group of people, assuming all people with a certain group possess all the same values and characteristics. The profiles show that although the women are all, or were, sex workers, they do not all possess the same viewpoints and attitudes that are often stereotyped with sex workers.

The book review of *Girl, Undressed*, by Ruth Fowler, again uses standpoint theory to share the experiences and viewpoints of a sex worker. Fowler weaves her general life story and her time as a stripper in New York into a commentary about human nature and perspectives on sex. Readers get to experience the acts of stripping through her narratives and gain insight into the lives of other disenfranchised groups of people with which she interacts and encounters.

The Bigger Picture

What does all this mean and why does it matter? Whenever we consume materials, read stories and view images, somewhere in our brains there is the question, "What's the point?." Sometimes there is a significant point and other times the goal is simply to entertain and market items. *SEX WORK* seeks to provide insights about an industry that is misunderstood and offer representation of

people who are too often misinterpreted, dehumanized, stigmatized, and disenfranchised. The method used throughout the publication to achieve these goals is feminist criticism. Feminist criticism is not just about issues related to women, but rather addressing the oppression of all people using a feminist lens that promotes life affirmation and nurturing. To address issues of oppression, the structure of domination and hierarchy needs to be disrupted, offering alternative non-dominating ways to live. Disruption can occur by applying three values – equality, immanent value, and self-determination. Equality is removing superiority and inferiority that constructs most human relationships, whether those relationships are business, romantic, friendship, etc. By removing these constructs, everyone is seen as being equal and deserving the same opportunities of self-expression. Immanent value means everyone has worth just as they are. Worth is not defined by power, money, and accolades, but instead saying every life is worth something just as it is because individual perspectives and experiences have value. Self-determination indicates that people should get to make their own choices and live their lives as they choose, not by constructed rules in a society, and that people are the experts on their own lives.¹²

When applying the three values to discussions of sex work, we disrupt the idea of inferiority of sex workers, increase the value of sex work, and validate sex work's place in society. Viewing sex workers as equals, rather than inferior members of society, supports them as valuable people who contribute to the growth and success of a society. Sex work offers significant financial

support to any economy. Workers earn money to pay bills, buy groceries, and support the general needs of themselves and their families. Regarding self-determination, decriminalizing sex work, not sex trafficking, would allow workers to construct their lives in a manner that is safe and productive, removing fear of incarceration and allowing them power over their own lives. *SEX WORK* strives to educate and expose readers to alternative narratives and ways of thinking about sex work/ers.

¹“Amnesty International Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers,” Amnesty International, pdf, accessed on March 13, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/4062/2016/en/>.

²Dewey, Susan, “Choosing Sex Work Over Public Assistance.” *Anthropology News* 50, no. 7 (2009): 28-28.

³Weitzer, Ronald, *The Ethnography of Prostitution: New International Perspectives*, Vol. 39. Los Angeles, CA: American Sociological Association, 2010.

⁴Brannigan, Augustine and Erin Gibbs Van Brunshot, “Youthful Prostitution and Child Sexual Trauma,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 20, no. 3 (1997): 337-354.

⁵Brunshot, Erin Gibbs Van, Rosalind A. Sydie, and Catherine Krull, “Images of Prostitution: The Prostitute and Print Media,” *Women & Criminal Justice* 10, no. 4 (2000): 47-72.

⁶Baran, Stanley J. and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, 7th edition (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Publishing, 2015).

⁷Cottle, Simon, *Ethnic Minorities and the Media* (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2000).

⁸Harding, Sandra, “Standpoint Theories: Productively Controversial,” *Hypatia* 24, no. 4 (2009): 192-200.

⁹Griffin, Em, Andrew Ledbetter, and Glenn Sparks, *A First Look at Communication Theory 9th ed* (New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2014).

¹⁰Brannigan, Augustine and Erin Gibbs Van Brunshot, “Youthful Prostitution and Child Sexual Trauma,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 20, no. 3 (1997): 337-354.

¹¹Roe-Sepowitz, Dominique E, “Juvenile Entry into Prostitution: The Role of Emotional Abuse,” *Violence Against Women* 18, no. 5 (2012): 562-579.

¹²Foss, Sonja K, *Rhetorical criticism: exploration and practice* (Long Grove, IL, Waveland Press, 2018).



So, What Exactly is a Prostitute?

The term prostitution is broadly and interchangeably used in discussions regarding sex work and sex trafficking. Often, there is misunderstanding about what each of those terms signify. A sex worker is a person who chooses to provide sex in exchange for goods or services. A sex-trafficked person is forced to provide sex. Big difference! Prostitution can be used in both contexts, but will certainly muddy the waters of understanding when talking about sex workers and sex-trafficking victims, a distinction that is important because the humanity of sex workers is often overshadowed by the inhumanity of sex trafficking. So, let us breakdown the term ‘prostitution’ a bit further into indoor and outdoor prostitution.

Indoor prostitution includes bars, brothels, call girls, escort agencies, massage parlors, and tanning salons. Indoor prostitution has forced workers and intentional workers. Forced workers are trafficking victims; people whose freedoms and choices are being withheld from them. Intentional workers choose, for various reasons, to provide sexual acts for goods or services. Intentional, indoor sex workers have fewer cases of sexually transmitted diseases than outdoor workers and sex trafficking victims, often enter prostitution at an older age, have lower rates of childhood abuse, and have more education.¹ Indoor sex workers are less drug dependent and often use ‘softer’ drugs, such

as marijuana, for coping with the job and socializing with their clients. With the ability to screen out dangerous clients, they experience less violence than those in outdoor prostitution, and feelings of oppression and victimization are expressed less in surveys of indoor, intentional sex workers.

Outdoor prostitution is on the streets. There are forced street workers and intentional street workers. Forced street workers are sex-trafficking victims, being used and controlled by other people. Intentional street workers work through some act of choice, although outdoor prostitution is sometimes called ‘survival sex,’ meaning the person often is without resources and has little recourse but to engage in prostitution.² Street work tends to be viewed by society through an oppression lens; implying abuse, exploitation, male domination, and misery are everyday experiences. Although exploitation and violence are present, those factors are not enough to reduce the concept of outdoor prostitution into simply an institute of subjugation and oppression. Intentional, outdoor sex workers are more likely to be drug-dependent and use hard drugs (crack or heroin) as a method of coping with the work environment. They will more likely experience violence and abuse because of the inability to screen customers or the unlikelihood of having a support/safety system nearby.

When addressing the abilities of people to make choices, whether choices withheld in sex trafficking or choices made in intentional sex work, it is important to address the spectrum of intent that exists within intentional sex work. There are various factors that influence the choice of becoming a sex worker. Empowerment, seeking financial stability, dealing with poverty, supporting a drug or chemical dependency, a solution to structural racism, failure of support systems, and many other socioeconomic factors influence choices. A person may choose to become a sex worker because it is a financially viable career, accessible work, or a better option than jobs paying less than a living wage. As well, systemic and structural discrimination, lack of support systems (personal and/or governmental), or mental health may influence the choice of becoming a sex worker. There are workers who enter the sex industry because they feel there are no other choices. This is where trafficking and intent become gray. Trafficking is a person taking away or withholding another person's ability to choose, an involuntary act. Intentional, or

voluntary, sex work can be a result of circumstances that leaves a person with limited choices to endure a society that systemically discriminates, excluding many from having equal opportunities to financial, physical, and mental well-being.³

With this distinction between sex trafficking and intentional sex work, as well as the understanding of indoor versus outdoor sex work, next is reviewing three common view points about sex work: as a form of deviant behavior, a method of gender oppression, and a type of work. There is a popular view that sex work is an immoral practice, an idea that is supported by the criminalization of sex work in many countries. Criminalization sets sex work apart from 'legitimate' work, allowing for marginalization, stigmatization, and victimization of the workers. Although decriminalization and regulation can reduce these problems, public perception does not always adhere to a government's recognition of sex work as legitimate and many societies still hold the deviant behavior view: Why would someone do this immoral, dirty work unless they are oppressed or forced?⁴

Intentional Indoor Workers	Intentional Outdoor Workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bars, brothels, call girls, escort agencies, massage parlors, tanning salons • Fewer cases of sexually transmitted diseases • Enter prostitution at an older age • Lower rates of childhood abuse • More educated • Less drug dependent • Experience less violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoors • More cases of sexually transmitted diseases • More likely to enter prostitution at a younger age • More likely to experience childhood abuse • Less educated • More drug dependent • Experience more exploitation and violence • Often called 'survival sex', due to lack of other resources



common frames (a social concept or construction) that intentional sex work is responsible for sex trafficking, is synonymous with sex trafficking, and is a clear form of violence by men against women and girls.⁷ Many academics and rights activists are reframing, offering a counter story, of intentional sex work as an issue of labor rights, where

Sex work as a method of gender oppression is a common thread in discussions regarding human rights, repression, and subjugation of women.⁵ Are sex workers victims of oppression or free agents in a career with a continual renewable resource, i.e. sex? Discussions of oppression often crosses the line between sex trafficking and intentional sex workers. There is obvious oppression in sex trafficking. As well, it is likely there is no intentional sex work environment that does not have some form of oppression involved, but the same can be said for many 'legitimate' careers in which women work. There are sex workers who find empowerment in their work and feel it is a rational career choice because of the ability to control their work conditions, choose their client base, and have financial stability.⁶ Gender oppression cannot be generalized between sex trafficking and intentional sex work, as sex worker's experiences are complex and there are extensive dynamics between workers, customers, and managers.

Sex work as a career is a battle-weary concept that is slowly gaining momentum in social and academic circles. There are

workers are a part of a larger 'informal economy,' shadow workplaces that include internal regulation and support consumerism.⁸ Sex work is service work and a part of the economy. Without legalization or regulation, personal/business income and other fees cannot be captured by local, state, and federal governments. This also means workers do not receive government benefits, i.e. social security, health benefits, unemployment. Sex workers are consumers. The common belief that sex workers reinvest most of their income into drugs and alcohol may be true for some, but that same concept also applies to Wall Street traders, business moguls, homemakers, etc. Sex workers pay bills, purchase homes, groceries, and clothes as most other citizens in 'legitimate' jobs.

Why do these aspects matter when discussing prostitution? Prostitution has a myriad of components that cannot all be adequately addressed in singular exploration. Research of sex workers is broken into many areas that support and disavow, and continually evolves as society ebbs and flows. For the long term, a societal understanding about the differences between sex trafficking,

intentional sex work, indoor prostitution, and outdoor prostitution will restructure conversations so that rather than prostitution being a social problem, the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work will be the social problem. Why is criminalization and stigmatization a social problem rather than sex work itself? Worker/labor rights, benefits, legal protection from violence, equal rights, and human rights are all reasons. When intentional sex work, not sex trafficking, is criminalized, the workers have no worker/labor rights, meaning the workers are taken advantage of by employers and have no legal recourse. Sex workers have no health, retirement, or social security benefits, yet they earn money and contribute to the economy.⁹ Workers have no legal protection from abusers, employers, or violent clients because their work is criminal and they will go to jail if they pursue legal protection. Intentional sex workers do not receive the same level of social empathy as sex trafficking victims. Sex trafficked people are more often recognized as human beings who have had their basic human rights taken from them by others and are forced into sex acts. With criminalization, sex workers have many of their basic human rights taken from them simply because they choose to perform sexual acts. Stigmatization of intentional sex workers is a form of social oppression. If a society believes that the oppression of people is unjust, and stigmatization is a form of social oppression, then that society needs to recognize the stigmatization as unjust.

A comprehensive understanding about prostitution, allowing for counternarratives, and reframing of social values will positively impact the lives of sex workers and sex trafficking victims.

¹ Weitzer, Ronald, "Prostitution: Facts and Fictions," *Contexts* 6, no. 4 (Fall, 2007): 28-33, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.uwo.edu/10.1525/ctx.2007.6.4.28>.

² Weitzer, Ronald, "Prostitution as a Form of Work," *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 1 (2007): 143-155.

³ Dewey, Susan and Tonia St. Germain, *Women of the Street: How the Criminal Justice-Social Services Alliance Fails Women in Prostitution* (New York, New York University Press, 2016).

⁴ Weitzer, Ronald, "Prostitution: Facts and Fictions," *Contexts* 6, no. 4 (Fall, 2007): 28-33, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.uwo.edu/10.1525/ctx.2007.6.4.28>.

⁵ "Time for Media and Feminists to Penetrate Prostitution: On the Issues Magazine Challenges Stale Stereotypes," *Women's Health Weekly* (2008): 490.

⁶ Weitzer, Ronald, "Prostitution as a Form of Work," *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 1 (2007): 143-155.

⁷ Jackson, Crystal A., "Framing Sex Worker Rights: How U.S. Sex Worker Rights Activists Perceive and Respond to Mainstream Anti-Sex Trafficking Advocacy," *Sociological Perspectives* 59, no. 1 (2016): 27-45.

⁸ Grant, Melissa G., "Let's Call Sex Work What It Is: Work; Villainizing sex workers won't improve their lives. Basic labor rights will," *The Nation*, (2014), accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/lets-call-sex-work-what-it-work>.

⁹ Jackson, Crystal A., "Framing Sex Worker Rights: How U.S. Sex Worker Rights Activists Perceive and Respond to Mainstream Anti-Sex Trafficking Advocacy," *Sociological Perspectives* 59, no. 1 (2016): 27-45.



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‘The World's Oldest Profession’

Sex work, as defined by the United Nations, is the unforced sale of sexual services for money or goods between consenting adults, which includes street prostitution, escort service, telephone sex, pornography, exotic dancing, and others.¹ *Urban Dictionary* indicates that offering sex for money is seen as a necessary or acceptable job parallel to factory work, and no stigma or sneer of contempt should be attached to its practitioners.² The World Health Organization’s definition of sex workers is, “women, men, and transgendered people who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, and who consciously define those activities as income generating even if they do not consider sex work as their occupation.”³ What do these definitions of sex work/workers have in common besides sex? Work. Yes, being a sex worker is working. It is a profession. Sex workers do not engage in sexual activities without some form of compensation. The exceptions are people under duress and forced or coerced to perform sexual acts without compensation to themselves. That is called sex trafficking and requires a different conversation.

Oldest Profession in Early America

Prostitution is referred to as ‘the world’s oldest profession.’ There is that word again... profession. Even our social history tells us that sex work is a recognized occupation, a way to provide for oneself and/or family. In the United States, prior to the Industrial Revolution, prostitutes predominately traded domestic services, including cleaning, cooking, and sexual favors, for temporary male protection.⁴ Not to say that sex work was unheard of in seventeenth and eighteenth-century America. Many cities and towns passed laws prohibiting ‘bawdy houses’ and ‘nightwalking,’ and sex work was practiced mainly by women who were viewed as moral failures. In early nineteenth century America, a

prostitute could be arrested for vagrancy if she was loitering on the streets, but prostitution was not a crime itself on a national platform. Prostitution was ad hoc, individual, and unorganized. The onset of the progressive political movement in the late nineteenth century saw the enactment of prostitution statutes in the United States, transforming prostitution from a practice to an institution. This movement established government control over many activities of the general population, including prohibition of alcohol.

Decriminalization and Regulation

So why are some forms of sex work illegal in the United States? Prostitution is illegal in all states except a few counties in Nevada, where it is strictly regulated. Some state statutes punish the act of prostitution, and other state statutes criminalize the acts of soliciting prostitution, arranging for prostitution, and operating a house of prostitution. Other types of sex work (exotic dancing, pornography, and webcamming) are legal and somewhat protected under the First Amendment, although prostitution laws vary from state-to-state.⁵

Comparatively, in the Netherlands, sex work is recognized as a legal profession and regulated by labor laws. If 18 years or older, a citizen of any country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, may work in the sex industry in the Netherlands as a paid employee or a freelancer. The worker must possess a valid identification card from their country of origin. Other countries of origin have other regulations and conditions. There is infrastructure to provide physical and mental healthcare, means for preventing sexually transmitted diseases, and avenues to report abuse or violence. The government mandates that brothels follow labor regulations and pay taxes.⁶

- Working to Pay the Bills

Prostitution is also legal and regulated in Germany. The country removed morality language from most Federal German laws, which previously invalidated contracts and agreements for sexual services, and excluded sex workers from public benefits, health insurance, and labor rights laws. The government removed criminal laws against 1) promoting prostitution (pimping) as long as the workers are at least 21-years old, 2) created unidirectional contracts that allows sex workers to sue clients for non-payment (but clients cannot sue sex workers for failing to provide services), 3) limited legal recognition between sex workers and employers (meaning employers cannot tell sex workers what acts to perform or with whom), and, most important, 4) sex workers were given access to employment benefits. Although legal in the country, states still have jurisdiction regarding health and safety of workers, zoning, and registration.⁷

Mexico decriminalized prostitution, although laws vary by state, requiring sex workers to be registered and at least 18-years old. Thirteen of the thirty-one states of Mexico regulate prostitution; many requiring sex workers to pay for and receive monthly health checks and carry their health card. Some cities have tolerance zones which allow regulated prostitution and red-light districts. Tijuana, which shares approximately fifteen miles of border with San Diego, California, has one of the largest red-light districts in North America; though prostitution cannot take place in public places, it is allowed on private property.⁸

In Argentina, organized prostitution is not allowed (brothels, pimping); but sex in exchange for money is legal. Prostitution, though, is not completely decriminalized. With no federal regulation, each Argentinian province regulates differently. For example, in San Juan, offering sex

services in public is punishable with 20 days in prison, as directed by the Code of Infractions and Misdemeanors.⁹ The industry is rife with discrimination, abuse, and persecution by authorities and clients. Many sex workers feel that by not being allowed to protect themselves in an organized industry their economic opportunities are lessened, there are limited means of finding work, and not allowing them to use their bodies for work is an act of violence and discrimination.¹⁰

Migrant Sex Workers

Decriminalization and regulation in multiple countries is linked to the emergence of migrant sex workers. Some workers are trafficked, and some are intentional workers who are taking advantage of a decriminalized system with a strong demand for services or escaping cultural, economic, gender, labor, or political repression. For some, this is an emancipatory process that workers believe will relieve poverty and deprivation. A negative to migratory sex workers is the increased vulnerability women have of being abused or trafficked, due to their illegal or irregular status in a country, and the division of labor between indigenous and migrant workers, where migrants are more likely working domestic or sex markets.¹¹ I also need to note that decriminalization and regulation are not identical in all countries. The structure of legalization in one country cannot be assumed to be the same structure in another country. This non-conformity between countries deeply impacts the experiences of indigenous and migrant sex workers.

Decriminalization/Regulation in the U.S.

Decriminalization is the process of removing legal policies that exert punishment on consenting adults who exchange sex for money or other goods, allowing workers to seek assistance

without fear of arrest and promoting an environment where workers can discriminate screen clients, knowing that legal recourse is available if a potential client becomes violent or abusive. Although decriminalization in the U.S. would remove legal persecution for sex work, the periphery component of drug addiction in the industry would still cause legal issues for workers. Circling back to a feminist criticism approach regarding sex work and drug addiction, a tactic would be removing legislation that punishes addiction and instead provide processes that build positive changes for individuals. This approach would apply to all people dealing with drug addiction, those who are poor, working class people, or people of color, who continually suffer from ineffective governmental policies.¹²

Decriminalization does not inherently remove stigmatization and discrimination against sex workers, although it does give workers more agency, or ability, to advocate for themselves and other groups who are often viewed as social pariahs. Reduction of stigmatization only occurs through rewriting social narratives and a social reconstruction, remembering that a person's social status is truly a direct result of how society constructs that person's place in the social organization. During my time with the Denver sex workers, they did not provide their thoughts about decriminalization or regulation, but I did not ask either. For my future research, exploring the perspectives of sex workers on decriminalization and regulation would provide a view, a standpoint, about how workers are truly affected. In the U.S., a dominant philosophy is that 'we are what we make ourselves,' meaning our struggles are a product of our own choices rather than a result of systemic failures. Researchers have noted that many workers in the U.S. are hesitant about regulation because a legal record is then established regarding their career choice, which can be more socially debilitating than constructed stigmatization.¹³

Sex Work Organizations and Advocates

Changing legal policy is challenging and politically fraught; there are several notable organizations internationally that work towards decriminalization and equity for sex workers in the belief that human and workers' rights, protection from violence, comprehensive healthcare, and elimination of discrimination should be afforded to sex workers.

The Scarlet Alliance, the Australian Sex Workers Association, promotes civil and human rights of sex workers, and works toward ending all forms of discrimination against them. The organization also challenges regulations that are discriminatory and/or repressive to the rights and autonomy of sex workers, work towards sex workers rights to occupational health and safety provisions and play an active role in Australia's response to HIV/AIDS.¹⁴

The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective advocates for the rights, health, and well-being of all sex workers. The group focuses on workers rights, HIV and STI prevention, education, and advocating reformation of laws regarding sex workers. *The New Zealand Model* is the governmental legal infrastructure that decriminalized sex work and upholds human rights of sex workers, which the Collective helped draft and pass into law.

Amnesty International released a policy on May 26, 2016 that supports state obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of sex workers. Amnesty International calls for the decriminalization of all aspects of adult consensual sex work due to the foreseeable barriers that criminalization creates to the realization of the human rights of sex workers.¹⁵

The Association of Women Sex Workers in Argentina in Action for Our Rights (AMMAR) is a major organization fighting for sex worker rights. The association was formed in 1994 by 60 sex workers and grew to 15,000 members over the next 10 years. In 1995 they joined the Argentine Workers' Central Union (Central de Trabajadores

Argentinos), and in 1997 was affiliated into the Network of Sex Workers of Latin America and the Caribbean. In January 2004, the head of the Rosario branch, Sandra Cabrera was murdered. Days prior, she spoke against police complicity in the organized crime network responsible for the sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of young girls and teenagers. Her murder remains unsolved.¹⁶

Sex Work as Employment

Why are governmental policies and advocate organizations important when addressing sex work as employment? First, is the idea that society is actively produced by human beings; meaning there is a constructed understanding of the world which people formulate assumptions about reality. Concepts of shame, criminalization, and human value are built by people, by society. When policies and organizations disrupt or challenge common assumptions, then movement is made toward changing socially constructed ideas about sex work and workers.

Second, when inclusion of all people and perspectives (class, gender, race, etc) are taken into consideration, then the cultural, economic, ideological, and social influences of the dominant people (dominant class, gender, race) are questioned and allows for change. Policies and organizations that include all perspectives, allowing disenfranchised people to share and discuss their experiences, challenges fundamental assumptions that many use to organize their thinking.

When there is a demand for a product/service in commerce, there is always a supply. Sex is a product/service and has a constant base of consumers. In the U.S., there are approximately one million sex workers and the majority are women. The criminalization of sex work often forces workers into poverty, dangerous working conditions, drug abuse, and social ostracization. There is a hypocrisy that promotes sexualization of women utilized in media and popular culture but punishes the reality of women's sexuality as

employment. Sex workers should enjoy the same labor rights and human rights as other workers, and these rights can only be gained once the discussion moves from a moral context to one of labor rights.

¹ "Sex Work, HIV/AIDS, and Human Rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia," United Nations, pdf, http://www.unodc.org/documents/islamicrepublicofiran/publications/1jan2015/Sex_Work-HIV-AIDS-en.pdf.

² "Sex Worker," urbandictionary.com, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sex+worker>.

³ Cheryl Overs, "Sex Workers: Part of the Solution: An analysis of HIV prevention programming to prevent HIV transmission during commercial sex in developing countries," World Health Organization, pdf, 2, http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw_toolkit/115solution.pdf.

⁴ Simowitz, Aaron D, "How Criminal Law Shapes Institutional Structures: A Case Study of American Prostitution," *American Criminal Law Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 417.

⁵ "Prostitution," ProCon.org, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://prostitution.procon.org>.

⁶ "Prostitution," Government of the Netherlands, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.government.nl/topics/prostitution>.

⁷ Prostitution Act, The Federal Government, pdf, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/93346/f81fb6d56073e3a0a80c442439b6495e/bericht-der-br-zum-prostg-englisch-data.pdf>.

⁸ 100 Countries and Their Prostitution Policies, ProCon.org, accessed March 9, 2018, <https://prostitution.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000772>.

⁹ Dubove, Adam, "Argentinean Sex Workers Demand the Right to Sell Their Own Bodies," December 4, 2015 *PanAm Post*, <https://panampost.com/adam-dubove/2015/12/04/argentinean-sex-workers-demand-the-right-to-exploit-their-own-bodies>, accessed March 10, 2018.

¹⁰ Minali Aggarwal, "Sex Work or Prostitution in Buenos Aires, Argentina," Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/sex-work-or-prostitution-in-buenos-aires-argentina>.

¹¹ Massari, Monica. "The Other and Her Body: Migrant Prostitution, Gender Relations and Ethnicity." (2009).

¹² Dewey, Susan and Tonia St. Germain, *Women of the Street: How the Criminal Justice-Social Services Alliance Fails Women in Prostitution* (New York, New York University Press, 2016).

¹³ Dewey, Susan and Tonia St. Germain, *Women of the Street: How the Criminal Justice-Social Services Alliance Fails Women in Prostitution* (New York, New York University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Australian Sex Workers Alliance, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://www.scarletalliance.org.au>.

¹⁵ "Amnesty International Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers," Amnesty International, pdf, accessed on March , 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/4062/2016/en/>.

¹⁶ The Association of Women Sex Workers in Argentina in Action for Our Rights, accessed March 18, 2018, pdf, http://www.ammar.org.ar/IMG/pdf/cv_ammар_english.pdf

Social Perceptions of Prostitution and Pornography

Intercourse, a.k.a. sex, is easily accepted as a biological function of men and women. Sex is both private and public, embraced and rejected as a source of empowerment and shame. Perceptions, acceptability of sex, and sexuality of men and women varies between cultures, religions, and ethnicities.¹ The quality and content of education (institutional, familial, and communal) about sex can be misleading, destructive, progressive, or even non-existent. The Internet and modern technology allows for easy access to a spectrum of views, information, and depictions of sex that are usually unregulated and not always accurate.^{2,3} Prostitution and pornography are examples of sexual activity that usually have no structured education and general perceptions are influenced by religion, legal policies, and other social values.^{4,5}

Social stigmas of sex workers fluctuate in relation to a person's choice to work in the sex industry and, more specifically, the type of sex work. General stigmas against sex workers are assumed but the reasons why pornography workers are potentially less stigmatized than prostitutes are important because the reasons may reflect overarching social values that are filtered through media, literature, politics, etc., and can be determined by how and/or where people gather information to form opinions. Why is the stigmatization not equal for all sex workers? What are the factors in information gathering

that influences a person's opinion of different types of sex workers? Do the representations of prostitutes and pornography actors in media play a large role in influencing opinions?

Legal policies

Legal policies regarding pornography can vary by geographic areas, but for the most part pornography is legal and is socially accepted as a commercial form of sexual activity.^{6,7} The detached process of watching sexual activity on a television channel or Internet website allows religious and social concerns to be put aside or completely ignored, meaning pornography workers are less likely to be judged or stigmatized. Pornography workers are inaccessible because of the impersonal nature of watching them on a screen, which helps to deflect social disgrace. Consumers of pornography are also likely to feel they have control over pornography actors through voyeurism, the idea of watching from afar. Surveillance theory supports the idea that consumers are gathering information about pornography actors that allow them the feeling of control and power. The actors themselves may not feel controlled but watching the actors in intimate situations portrays them as vulnerable, allowing consumers to feel superior and in control. People are less likely to be critical of pornography actors because of the sense of personal knowledge and power the consumer feels over the actors.^{9,10,11}

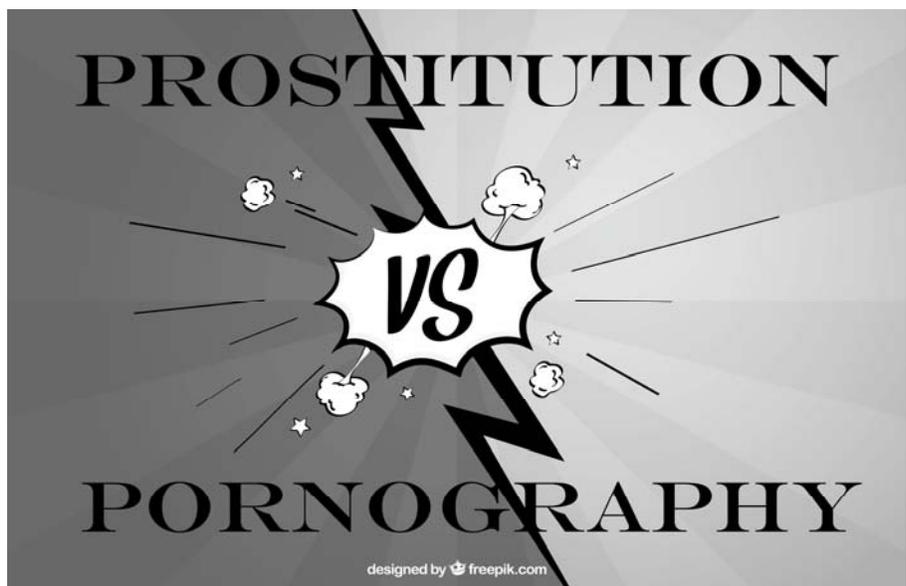


In contrast, legal policies regarding prostitution, and the more personal nature of the sex acts, can have a greater negative influence on social acceptance. Prostitution is a criminal offense in most U.S. states, yet there is a social acceptance of using prostitutes as a sexual alternative to spouses or domestic partners.¹² Commercialized sex, i.e. pornography, is expected to be regulated because of being a commercial product. Prostitution is an interpersonal act that challenges people's sense of morals, causing personal conflict between legal policies, personal values, and a person's sexual knowledge. Framing theory is the process of defining and redefining issues for the public and is most often applied to media representations and legal policies regarding sex workers. Legal policies define and redefine attitudes of the public toward prostitution workers. The criminal nature, stigmas, and social reputations of prostitution are generated through legal policies. Data from countries across the world reveal that legal policies directly influence levels of acceptance, willingness for policy reform, and the variability of views about prostitution.¹³ Prostitution is illegal in every state in the U.S., except for a few counties in Nevada, where prostitution is legal only under specific regulated conditions. Other types of sex work (pornography, exotic dancing, and web camming) are legal and somewhat protected under the First Amendment. Comparatively, in the Netherlands, sex work is

recognized as a legal profession and regulated by labor laws. Prostitution is legal and regulated in Germany. Mexico decriminalized prostitution, requiring sex workers to be registered and at least 18-years-old. Argentina legalized sex in exchange for money but does not allow organized prostitution, such as brothels.¹⁴

Media representation: Role models and sensationalism

Media is a significant influence on society. Social roles, behaviors, and attitudes are depicted and consumed by millions of people every day.¹⁵ In regard to sex, pornography often serves as a role model of sexual behavior. Women having casual sex with multiple partners is a common storyline in most pornography and research has found that the sexual behavior of women in the United States (U.S.) is influenced by the consumption of pornography. Essentialism theory supports the modeling behavior of female consumers. Essentialism is using a set of characteristics that define the self and others; people are reduced to how society has scripted those characteristics. The female pornography actors (as individuals and their



behaviors) are defined by how society (pornography industry) scripts their behaviors and personalities. Female consumers use the female actors as role models for their personal sex life. Internet pornography viewing is associated with the number of sexual partners for women. Confidence in media also factors into the influence of pornography on number of sexual partners. Realistic representation of sexual encounters holds greater influence than encounters deemed as “fake.” Pornography also influences male sexual behavior by encouraging male dominant sexual acts. Pornography depicting continuous explicit sex with no storyline or plot promotes the same behavior (male dominant sex acts) in men with their sexual partners by defining the male and female roles in sexual encounters. Female pornography actors are more often reduced to a sexual tool and subjected to dominant sexual behaviors (spanking, hair pulling, slapping, choking, and confinement). Male consumers are found to identify real life sexual partners with the female actors and are more likely to exhibit dominant sexual behaviors.^{16 17 18}

With prostitution, media has a strong history of sensational reporting. Groups in society (moral entrepreneurs, politicians, experts) work towards achieving ideologies by using media to create a ‘moral panic.’ ‘Moral panic’ is when a group or type of people in society are portrayed as a threat and people in power attempt to enact laws and regulations to control or remove the threat. In the case of prostitution, moral entrepreneurs (community and/or religious leaders) utilize media to promote prostitution as being a deep threat to society. Politicians then mobilize experts to analyze the situation and offer a legal ‘solution’ to the threat. An example is

the Street Offences Act of 1959 that was enacted in the United Kingdom.

An Act to make, as respects England and Wales, further provision against loitering or soliciting in public places for the purpose of prostitution, and for the punishment of those guilty of certain offences in connection with refreshment houses and those who live on the earnings of or control prostitutes. (Street Offences Act 1959)

Sensational newspaper coverage of prostitutes being an annoyance on the streets and a threat to post-war society prompted the Wolfenden Committee to produce a report about the threat, which led to Street Offences Act.^{19 20} Overall, pornography is a role model for sexual activity because of the commercialized nature and legal policies of the industry. Prostitution does not enjoy the same level of commercial esteem as pornography nor the same legal stability and suffers from media sensationalism.

Public opinion

In 2017, I conducted a pilot online survey about attitudes towards prostitution workers, pornography workers, and general confidence in media representation of those workers. There were 121 respondents, approximately half female and half male, with an average age of 36 years.²¹

Results indicated attitudes of less stigma toward pornography workers than prostitutes, although, overall, women were less supportive than men for both types of workers. That being said, female respondents were less critical of pornography workers than prostitutes. As previously mentioned,

women often use pornography workers as sexual role models, meaning women who view pornography will base their own sexual activity on the behaviors of pornography workers, therefore there is an expectation that women would have less stigma against pornography workers than prostitution workers, who are not usually deemed role models but more as criminals.

Survey questions about media representation were meant to gauge how confident respondents are that media accurately represents prostitutes and pornography workers. This confidence factor is important because most media representation does not depict sex workers in a positive manner. A higher confidence level in media representation means the respondents trust the depictions of the respective workers. Survey respondents indicated less trust in media portrayals of *pornography workers*, meaning the representations were likely not true, and expressed less views of stigma against the workers. On the other hand, respondents indicated higher confidence in the representation of *prostitutes*, meaning the portrayals were more likely real, and expressed more views of stigma against the workers. These results support the idea that confidence in media representation, how media portrays pornography and prostitution characters, and how people model their own behavior based on media representation, influences the attitudes that society has about real-life pornography workers and prostitutes.²²

Why these factors are important?

Sex workers, whether pornography workers or prostitutes, are generally ostracized and stigmatized in society,

primarily because of the nature of their work. Exploring the reasons why certain stigmas occur is important when assessing how to initiate social change. With the idea of creating social perspectives and relationships based on seeing others as equal and not as inferior or superior, there needs to be an understanding of the components that propagate inequality, stigmatization, oppression, exploitation, domination, etc.²³ Disrupting the dominant beliefs in a culture and offering counter perspectives will enable restructuring and transformation of principles and ideas that are currently harmful to many groups within that culture.

COMMENTS FROM SURVEY

“All sex work between consenting adults should be legitimate and taxed.”

“Although they're horrible positions, some individuals elect to follow that path. I can't judge anyone for their choice in career, and wish them success.”

“Everybody is entitled to choose their method of earning a living.”

“I am generally positive towards prostitute workers but am a bit less favorable toward pornography workers. Each group of people however have good qualities about them.”

“I am not one to judge, but not a big fan of them.”

“I am uncomfortable with the idea of sex work. But I would rather be supportive of them than judge them or scorn them. Just because I am uncomfortable with it doesn't mean they shouldn't be treated as humans and their feelings and opinions be heard.”

“I believe it is morally wrong but I also think that some people feel they have no choice.”

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- ³ Sabo, Anne G, "Highbrow and Lowbrow Pornography: Prejudice Prevails Against Popular Culture. A Case Study," *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 1 (2009): 147-161.
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- ⁶ Evans-DeCicco, Jennee A. and Gloria Cowan, "Attitudes Toward Pornography and the Characteristics Attributed to Pornography Actors," *Sex Roles* 44, no. 5 (2001): 351-361.
- ⁷ Ortiz, Rebecca R., Shawna White, and Eric Rasmussen, "Do Individual Perceptions Matter in Pornography Effects? how Perceived General Acceptance and Influence of Pornography may Impact Agreement with Sex-Role Attitudes," *Communication Research Reports* 33, no. 2 (2016): 88-95.
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- ¹⁰ Ortiz, Rebecca R., Shawna White, and Eric Rasmussen., "Do Individual Perceptions Matter in Pornography Effects? how Perceived General Acceptance and Influence of Pornography may Impact Agreement with Sex-Role Attitudes," *Communication Research Reports* 33, no. 2 (2016): 88-95.
- ¹¹ Wright, Paul J., Chyng Sun, Nicola J. Steffen, and Robert S. Tokunaga, "Pornography, Alcohol, and Male Sexual Dominance," *Communication Monographs* 82, no. 2 (2015): 252-270.
- ¹² Cao, Liqun and Edward R. Maguire, "A Test of the Temperance Hypothesis: Class, Religiosity, and Tolerance of Prostitution," *Social Problems* 60, no. 2 (2013): 188-205.
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- ²⁰ Montgomery-Graham, Stephanie, Taylor Kohut, William Fisher, and Lorne Campbell, "How the Popular Media Rushes to Judgment about Pornography and Relationships while Research Lags Behind," *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (2015): 243-256.
- ²¹ Respondents: age range of 19 to 72 years; 52.1% with annual income of less than \$50,000, 47.9% above \$50,000; sexual orientation breakdown was opposite sex 101 (83.5%), same sex 8 (6.6%), and bi-sexual 11 (9.1%); ethnicity breakdown was 111 (91.7%) not Hispanic or Latino and 10 (8.3%) Hispanic or Latino; race breakdown was American Indian or Alaska Native 4 (3.3%), Asian 8 (6.6%), Black or African American 11 (9.1%), and White 102 (84.3%). Of the participants, 47.9 % were in a relationship and 52.1% were not in a relationship.
- ²² Perkins, Wendy, pilot survey through MTurk, COJO 5070: Quantitative Research Methods course (2017).
- ²³ Foss, Sonja K, *Rhetorical criticism: exploration and practice* (Long Grove, IL, Waveland Press, 2018).

When I Grow Up I Want to be a...

What do you want to be when you grow up? A common question we ask young people. Most children will say they want to be a doctor, lawyer, truck driver, and so on. Very rarely, or possibly never, does a child indicate sex worker as their adult career. Childhood years are the most formative in development of social skills and self-esteem. Family and friends structure how young people process their identity and how to gain acceptance by others. Boys and girls are inundated with media images and storylines that suggest necessary behaviors and appearances to be accepted.

Sexual molestation at a young age sets a standard for children of their value. This is especially true for young girls. Girls who are sexually molested identify their body and sexuality to be their value as a person and the aspect of themselves that earns the most 'love.' Their cognitive development may not identify what is happening to them or why, but they do understand that value is being attached to their bodies. An article from the *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* used social learning perspective to explain how childhood sexual exploitation also teaches the victim to view herself as damaged or "dirty." Studies indicate that one in four girls and one in ten boys suffer from sexual molestation in the United States.

Many of the women profiled in *SEX WORK* speak of experiencing childhood sexual and emotional abuse. Roxanne grew up in a large mixed family where the ages of the eleven children ranged over 30 years. She was overweight and felt picked on and made

fun of a lot. When an older male (19 years old) provided Roxanne (12 years old) with love and attention that included sex, that behavior instilled a sense of her worth and how to have relationships with men. That sense of worth followed her into adulthood. "When I met my first pimp, I never had attention from people really. I was really big, at that point in time I was probably 300 plus pounds, and people were now paying attention to me. They liked me and I was good at making money. That's what I thought I was going to be for the rest of my life. I was going to be a ho for life."

Neisha's parents divorced when she was a baby and both of her parents each remarried three more times before Neisha was 15 years old. She spoke of a lot of instability during her childhood due to the various marriages, subsequent half-siblings, and subsiding on low-income. Neisha noted that her multiple sets of parents had a lot of hardships and difficulties. Neisha also remembered being sexually molested when she was 6 or 8 years old by a babysitter's son. "I don't want to say escape your environment but overcome your environment. Because I think more often than not we are products of our environment."

Laurallee felt like the 'black sheep' of her family. She was molested by her grandfather when she was seven years old. She was also molested by a male babysitter. Laurallee's father was an alcoholic who was mentally and physically abusive to the family. As an adult, Laurallee was in a 17-year relationship with an abusive partner who eventually left her homeless and penniless. "Everybody's life is

not dysfunctional. I thought dysfunctional is how the world was. I thought everyone grew up the way we did.”

Jessica’s father was in and out of prison during her childhood. Her mother worked many different jobs to make ends meet, meaning she was often not home for Jessica and her brother. Jessica was molested by babysitters and her brother. By the age of eleven, she felt ignored by her mother and idolized her father. She was expelled from 8th grade for fighting and using drugs and alcohol. Jessica was put in a wilderness therapy rehabilitation program at 13 years old.

Not all male and female sex workers experience childhood sexual molestation and molestation is not an absolute predisposition to being a sex worker. Other factors such as home environment, social structure and support, and emotional stability also effect entry into the sex industry. Little girls and boys do not dream of one day being a sex worker but sometimes brutal life realities, perceived available options, and the need for acceptance leads them down that career path.



“Everybody makes mistakes and everyone is a product of their environment. I just think that me being in the environment and under the circumstances with my mental health, I just fell into a path of destruction. I had a hate for men, for what had happened, and so that was my way of kind of getting back at men in general. I didn’t like being with men so I took it to a level of where if I was going to do this, you know who makes a \$100 a half hour? It’s very good money and I was just looking at it for the money...I know I had a lot of pain and hurt from my past and childhood that I did this above and apart from my morals and values. But when you get into a circumstance and you have so much hate and frustration built up you act out of anger and do things that are harmful not only to yourself but to others. And I just learned that no amount of money is worth me and my body. My body is priceless.” - Jessica

“Telling My Story Because It Needs to be Told”: A Photo-Ethnography Exhibit with Denver Women in the Sex Industry

https://www-lib.uwyo.edu/digital/exhibits/exhibits/show/sex_workers

Women make up the larger percentage of workers in the sex industry. As a marginalized group, human qualities of sex workers are overlooked or ignored in mainstream media. Unfortunately, the harsh realities of the industry overshadow the individuality of these women. They are not seen as someone’s daughter, sister, mother, wife, or friend. Drug abuse, crime, poverty, mental illness, or desperation are most often overemphasized in media and society. Sex industry workers are ordinary people with families, successes, failures, and life stories that are not unlike a multitude of people who are outside the industry.

The following profiles are of seven women in the sex industry, primarily street workers, who participated in a photo-ethnography project focusing on the realities of their lives. Each woman was photographed over a three-day period in their everyday life, showing their routines, hobbies, and interests. The women were allowed to share their stories, both current and past, in a manner that provides dignity and reality rather than sensationalism.

The project was conducted over the summer of 2015 in the Denver, Colorado region, culminating into an exhibit that visually focuses on the women as ordinary people and is supplemented by paraphrased text from interviews with the women and observations of the photographer.

All of the women involved with this exhibit have some form of mental illness,

including bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, dementia, personality disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Whether the mental illnesses existed prior to the women’s involvement with the sex industry or is a manifestation of working in the sex industry is unknown. All of the women also had some form of childhood sexual molestation. The sexual offenders ranged from family and close friends to neighbors and peers.

Lifestyle choices are often discussed topics. The women are frequently asked why they choose to be sex workers. Most often, their answer is that they felt they had no other options. The women agree they did make a choice at some point to get into their first trick’s car or to accept payment for sex but with the feeling that no other alternatives existed. Perceived self-worth made them feel that they were not good enough for anything else. If drugs did not exist before becoming a sex worker, the drugs started shortly thereafter. Mental numbness is a desired trait for the profession. Criminal records for prostitution and possession, and a lack of substantial work skills, makes getting out of the business improbable.

Original photo exhibit supported by the Larsh Bristol Fellowship, Human Projects Initiative, Street’s Hope, and the University of Wyoming Gender and Women’s Studies program.



My name is Anita and I am 50 years old. I come from a Baptist family and grew up in Missouri, about 20 miles east of Kansas City. My dad was a mechanic for a trucking company and later became a manager. He was a union man. My mom worked in a popcorn store.

The man I call my dad came into my life when I was one and a half years old. My dad was a loving, caring, and sweet person. He was in the Army when he first met my mom. They got married when my twin sister and I were three years old. He took on my mom and five kids, and he made no difference between us and the two kids that came after in the marriage. He had two kids from a previous marriage as well, but they did not come into my life until I was eleven. One time I asked him why he loved me so much. He said the moment he laid his eyes on me, he knew I was the sweetest girl in the world and he fell in love with me.

There were good things in my childhood. I remember my dad building us a go cart and I got a keyboard when I was ten. I liked to play music and I was good at writing music too. I wanted to be a music therapist, using music to help people relate to emotional issues.

My twin and I were molested by our biological dad. I don't remember at what age that happened though. One of my half-

brothers did molest me when I was 11 and I became pregnant. I gave birth to my oldest daughter when I was 12 years old. Social services tried to take her, but my mom and dad said no, and took custody of her until I was 18. I continued going to school and trying to have a normal life, although I ended up not graduating from high school. I started taking speed when I was 15 or 16, then started crack at 17 or 18. I stayed on crack for 12 years. When I was 16, my boyfriend and I had a daughter, but I didn't marry him. I married Mike. I was 18 and he was 21. I didn't love Mike when I married him, but he was good for me at the time. We were married for two years. We had a son while we were married, and I was pregnant when we separated.

On our 23rd birthday, my twin sister killed herself. Her husband left her for a younger woman and the pain was too much for her to bear. I lost half of myself when she died.

When I was dating the man who would be my second husband, I hooked up with a sugar daddy. That is how I started into the sex industry. I started prostitution because I was broke and wanted a crack hit.

A dope dealer told me that if I had sex with him, he would give me a hit. Then he brought more people with him and said that if I had sex with them I could have more crack. I lived like that for a while. Eventually,

I have an afghan from one of my sons that passed from double pneumonia caused by HIV. It is one of the few things I have to remind me of him.





My brother's veteran benefits don't always cover what he needs. The medical system does not do a good job of tracking his admissions and tests.

The seizures happen almost every day. The EMT's come to our place a lot.



My brother keeps having tests to figure out why the seizures happen but the doctors can't seem to find a reason.

another prostitute said I should be doing it for more than just dope, so I started working the streets. I made \$400 in the first two hours on my first try. There was no way I was making that much money anywhere else.

When I married my second husband he did not accept my two sons from my first marriage. I was only married to my second husband for a year. In that time, we had twin sons together. I lost one of my twin sons when he was older to double pneumonia caused by HIV.

Eventually I did five years in a federal penitentiary on a dope case and another four

years on a fraud case. When I got out, I went right back into the game. I spent a lot of time on Backpage (a version of Craigslist for sex work) but I preferred street work. I moved to Denver in 1999 for a fresh start. I was good for a year but then started selling dope at night. I was a truck driver with a partner from 2001-2006. We trafficked drugs across the country. He was possessive and abusive. One beating broke both my arms and my jaw.

It is hard for me to remember all that has happened in my life. I struggle with personality disorder, bi-polar disorder, and schizophrenia.

I am over two years clean from drugs and out of the business. This year, 2015, I completed my GED. I tried one of the recovery programs a few years ago, like Street's Hope, but didn't finish. Even so, I finally got out. On a daily basis, I deal with my mental illness issues and worry about the stomach cancer I was previously treated for. I had a heart attack not that long ago too. You never know when things like that might come back.

I live in a one-bedroom section-8 apartment with one of my younger brothers, a young woman I call my daughter, and her

boyfriend. I sleep in the bedroom, my brother on the couch, and the other two sleep on a blowup mattress in the living room. My therapy pet is a rat. He sleeps in my bed with me and gives me comfort. My brother and I just reconnected recently after not seeing each other for a very long time. He is several years younger than me. He is a military veteran who suffers from seizures every day. My rat always curls up on my brother's neck when he starts of have a seizure. He keeps having tests to figure out why the seizures happen, but the doctors can't seem to find a reason. We go to the hospital a lot for his seizures.

I reconnected with my brother just a few months ago. He is a military vet and has seizures from PTSD.







So many things are unknown in my future. My physical health, the stability of my mental health, and my financial situation. I live day to day.

I can't drive so friendships are important. We help each other out with our combined resources.

I call the young woman living with me my daughter. She is not my biological daughter, but we became good friends while in Street's Hope and have helped each other out. My 'daughter' is still in the business. Her work helps provide for the household. She has a regular trick who is a butcher and she brings home fresh meat every couple of weeks. All of us help decide what to ask for when she sets up her time with the butcher. Her boyfriend deals drugs. He is in and out of jail, but he brings home food and money too.

I am hoping to get into a new housing unit

soon. My current complex is full of drugs and brutality. Several women have been raped in their apartments and in the parking lot.

I would still like to be a music therapist. I very much want to write and play music again. My keyboard is in storage someplace. Maybe my brother can help get it for me.

So many things are unknown in my future. My physical health, the stability of my mental health, and my financial situation. I live day to day. So many things have happened in my life but I am not gone yet. I have plenty of stuff yet to do.

What do you want others to know about you?

“Come walk a mile in my shoes.
Come stay and do a day of my day.
Do what I have to do to survive....
See how I hurt, see where my pain comes from.”

Sometimes I am overwhelmed with everything.





My name is “Brandy.” I worry about the safety of myself and my family, so I am using a fake name and my face is not visible in pictures.

I was born in west Denver. I am 39 years old and the youngest of six children. My mom was an RN and my father was a heroin addict. I remember there being a lot of alcohol, drugs, and gang activity in my childhood. My dad left when I was young, and my mother remarried. My mother became depressed and turned to alcohol and marijuana soon after my step-father died from a gunshot wound and my brother died after being hit by a drunk driver. She stopped being an RN and became a bartender. I often remember the whole bar coming to our home after closing. My mother tried to be a good mom. She taught us not to steal and to respect our elders. Unfortunately, I don’t think there were good resources for her back then and her mental health issues were not addressed properly.

I don’t have a lot of fond memories of my childhood. We always had a house full of people. “I remember as a little girl, men coming into my room and carrying me out.” I was young, maybe four years old. In school, I liked gym and art, otherwise I did not like school.

I think teachers just passed me along the grades to just get me through school. I still have no idea how I got a diploma. I am surprised I can read today. I feel like I slipped

through the cracks on everything. I didn’t know any better. I just thought that the way I lived was just how things were for everyone. It was when I saw parents who were supportive, girls who had their hair combed every day, had good grades because moms made them do their homework, that is when I realized that not everyone lived the way I did. I don’t think my mom needed social services to take us from her, but that she needed help. Resources, tutors, and therapy for us and mom would have been a good thing. “I don’t think my mom was a bad mom. I think she was just lost herself.”

When I was fifteen my mom had a car accident and slipped into a coma. I don’t know what experience she had in the coma, but her faith became strong and she changed her life. My mom did end up clean and sober. At that time, I thought I was so grown up, no one could tell me what to do and I was out of control. My family started to change by using less alcohol and drugs. My mom was trying to make a structured and stable home life. On the other hand, I was going to bars, drinking, involved in gang life, and learning to shoot a gun. I was depressed, lost, and scared. I had no idea what each day was going to bring.

“I was having a lot of sex because that is what I thought love was. I didn’t like it, but I thought he did, so he would love me.”

I moved to Utah, met a man, and had two daughters. I followed him back to Denver,

I finally came to a point of knowing I want a different life. I have so much to live for and so much that I can give back to others.





I feel good helping others, making others smile, and knowing that I will be able to give something back that will help someone someday.

My children have seen me struggle. They know what I have dealt with. They know that drugs, alcohol, and gangs are not the answer.

Prostitution gives low self-esteem. I am not proud of all the men I have been with.





I am in my 30's and finally learning to cook.

then to California, then came back to Denver. He was mentally abusive and I started drinking again. I needed to leave him. One of my best friends introduced me to escorting. I liked how fast the money was coming in and I would be able to take care of my kids. I was 19. I worked for an agency that was "licensed." Officially, the rules were no sex and no drugs, but if it happened we did not get fired. We had to pay a fee to the service, but the rest of the money was ours. I left him and got my own place.

I was uncomfortable being an escort because most of the sex I had before involved drinking and being at bars, basically not-

sober sex. I started drinking more because I needed something to numb myself from what I was doing. Eventually a friend introduced me to cocaine. I was always told "don't do it, sell it." I liked the way it made me feel. To me, it balanced out my alcohol. I felt more in control, sexier, and it increased the numbness. I felt independent. After I hit a couple of thousand dollars for the day, I would go to the club. I did this every day. Sometimes I would not sleep because of the cocaine.

I would visit my kids and give my mom all kinds of money. I felt like this made their life better than when I was little. My kids

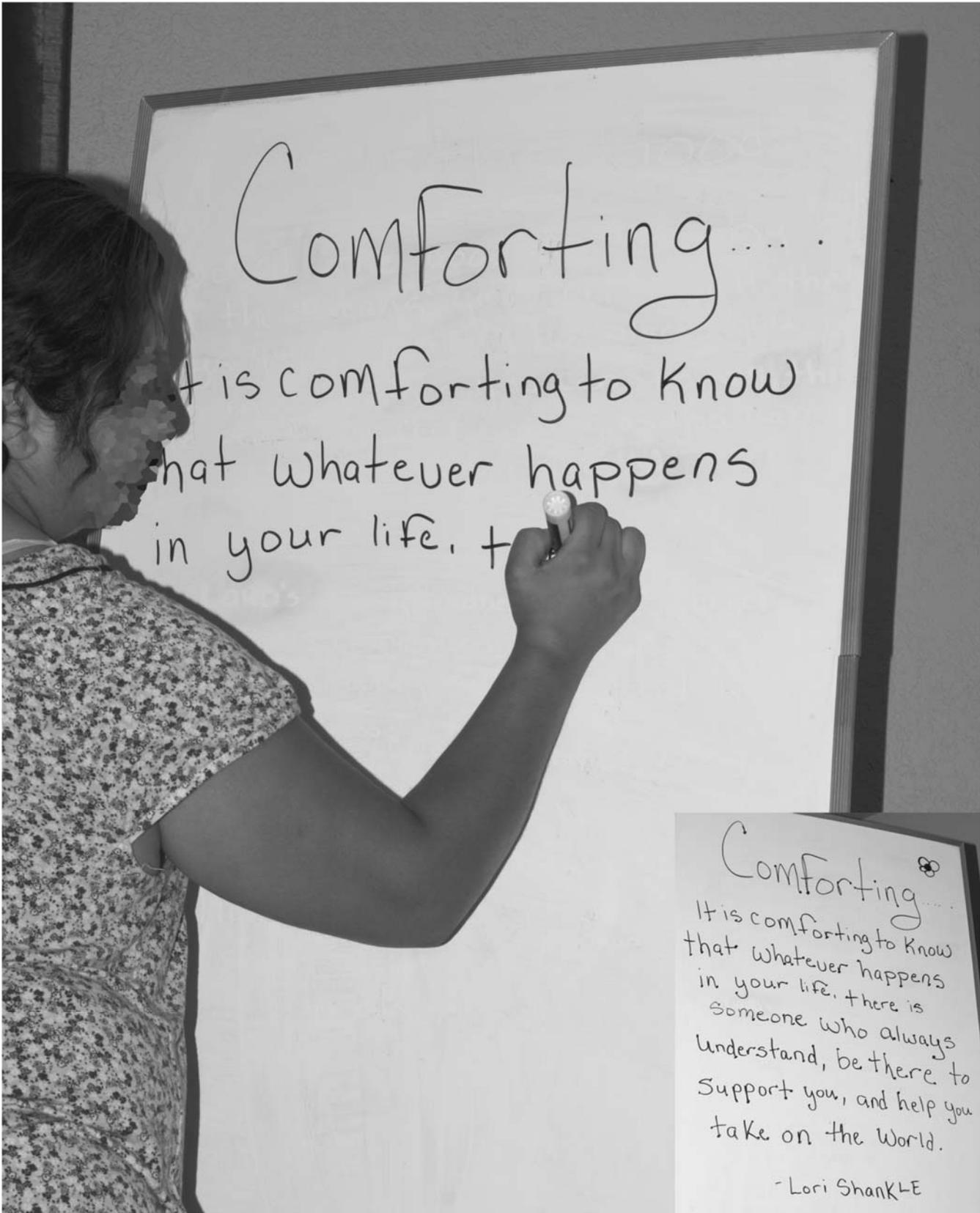
wanted for nothing, the bills were paid, and I visited them every day. I felt like I was doing everything right. A friend introduced me to crack cocaine when I was drunk one day. After having it once, it was all I could think about. "That was a wrap. That stuff made me love it." I kept escorting and then buying crack. I was getting really strung out. I stopped seeing my kids. My car broke down and I couldn't make my escort appointments. Life just unraveled. I started associating with prostitutes from Colfax. I asked one of the ladies why they are on Colfax when they could make more money escorting. She said,

"Never say never." The crack finally had me so wrapped up that I was no longer fit for escorting. At 21, I hit Colfax.

I lost my kids. I lost my home. I lost everything. I just wanted to get high and drink. I was on Colfax day and night. I had a combination of guilt, shame, and a little bit of power. The power came from me making these men happy and they were paying me for that. I was so numb and drunk, I did not feel that I was doing anything wrong. The men who use prostitutes sometimes are just lonely and are needing company. They have no one in their lives. Others just saw the women as

Religion has been a big resource for me. I am not ashamed to show who I was in church because I know God loves me no matter what I used to be.





Comforting.....

It is comforting to know
that whatever happens
in your life, +

Comforting

It is comforting to know
that whatever happens
in your life, there is
someone who always
understand, be there to
support you, and help you
take on the world.

-Lori Shankle

objects. "I have been beaten, raped, and left for dead many times."

The life breaks a woman down, in her heart, knowing that this is what she has to do to survive.

I have been on and off drugs, alcohol, and the streets for 18 years. I finally came to a point of knowing I want a different life. I worked on getting into a program. It took several months but I was finally accepted. When I got the call, "I was high and drunk,

and I just started bawling. I started dumping out all my alcohol and breaking my crack pipes down the toilet. And I went to sleep." I have been in a program for six months now. I am working on housing and trying to get into a floral school. I know that for the rest of my life, I will have to be a part of some group, i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous. I will always have to have a support system to not fall backwards. I was heartbroken out there. I was not a happy hooker. I was lost.

My heart goes out to the women still out there. I don't care how dressed up you are, or how many times you get your nails done, or what kind of car you roll in, how glamorous your day is, and how glamorous your apartment is because you are an escort, or you are on Colfax, or you do drugs or you don't, it's an ugly world. All the women I have ever met have had a broken heart. They ain't happy, they just look happy. They put on this face. But deep down inside, however we got there, most of the time it was not because we decided we wanted to be a prostitute when we grow up.

I find inspiration in the books I read and like to share with the other women.



I know now that what I was doing is not because that is who I am. That is not who I am. That is who I became.



My name is Ernestine. I am 45 years old and a native of Denver. I have a sister, and a brother who died a few years ago from cancer. My parents were both alcoholics. My dad was very handsome and worked construction. We always had food and clothes on our backs. He loved us the best he could, but alcohol got in the way. My mother was very beautiful and a homemaker. Sometimes she worked in nursing homes for extra money. She died of lung cancer a year ago. They both tried to take care of us, but they did not know how to love. They did not know how to nurture because their parents did not nurture them. Sometimes even comments that were probably meant to be funny felt hurtful. I was born breech and “my mother tells me I have always been a pain in the ass because I was born ass first.” I felt like that was always thrown in my face.

I don't remember much of my childhood. I do remember my uncle sexually abusing me. My mom and grandma knew about it. “They walked in as I was pulling up my pants coming from the backroom and my uncle was back there. I was coming out as they were walking in, and I was zipping my little shorts up.” I was eight or nine. It wasn't stopped because I don't think my mom wanted to believe it happened. He was her brother.

I liked science in school and sometimes I got awards. I think outer space is fascinating and I like to learn all I can about it. I wanted to go to the moon when I was a little girl.

Otherwise, I did not do well in school.

When I was about 13 or 14 years old, the much older next-door neighbor offered me money for sex. I really didn't know what I was doing, but then he gave me money and that made me feel better. I consider that to be my first trick. I had my first daughter when I was 15 years old.

I don't remember any positive influences in my childhood. My childhood is how God made it and I don't believe God makes junk. I started pot, alcohol, and LSD when I was 15. I didn't graduate high school. I was embarrassed because I was in special Ed. I have tried to get my GED and it is just not going to happen. I was diagnosed with early dementia and a bi-polar disorder. I don't like all the meds prescribed for me. The only medication I think worthwhile is Ativan because it helps with anxiety, so does alcohol. That is why I drink.

My first four children were with my high school sweetheart. We were together for five years. We lived with his parents. He did not work, so I shoplifted with his mother. I went to prison for six months when I was 18 years old on a case that involved \$38,000 of stolen jewelry.

I learned how to use men better while in prison. While in jail I met a man through *The Oyster*, a magazine that guys pick up in liquor stores and find women in their ads. Female prisoners write a little bit about themselves and if the men like you, then they start

I am not happy in my heart with what I have done but it is my life. I don't want to be in this business any more.



writing. This man started writing and taking care of me in jail. He bought me all types of beauty products, clothes, etc. and put money in my commissary account. He started to come see me in jail. He made me feel totally great. When I got out of jail, I went into a half-way house. He told me that if I left the half-way house, he would get me an apartment, marry me, and take care of me. He was a trucker and very abusive. I later found out that he was an escaped convict who was wanted for attempted murder, kidnapping, and firearm trafficking. I only knew him by an alias name. The FBI eventually busted him in our home. I was crushed. "I said Prince Charming ain't real. He ain't coming through."

I was very vulnerable after he was arrested. I went to live with my parents, started using cocaine, and drinking a lot. I met my second (common law) husband through my uncle, the one who abused me. His name was William and he was a crack head. I did not know about his drug addiction. He ended up in jail, but he liked me and took care of me even from jail.

William and me were together for 7 years and we had two children together. We moved to Pennsylvania for three years and then to St. Louis. I went to jail for 5 years when I was 25. We weren't married after I got out of jail.

I soon married my third husband and had two more children. He didn't have a job, but I worked the streets and 'backpages' to support us (Backpage.com allows sex worker ads). I preferred the street jobs to the backpage jobs. Street jobs are quick with very little fuss and interaction. We were together for 14 years and broke up just few months ago.

What do you want other people to know about you?

My strengths are my beauty, positive attitude, honesty, and integrity. "I love my integrity." I have a lot of energy. I am very healthy, even with all the drugs I have taken, and I have not always been safe on the streets. "That I can laugh without any money. That I can be free without any money. Not even a penny in my pocket book and I can still smile without any money...I can still smile." I want to be drug and alcohol free, exercise, and be

Panhandling at Wal-Mart is usually successful. I have 7 felonies on record and 15 cumulative years in jail.





I have eight children and eight grandchildren. I have not had contact with four of my kids for several years.

My daughter started working the streets a year ago. I don't want her living my life.



I have been in this business for over 30 years.
My soul is tired.



healthy. Clothes make me very happy. I would like to have a sewing or quilting machine. That's my dream, to sew or to make quilts, to make whatever I want, whatever is in my heart. That would be my work.

Two of my children have many of the same issues that I have had in life. My daughter is a prostitute and one of my sons has some of the same emotional problems I do. I don't want to be in this business any more. I am ready to be done. I am not happy in my life. I am at a low point and I have to make a change. My mom passing away made me feel alone and without support. I always depended on her. Now that she is not here, my kids really need me. They don't have anyone else. It is important for me to change for them, but right now I am ready to change for me mostly. I am spending a lot of time by myself, drinking, listening to music, and crying. I work the streets to make enough money to pay the bills and take care of my needs.

It is July 2015 and I am on a waitlist for a recovery/safe house. I WILL get in. I NEED to get in.

Sex is a big thing to me. I'm addicted to not so much to money like I told you. I'm addicted to taking stuff from men more than anything because my uncle did it to me. He took something from me that can never be replaced...I get to be in control because I got what they want, what they need.

This program will help me understand why I do the things I do and why I feel the way I do. I don't regret my life. I did enjoy some of it. This life is who I am and what I lived. It's me.

This is an ugly life. There is money and a 'feeling' of love but that is not enough. It is not real love.



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- Pastry \$1.00
- Latté \$3.00 2% milk (soy milk upon request), espresso single shot
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 - Amaretto, Peppermint
 - sugar free: Hazelnut, Vanilla, Carmel

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My name is “Jessica” and I am 31 years old. I am in a recovery program/safe house, so I am using a fake name and my face is not visible in pictures.

I was born in Gallup, New Mexico and I have a brother that is two years older. My parents divorced when I was seven, I think because my dad was in and out of prison a lot for drugs and stuff. My mom, brother, and I moved to Oregon after the divorce to live with my grandparents. I felt alone in Oregon. My mom was always working and I felt like she never really cared about me. While in Oregon I was raped and molested by babysitters, as well as my brother.

I liked school, sports, and worked hard at my studies, but the rapes and molestation put me in a bad place. I was always closer to my dad than my mom and finally decided I should just be like him. I started drinking and using drugs. I was expelled from 8th grade and was put in the Catherine Freer Wilderness Therapy rehab when I was 13.

For a while my parents got together again, and we all went back to New Mexico. I was still having problems in school and kept getting expelled for fighting. I didn’t finish high school.

When I was 16 my boyfriend forced me to go to Mexico with him. I was down there for three or four months before he finally let me go back home.

I eventually had a falling out with my parents. I left New Mexico and went to Arizona where my bother and other relatives were living. I lived with my aunt and uncle for a while, but I got in trouble while living with them, so I went to live with my brother. We partied every night. My brother eventually lost his job and we lost everything. He went to live with our parents, but I stayed in Arizona. I lived there for a long time. I just moved from house to house. The Mexicans taught me Spanish and took care of me. I sold drugs on the streets for the Mexican mafia and I was addicted to crack.

I met a man in Arizona. He was a construction worker and he took care of me. “He was in love with me, but I didn’t love him. I stayed with him because he always took care of me. I never wanted for nothing.” I went to jail for possession while we were together. I have a big arrest record in Arizona, by the way. I got sober and my GED while I was in jail and got pregnant after getting out. We were together for 8 years and have a son.

After we split, I moved to Colorado. I had to work when I moved to Denver. I had never had to work jobs before. I had always been taken care of, by the cartel family and others, so I didn’t know how to work and be a mom. I relapsed into drinking, partying, and crack. “I stayed in that destruction for a while.” My mom turned me into social services and I lost my son.

My greatest asset is God and I am a loving person by nature.



**Staying off drugs will keep me from backsliding.
Medication control is important too.**

While in this destruction, I met a man, who later became my husband, and got pregnant again. He was working as a cook and got us an apartment. I struggled with the addiction while pregnant, but I got sober at the end. He raped me shortly after my daughter was born and I got pregnant right away with my second son. I struggled again with the addiction. I finally got sober and did okay for a while. I used several programs to help me keep clean and take care of my kids. I went to culinary school and worked as a cook.

Things went bad again when legal actions started moving forward on some of my drug cases. My husband and I separated. “He went to Mexico when [the authorities] opened my case and I called immigration on him.” We are still married though and still talk on the phone periodically.

In the last two weeks before my case was closed, I relapsed. At the time, my mom was pushing for me to support my oldest son, who she has custody of, and taking care of

everything else was too much. I went into this mental funk. I felt like I had no viable options. I was a single mom with two small children and it was all too overwhelming. I eventually lost my kids and they were adopted out. I met a man named Mario. He used me, beat me, and kept me high on crack and heroin all the time. I lost everything and had nothing.

While with Mario, I met a woman who introduced me to prostitution. It felt like at least an option at the time. She had been in the business a long time and, “she knew I was pretty and she would get a lot of hits and I didn’t know nothing. She used that to her advantage.” She had me raped. She did a lot

of bad things to me. She was my pimp and an evil person.

It took me a while to get away from the woman and to detach from Mario. My faith was a big part of me getting away. I have always kept a bible with me. “I just knew that if I kept reading the Word then some kind of change would come about.” My greatest asset is God and I am a loving person by nature. For my future, “I see a lot of possibilities, a lot of happiness, and a lot of joy and accomplishments, and a lot of sobriety.” I want to have a food truck. My kids are my whole life. I want my oldest son back for the summers, a house, and to go back to school.

Personal care is an important part of recovery. Clothing, make-up, and manicures make a big difference with self-esteem.





Addicts want instant gratification. “Being clean doesn’t change the game and wipe the slate clean.”



I am taking every good moment when it comes.



I am interested in studying theology. I think I can deeply help others who struggle like I do.



When I was young my father made me a unicorn with prayer hands. I loved my dad. Unicorns have always held special meaning to me.

Faith is very important in my recovery. I am going through the process of being baptized.



I have a whole new outlook on life. My head is clear, and I can see the hurt and pain of others. But I am learning that I need to help myself right now, not others. "Being clean doesn't change the game and wipe the slate clean." Addicts want instant gratification. Everyday lives and everyday people are sober. Normal people don't use drugs and prostitute their bodies.

*Because we are so
pained from what we
were doing that right
away we think we
should get some sort of
accomplishment, but
it's not
accomplishment. All it
is that you are living
life on life's terms...it
is a choice to be clean,
not an
accomplishment.
Recovery is not a
celebration, it is your
life. It is either life or
death.*

I am bi-polar, severe PTSD, OCD tendencies, and have borderline split personality disorder. I am artistic, a mother, a believer, and a leader. I love my kids and life.

Everybody makes mistakes and everyone is a product of their environment. I just think that me being in the environment and under the circumstances with my mental health, I just fell into a path of destruction. I had a hate for men, for what had happened, and so that was my way of kind of getting back at men in general. I didn't like being with men, so I took it to a level of where if I was going to do this, you know who makes a \$100 a half hour? It's very good money and I was just looking at it for the money...I know I had a lot of pain and hurt from my past and childhood that I did this above and apart from my morals and values. But when you get into a circumstance and you have so much hate and frustration built up you act out of anger and do things that are harmful not only to yourself but to others. And I just learned that no amount of money is worth me and my body. My body is priceless.



My name is Laurallee. I am 48 years old. I grew up in Carthage, a little town about 15 miles from Rushville, Indiana where I was born. Although my childhood was dysfunctional, I do have some fond memories. Every year we went to Lake Cumberland, Kentucky to go trout fishing and camping. We would go to the bottom of the dam and night fish. In the morning when the horn sounded, we had to grab all our gear and run to the top or get swept up when the dam was opened. I also loved sports when I was young. I really liked basketball. Art was also my thing, and still is my thing.

I have a sister and a brother. I always felt like the black sheep of the family. "I wasn't the sharpest crayon in the box, but I sure was the brightest." My dad was intelligent and a very functional alcoholic. He was a tool and die maker for General Motors. We always hoped he was too drunk when he came home to mess with us. He was mentally and physically abusive, but not sexually. "My grandfather took care of that part for me." My grandfather started molesting me when I was seven years old. Later in life, I discovered that weed numbed out my grandfather and the male babysitters that molested me, and all the ugliness from my dad.

My mom had several jobs when I was young. She worked as a janitor in a children's home and wrapped vinyl records for RCA on an assembly line. My mom still lives in Carthage. My parents divorced when I was 12 years old. My dad quit drinking, cold turkey,

after the divorce. It was a tremendous personality change for him. He remarried and was with my step-mom for 32 years. My dad passed away two years ago from cancer that came out of remission after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. My step-mom also died from cancer.

My mother has been married five times. My mom's second husband shot and killed himself. He was mentally unstable. My mom had a restraining order against him, and I believe he planned to shoot me too. I found him dead with a big hole in his neck. My mom was married to her third husband for six months. He was a sailor. The fourth marriage was with Marvin. He was a nice guy and they stayed together until he didn't have any money left. Then she married Kinley. He died a year ago.

Neither of my parents asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. I didn't think college was an option. "I just figured I would grow up and work someplace, like a factory job." I have always worked, except when I was on the streets and homeless.

"At a very early age, I knew I kind of liked women." I was in a relationship for 17 years with a woman who was 11 years older than myself. She was in jail for 8 years of that time and it was a toxic relationship. She was way lost, still is probably. Having somebody was better than having nobody at all though. "You see somebody that needs to be loved so much, even more so than probably yourself, and you put all their needs and wants before your own." She was a user, but she did not allow

I like driving. Sometimes just driving around and seeing what people are doing, that makes me happy.



I was scared to death moving into my own apartment, with no support of a program. Fear and uncertainty are always in front of me.

Therapy pets are very important for stability. I may not have community anywhere else but I always have Piper.

me to use any drugs other than marijuana. She taught me how to shoplift and finally started shooting me up with heroin. She was originally from Denver and that is where we finally ended up.

At some point I was picked up on a traffic violation. My partner's mother posted bond, but then my partner told her mother to revoke the bond. I ended up spending five days in jail for traffic court. It was my first time in jail. When I got out, I had no place to live and no money. I was homeless and penniless.

This guy told me, 'you're a woman, you can make money.' He kind of gave me a rundown of how things worked and I watched. About an hour later, I got into my first vehicle. It was really odd and weird. My circumstance got me into that, but I'll tell you what though, when I found crack cocaine, that stuff just numbed me from all the kinds of pain I ever felt.







I have worked in many jobs, a lot of warehouse jobs. I am good with my hands. I quit the last job I had because a co-worker was one of my former tricks. The situation was too uncomfortable.

It was hard being a lesbian with a mainly male clientele, but I just looked at that as work. This work became my life. Eventually, I needed to be done with that life. The night before I entered the recovery program, my old partner beat me up, and I went in with a black eye.

“Can I do this on my own?” I was in a controlled relationship for so long and didn’t really know how to take care of myself. Street’s Hope was good for me. Therapy has been life changing, especially EMDR (eye movement desensitizing and reprocessing.) I don’t have to hold onto any anger. I don’t have to be mad at somebody. I can just let it go and let it go for real. I look at things a lot differently now that I have been through therapy and a recovery program.

I tried going back to school, but after Street’s Hope, I quit. I don’t know what I want to do. I am good with my hands and my favorite job is driving a fork lift. That is what I want to do as a permanent job. I don’t have a good support system now to help with the hurdles, and I get discouraged. I became depressed after completing my program. I always had people around and a great support system. After the program was done, it felt like everything was ripped from me and I was alone again. I should be doing Narcotics Anonymous, but I find the discussions to be unproductive. Sometimes I just don’t get it, what people are talking about.

I do sometimes think of going back to the streets, because I know how to make money and survive out there. I don’t know how to

make things work in 'normal' life. I know that going back on the streets is bad. Selling my body to make money leads to drugs, then needing drugs leads to selling my body for money. Getting a real job is hard with a felony record and no traditional work skills.

I don't feel like I have ever had a positive relationship but I wouldn't change anything in my past because it has made me who I am. This is where I am supposed to be, by God's will.

What do you think about stereotyping sex workers?

How do you know what she's been through? How you going to sit there and point your finger at her...It's not a life that they choose. It's not like you wake up one day and say, 'I think I wanna be a drug addict and prostitute. Yeah!!! Let's roll baby!!!' Some people need to have their eyes opened to more things and some people need to close their mouth to more things. They really do. It's all the human



race. You're going to have good, bad, right, wrong, indifferent, whatever...with any subject, anywhere. Before people open their mouth about a stigma, what they think is politically correct and incorrect, or why they think this and why they think that...I think that they should just open up their ears and their heart, and look and see what is going on around them.

Having a car is a big deal. Many women can't afford a vehicle. Bartering the use of my car helps both them and me.



Everybody's life is not dysfunctional. I thought dysfunctional is how the world was for everyone.



Finding a supportive community is difficult. A non-drug, "normal" environment is hard to be accepted into. Drug environments are too much temptation.



My name is Neisha, I am 45 years old, and was born in Grand Junction, Colorado. My parents were both 16 when I was born. My grandparents tried to get my mom to give me up, but she wouldn't do it. My parents divorced when I was one year old. My mom was married a total of four times by the time I was ten years old. Gene is her fourth husband and they have been married 35 years. I have a little sister, Richelle, from mom's second marriage. Shondra is a step sister from Gene.

My dad was married a total of four times by the time I was twelve years old. He had three daughters from his second marriage. He and his fourth wife have been married for 32 years.

I moved a lot when I was little because of the various marriages, although we never left Colorado. My mom worked in a bar and in an office for tree trimmers. My sister and I were with babysitters a lot. When I was around eight years old, a babysitters' son molested me for about a year and a half. He tried to molest my younger sister too, but I wouldn't let him. I told my mom, but she did not believe me. Not long ago my sister told my mom about the molestation and she finally believed. After mom married Gene, we lived well for a while, until the economy collapsed in the Grand Junction area.

I loved school. I loved math, reading, and music. My favorite subject was English. I

liked to write. I tried to play instruments, but my mom couldn't afford them. They didn't have programs for low income families back then to help kids get involved and overcome their environment.

I don't want to say 'escape your environment' but 'overcome your environment.' Because I think more often than not we are products of our environment. When you live on low income and your mom barely has enough money to feed you, you don't get to do a lot of extra-curricular activities."

I didn't graduate high school, but I did get my GED.

At some point in my teenage years I started to become bitter. My multiple sets of parents had a lot of hardships and difficulties. I think I assumed that some of their sharpness was directed towards me, although in hind sight I am not sure that was true.

I love my family. I feel that I have many children, although not all of them are biologically mine.

I ran away and hitchhiked to California when I was 13. I met an Italian man on the beach. He was 25 years old. He offered me a place to stay and I ended up staying for the next few years.

While in California I was having sex with dealers for drugs, but I wasn't working the streets. I had my first child a week before my 17th birthday. By the time my daughter was born my parents had moved to Arizona from Colorado.

My Italian and I decided to move to Arizona. I was clean and had a job. We were only in Arizona for a few weeks before my boyfriend left to go back to California. I didn't hear from him again until my daughter turned 18.

After my boyfriend left I became very depressed and overwhelmed. I started using heroin really heavily. My mother told me I had to leave. I soon had a new boyfriend whose mother ran a daycare. My daughter got

to stay at the daycare while I worked. Something happened, and she turned me into social services. I came home from a job interview and my daughter was gone. I still needed a job, so I started stripping and soon my daughter was taken away from me permanently. My parents adopted her because I couldn't take care of her or myself.

I knew as a teenager that I preferred women, but I grew up Catholic and thought I couldn't love women. I thought I was broken. When I had my daughter I thought, "Finally I'll have someone who loves me the way I love them. I had no idea that that love doesn't come for years down the road. And I do mean years."

Losing my daughter sent me over the deep end. I met a dope dealer, Ralph, who got me strung out on heroin and was very abusive.

Ralph introduced me to working the streets. We were together for around six years.



I adore motorcycles. I take any chance I get for a ride. I like talking about motorcycles too.



Most, if not all, of my female partners have been African American.



Ralph taught me how to trick the tricks. I convinced one that we were going to get married. He gave me \$14,000 to buy a gown and make wedding plans. I also had a child with Ralph, her name is Bobbi. I was using drugs the whole pregnancy. Bobbi tested positive for heroin when she was born, and she was taken away.

My third daughter is Chanel. Her dad is Billy and we were together for a year and a half. I got pregnant right away and I used drugs again the whole pregnancy. We were working the hotels on East Colfax. I was doing some hooking, but mostly I was setting up men to get robbed. I would pick up men, take them to the hotel, then Billy would show up and rob the men. Eventually we were busted by an undercover cop.

I spent a night in jail, but Billy was sentenced to two years of jail. After Chanel was born, I took her to see Billy in jail. He told me that I should go live with his sister. Turns out his sister was lesbian, and we ended up in a relationship.

Billy's sister was getting methadone treatments. On one of our trips to Denver I ended up in a shooting gallery with my baby. I OD'd and I believe I literally died. The people in the drug house dragged me out to the street and left me. I woke up in the hospital and Chanel was gone. She was taken away from me, but my grandmother adopted her.

I went off the deep end again. I had three suicide attempts and heavy drug abuse. "I wanted something different...but I thought that those weren't possible for me because I was broken. I thought something was wrong with me. I thought I was unlovable."

I have had several trips to women's correction facilities. My longest stint was over five years. Joyce was a black woman I met in jail. Two years after we met we became a couple and were together for eight years. I was working, going to school, and doing well while we were together. Joyce had two children which I helped raise.

Finding the right church can be hard. Not all are accepting of sex workers. Faith is important to me. I find so much support and wisdom in church.





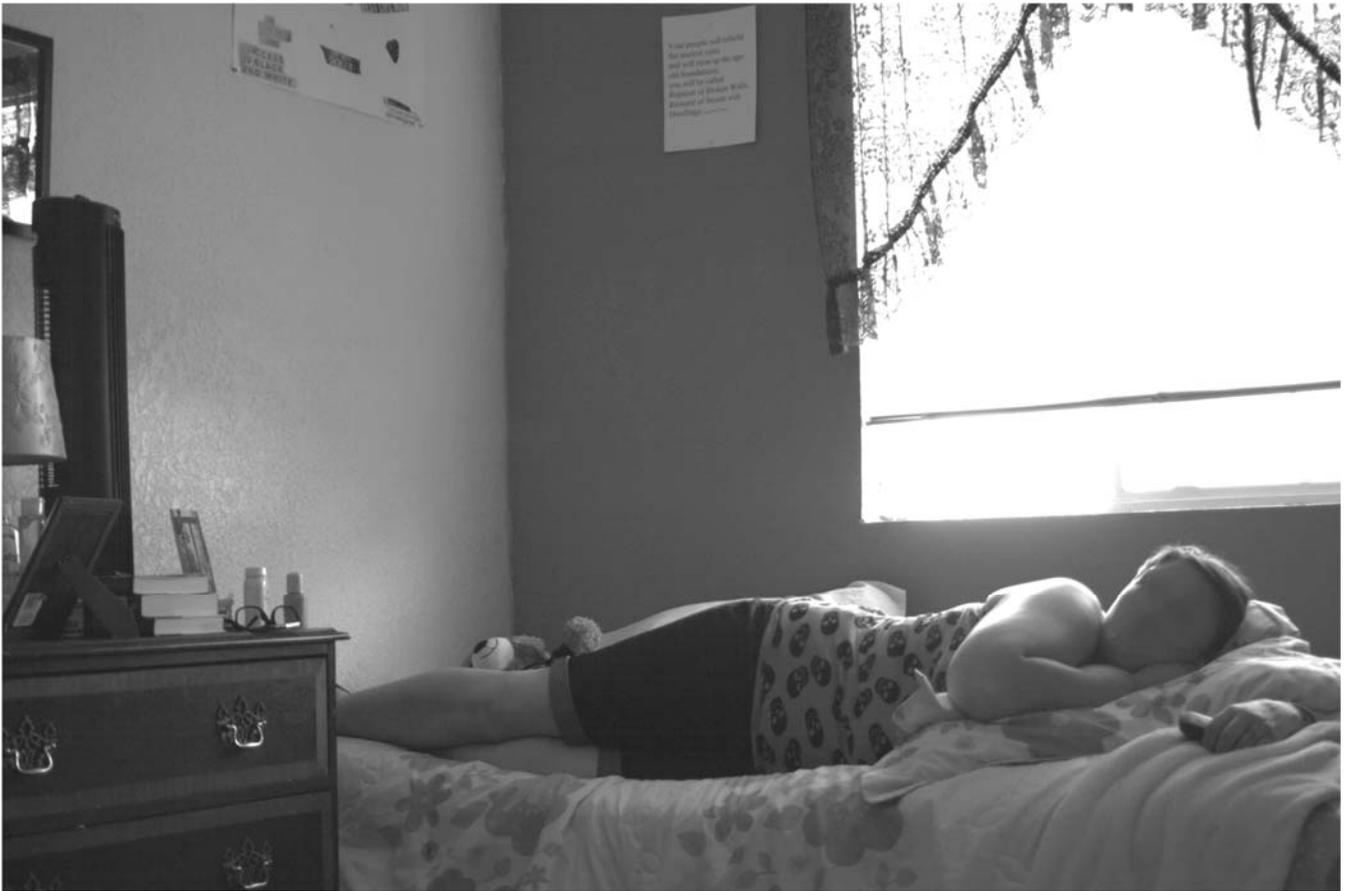
I have so many more stories about my life to share, but too much for this project. For now, I am clean of drugs except for marijuana that I use for knee pain. I am trying to get into a recovery program for sex workers. I recently reunited with a black woman named Dorinda, who I was in a relationship with when I was 20. I am living with her right now, but I don't know how long it will last. We have not seen each other for 20 years and

we are different people now. If I can't stay with her, I have no other place to live except the streets. I am still turning tricks and I receive minimal disability support for my knee, schizophrenia, and personality disorder. Tricks and disability support are not enough to even pay rent on a cheap place. I will keep trying and hopefully something will change soon.



I cherish my time with family. Children have always been my soft spot. I love my family, whether they are family by blood or otherwise.

I try to use all the community resources available to me. Sometimes these facilities have stigmas attached to them.



I was 12 when I had my first relationship. He was 19 and I thought he loved me.

After being in a recovery program for a few months, I realized that I don't want to be a sex worker anymore. I have better things to do.



My name is “Roxanne.” I am in a recovery program/safe house, so I won’t use my real name.

I am 34 years old and I grew up on a farm in Oklahoma. I am the youngest of eleven kids. I have six sisters and four brothers. All the kids are a mixture from previous marriages and then children from my parent’s marriage. The oldest sibling is 60 something years old. I am closest to the next two youngest siblings. My parents were married for almost 40 years. My dad died last year from old age. He was 84 years old. My mom is still in Oklahoma.

Our farm produced mainly for the family. Our school was rural. All the grades, K through 12th were in the same building. I did 4H, FFA, and rodeo. I liked to read, and I still do. My favorite author is Robert Green. I loved science and math. I wanted to be a vet when I was young. Now that I have felonies, I can’t be a vet because of the narcotics. I did not graduate high school, but I did get my GED when I was 17 years old.

I hated growing up in a large family. I was picked on and made fun of a lot. I became really independent as a teenager and felt that no one could tell me what I could or couldn’t do, especially my parents. When I was 12 I met a guy who was 19 years old. I met him through mutual friends. We were a couple and having sex.

He always wanted me to have sex with his friends. I thought it made him love me more but really, he was just selling me. I had a pimp and did not know it. He had me sell drugs too. This is the man who set the standard of what I thought relationships were supposed to be. Since that point, I don’t think I have ever been in love. All my relationships

have been about people taking from me. I don’t know how to be in a relationship that is based on equality.

I broke up with my boyfriend when I was 18. I got a job with Avis and was dealing drugs (meth) through the business. The drug business got busted and the Avis center was closed down. I decided to move to Arizona with a friend when I was 19 and I had a pimp within my first week. He was a black man. I have always felt more comfortable with black people. Black people judge less, and black men have always liked me.

When I met my first pimp, I never had attention from people really. I was really big, at that point in time I was probably 300 plus pounds, and people were now paying attention to me. They liked me and I was good at making money. That’s what I thought I was going to be for the rest of my life. I was going to be a ho for life.

We took a road trip with two other women to Vegas and then to L.A. for tricks. I was arrested in L.A. and spent three days in jail. We went back to Vegas and set up for a while. I was working the “track” on Boulder highway during the day and at night working The Strip. I was making at least a \$1,000 a day in the beginning.

I wasn’t doing drugs when I was with my pimp. He didn’t allow his girls to do drugs. I stayed in Vegas for three years, then I “chose



up” with a different pimp. We did a lot of back and forth between Vegas and Phoenix, just working the different tracks. I never felt like I had a choice. It seemed like the only thing I had ever been good at and I felt like my family never really cared. “The most love I ever felt was when I was 14 and initiated into a gang, more than I ever felt at home.” I moved a lot between pimps and most of the tattoos on my body, including my face, are the names of my pimps. This is called branding. Sometimes I chose my pimps and sometimes I was sold to other pimps.

I started doing Backpage in my 20’s. After I discovered Backpage (a version of Craigslist for sex work) I stopped working the tracks. I prefer working Backpage. I just sit in my hotel room, I get calls, we meet, and then I am done. No walking the streets and being offered \$20 for a trick. Much better money.

I have three children with a man I met in a gang situation. After I found out I was pregnant the first time, he and I went back to Oklahoma. I was not prostituting, but we were still selling drugs. I had a boy and then a girl 9 1/2 months later. We were okay for a while but then he went to jail, so I went back to Backpage to make a living.

I got pregnant a third time with the same man, even though we weren’t together as a couple. He was married to another woman when I got pregnant and I became very depressed. I started using crack again and used through the pregnancy. The baby was crack addicted when it was born at seven months. The baby was taken away right after birth and my other two kids, who were both only 2 years old, were taken away from me.

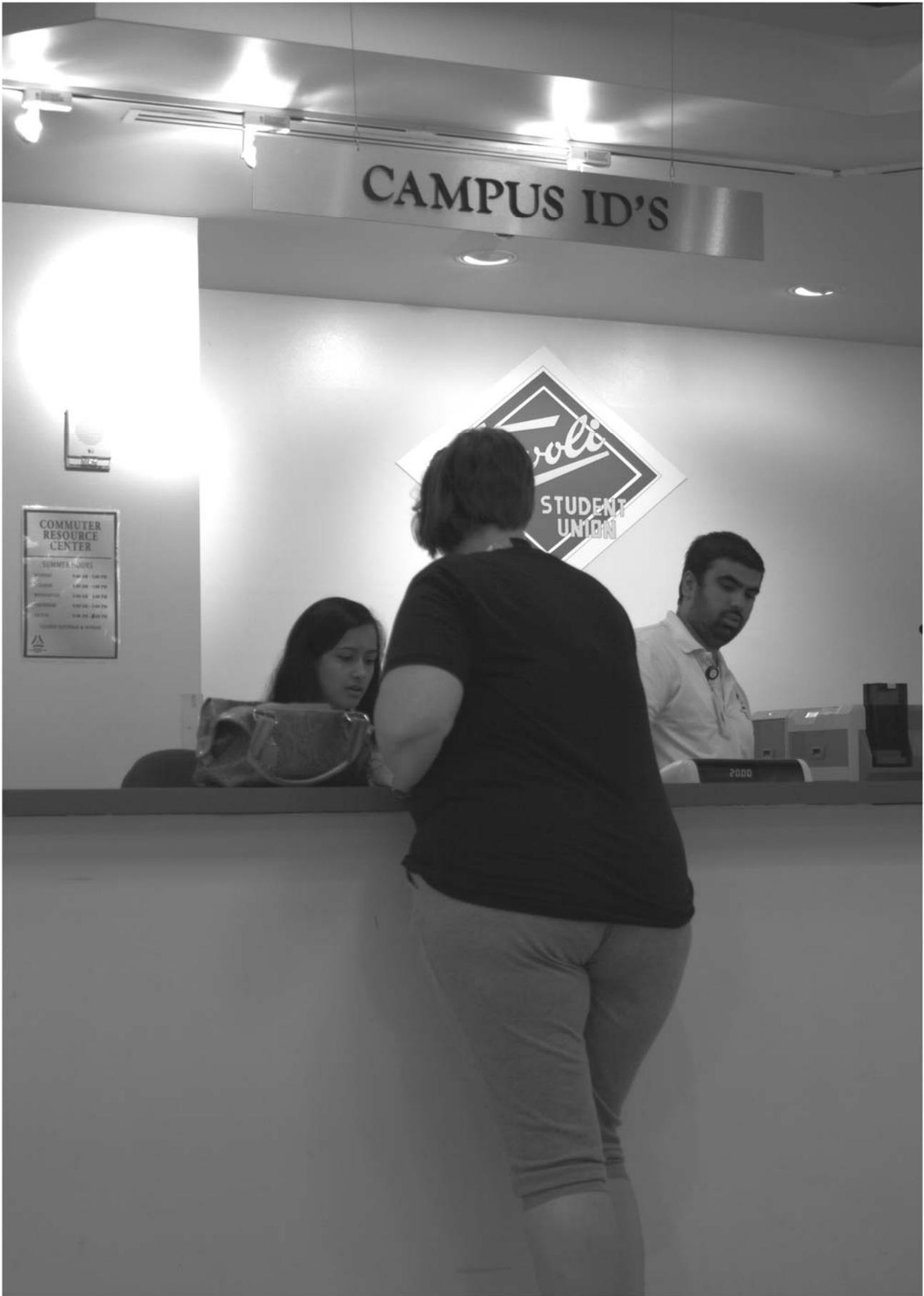
I lost my mind for a long time. I went back to prostituting and heavy into drugs. The

Life is getting better. Sometimes I struggle when things get stressful but I am learning to cope.

Building healthy relationships is important in recovery.

Surrounding myself with people who are not involved in the business or drugs is key.







School will be hard, stressful, and a big adventure.

I am so excited to start school in the fall. I know that there are so many great things I can do in my life.

two oldest kids ended up with their dad and his wife, but the youngest kid had too many problems and was adopted out. I last saw my two oldest kids three years ago. I have not seen my youngest since he was born.

My second to latest pimp caught a charge a couple of years ago and dipped out on it. He got caught again and was in jail but was still my pimp. He sold me to another pimp while he was in jail who had multiple girls on backpage. I oversaw and trained some of the girls.

One of the new girls he brought in was under age, but I didn't know. Her ID said she was over 18. He knew she was underage though. We were busted by the feds and I turned evidence for a sentence reduction. It was okay. I was tired. It was my way to get out. No more beatings, sex, and ownership.

Luckily, I was able to get into a recovery program. After being in a program for a few months, I realized that I want to do this type of work. I want to help other women who have been or are in the industry. I want to be able to say that I have been there and that I know what it means to live out there. I am working on reclaiming my life and my identity. I am working on getting the tattoos removed. I get profiled a lot because of the way I look, and I want to be treated normally.

I am in a good place, happy, and have dreams. I want to get a car and an apartment. Eventually I want to have property with a home where my kids can be with me. I want to go to school and get a degree. I will start community college in fall 2015. I want to get a Ph.D. in human services to fight human trafficking and study criminal psychology.

I hope I can handle the university life. Too much stress makes it easier to backslide into bad things.



Do you feel like there is anything that could make you backslide?

“No. No. I don’t think anything. Now that I see that I can do something else and that my life isn’t just based on that for the rest of my life. No. Things that are worth having isn’t easy to get.”

I have spent a lot of my life with black people. I prefer black people. They are less judgmental than white people.

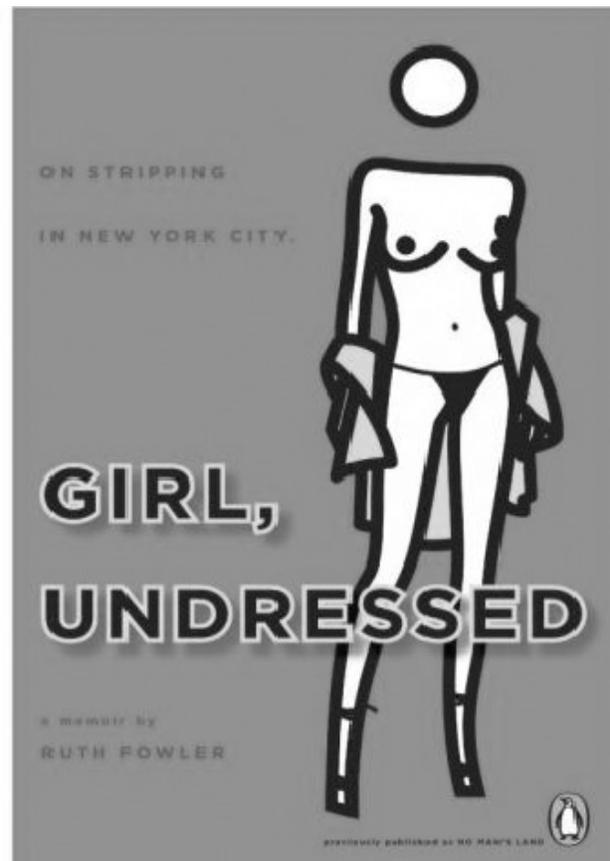


Girl, Undressed

by Ruth Fowler

Welsh born, Cambridge-educated Fowler offers a first-person narrative of sex, desire, representation, and identity. This memoir follows the life of an undocumented woman living in New York city in the mid-2000's. Before arriving in New York, Fowler experienced an uneventful college life at Cambridge, graduating magna cum laude. After college, she taught English in Argentina, traveled through Asia and Europe, crewed on private yachts in Spain and France, and sailed the Atlantic. Thrown into the mix of this five-year, world-wide adventure was excessive drinking and sexual escapades. Out at sea, somewhere between America and Europe, Mimi was born.

Fowler lands in New York, post 9/11, on a short term visiting visa. She tries to work as a writer, but no work visa nor social security number means working legally is impossible. She scrapes by working as a waitress getting paid 'off the books.' As the financial pressures of living in New York City, and fear of her undocumented status being discovered increases, Fowler enters the sex industry, first as a waitress in a strip club, then as a stripper. Mimi, Fowler's confident, unbreakable persona that was born at sea, becomes the star of the narrative. Mimi traveled a two-year descent from, 'this is only



temporary, and I won't have sex' to 'Yes, let's get a private room.' Fowler has a small bit of fame after she is the focus of an article in the *New York Times*. Opportunities for writing fall at her feet but the allure and degradation of stripping keeps Mimi dominant in life choices. Fowler finds that leaving the sex industry is a difficult process of disentanglement and a forceful demise of Mimi. She is eventually successful in extracting from stripping after receiving her long-sought work visa. As evidenced by this review, Fowler became a successful writer.

Fowler's narrative is dark, seductive, chaotic, and narcissistic, offering tantalizing insights to a life style commonly relegated to stereotyping and stigmas. Her first-person narrative guides the reader through Fowler's transformation into Mimi, and brings the realities of being undocumented and working

in the sex industry to the center of attention. Her knowledge, opinions, and experiences are shaped by the social groups she dwells in, influencing her perspective of society, human nature, and her identity. Fowler's ideals, thoughts, and feelings about her status in society are common threads among sex worker narratives. She describes sinking into deeds and places that only "the ruined" (her term) reside. "Because by the time we get to that [strip club] stage we are already beyond redemption."

Feelings of low self-worth and a lack of options are common among sex workers and are brought into public focus by narratives like Fowler's, Traci Lords, Maya Angelou, and Gypsy Rose Lee. Too often, though, society gets caught up in essentialism. Essentialism, the act of generalizing about a group of people, obscures the diversity that exists among groups of people. Although there are commonalities and familiar threads weaved into the different narratives of sex workers, their individuality should not be obscured by stereotyping.

At times, Fowler's narrative is misogynist, racist, and she shows a general distaste for people overall. Her casual cruelty seems real, but her own self-loathing fuels the misdirected anger. Some readers may find Fowler to be brutal and selfish, and others may feel she painted an honest, raw and very real picture of her world. *Girl, Undressed* was published in 2008 and although the narrative is over a decade old, Fowler's experiences are still relevant to modern day sex workers and the sex industry as a whole.

Street prostitution is inherently dangerous because of its private nature. Physical and sexual assaults by clients and pimps are common. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reported 63 known street sex workers were murdered between 1991 and 1995 in Canada. Fifty of those deaths were at the hands of clients. Additionally, there were 16 people killed by street prostitutes during that same period.

Source: Government of Canada
Publications.
www.publications.gc.ca

Not Always Happy Endings

Happy endings are not always possible for sex workers, whether they are still in the industry or have detached from the lifestyle. Of the seven women who participated in the photo-ethnography project in summer 2015, two of them were still actively sex workers, three were in a recovery program, and two were out of the sex business. Here are their continuing stories and endings as I know them.

To the best of my knowledge, Anita is still living in the same section-8 housing unit with her cooperative family. I know she was hoping for better housing, but I don't know if she succeeded. Brandy successfully completed the Street's Hope program and began the pursuit of her education. Jessica was in the Street's Hope program during the project. I don't know if she successfully finished. Laurallee still lives in the same housing unit and I am not aware if she has found sustainable employment. Roxanne was in a recovery program during the project and I heard that she left before completion.

Ernestine got into Street's Hope in fall 2015. Her mental health affected her recovery and she left the program after a short time. Once back on the streets, she realized her mistake and desperately wanted to return. Unfortunately, her spot in the program had already been filled and she was back on the waitlist. Before Ernestine was able to be readmitted into the program she was killed in a hit and run accident by a drunk driver.

Neisha entered the Street's Hope program in summer 2016. She was able to get the

medical help she needed, which included knee surgery. One week following the surgery, Neisha passed away. I am not aware if her death was due to a complication from the surgery or another cause.

Another recent not-so-happy-ending is the shut down of Backpage.com. On April 6, 2018, Backpage.com was seized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division. The seizure was a response to the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act, a bill to amend the Communications Decency Act that will allow civil and criminal sex trafficking-related claims against internet companies that previously had immunity from liability for posting content from their users without modification. The purpose of the bill is to reduce or stop sex trafficking on websites, although the shut down of Backpage.com will have a significant impact on sex workers. Many sex workers run their businesses through sites like Backpage.com and Craigslist's personal section, which voluntarily shut down on March 23, 2018. On-line business platforms allow sex workers to screen clients, providing greater safety for the workers. For many workers who have built a large clientele on the sites, their entire income structure will be destroyed, forcing many into other sex work venues that are likely less safe.



This Wordle was produced from the introductory panels of the photo-ethnography exhibit..

Significance of Colfax



Colfax Avenue, in Denver, was a well-known tourist strip in the 1950s. At least 93 motels existed on both the east and west sides of town. The completion of Interstate 70, in the middle of the 1960s, ended the golden age of the automotive tourism on Colfax. The street is now a 26 mile stretch of corporate and local businesses, government buildings, entertainment, and social hubs.

Wyckoff, William. "Denver's Aging Commercial Strip." *Geographical Review* 82, no. 3 (1992): 282-294.



After automotive tourism waned on Colfax, prostitution moved from the urban areas into the suburbs and there was a rise in adult motels that replaced the earlier family-oriented clientele. There is currently a 4.5 mile section of the street where many of the remaining hotels now serve as work places for sex workers.

