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# Gender, Emotional Labour and Interactive Body Work: Negotiating Flesh and Fantasy in Sex Workers' Labour Practices

**Barbara G. Brents and  
Crystal A. Jackson**

It has almost become a truism in some circles to say that prostitutes, “sell their bodies.” For some, the prostitute has become iconic in representing the female body degraded and defiled by patriarchal sexuality (Jeffreys 1997; Barry 1995). Yet, in a fairly straightforward critique of the body essentialism in that view, one sex worker told us, “I don’t know where they got ‘selling your body’ because wouldn’t that be uncomfortable if somebody walked off with your vagina?”

As the social sciences begin to bring the body back into our understandings of social life, the gendered body’s relationship to the labor process continues to be the subject of much debate. Understanding the dilemmas of body work in sex work becomes increasingly important as more and more work in late capitalist service economies involves the sale of bodily labor. From the commodification of appearance to intimate labor on another’s body, more workers must labor on their own bodies to look ‘right’ in entertainment, tourism, hospitality, retail sales and even corporate management (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006, Warhurst and Nickson, 2007, Warhurst et al., 2000, Witz et al., 2003). Beauticians, fitness instructors, maids, tattoo artists and piercers, undertakers, childcare workers, and a host of medical workers labor on other’s bodies, touching them, manipulating them, enhancing them, healing them (Twiggy et al., 2011a, Wolkowitz, 2006).

Usually sex work research focuses on the incongruity of intimacy and work, and the consequences to self-identity and gender inequality. The increasing attention to the body/work nexus provides an important frame for exploring similarities in a wide range of work. Body work is gendered as well as material, and research explores the negotiation of physical boundaries of the body as well as the physical senses (Wolkowitz, 2006, Vannini et al., 2012). By using the frame of body work, we can add a more refined understanding of how the gendering process is implicated in the construction and surveillance of the body in sex work. Likewise examining sex work can teach us much about the relation between body, emotion and labor in a variety of jobs.

In this chapter we examine how sex workers in Nevada’s legal brothels talk about their bodies and their labor. This research comes from a larger project on Nevada’s legal brothels (Brents et al., 2010). We focus specifically on what prostitutes say about themselves, their bodies and their work. What does the body mean to sex workers themselves? How do they position themselves in relation to their bodies and to the bodies of their customers? We specifically look at the way sex workers talk about and don’t talk about bodies, how they describe the interactions, and how they give meaning and value to the interactions.

What we find is that workers use different strategies in negotiating the body/work nexus, depending on the material conditions of the work and the resources that a worker brings. We find that sex workers' thinking about their body is itself socially and culturally constructed and different workers think about their bodies in different ways. In their different constructions, workers both resist and reproduce dominant gendered constructions of the body and the devaluation of body labor.

Finally, we argue that the body/work nexus must also be understood as a body/emotion/work nexus involving a variety of dimensions that are assembled in different ways by different workers, both in different kinds of jobs, but also within similar kinds of jobs. This multidimensional way of conceptualizing body work that will help us in viewing commonalities and differences in different kinds of work. The specialness of sex work, what distinguishes it from other forms of labor, is that clients touch back. It is a significant component of the work, but only one component. And the way workers deal with this varies.

### **The Body and Emotional Labor**

Beginning with Arlie Hochschild's groundbreaking study of the labor of airline stewardesses, emotional labor has become the dominant frame for understanding the labor process of the service industry. Emotional labor focuses on how service and care workers, largely women, deploy emotions as commodities and how that affects their sense of self (Hochschild, 1983). While the early literature focused on the alienating aspects of shaping one's emotions to the demands of employers, more recent research suggests that there is variety in how workers employ emotional management strategies to manage self-identity (Bolton, 2005a, Grandey, 2000). In addition, the structure, context and conditions of the job, autonomy, working conditions, length of interactions, repetition of interactions all affect their ability to negotiate and cope with the labor (Abiala, 1999, Sanders, 2005a, Wharton, 1993, Bulan et al., 1997, Wharton, 2009, Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002, Zapf and Holz, 2006).

Body work involves direct, hands-on activities, handling, assessing, and manipulating bodies in paid labor (Wolkowitz, 2002, Twigg et al., 2011b). Empirical research on body work has focused on the field of health, medicine and care work (Twigg, 2000, Twigg, 2004, Fonor, 2004, Diamond, 1992, Stacey, 1988, Twigg et al., 2011a). In many of these studies, it is both the labor process as well as cultural constraints of gender, sexuality and race that shape the experiences, value and performance of the work.

Carol Wolkowitz (2006) has pointed out that much of the analysis of the prostitute's body itself has been largely theoretical, either essentializing the body or viewing the body as text or metaphor, without looking at the material relations that both construct mindfulness of the body and organize the work. Empirical research on sex work has drawn on concepts from the emotional labor literature (Chapkis, 1997, Vanwesenbeeck, 2005), focusing on the ways women negotiate separating self identity from their labor through creating physical or emotional boundaries between self and work (Sanders, 2005a, Abel, 2011, Sanders, 2002, Brewis and Linstead, 2000, Sanders, 2005b, Browne and Minichiello, 1995, Sanders, 2008). Yet this work has not necessarily focused on the body and in some ways continues to essentialize the body and self. What is clear from this research, though, is that the interaction between emotional and bodily labor is important to understand.

Research on body work also suggests that contemporary Western culture's mind/body dualism affects how service work is allocated and valued, and this further implicates emotional labor in how we view body work, especially for sex workers. In the health professions, for example, it is male doctors who do the intellectual labor while women do both the emotional and "dirty" work (Emerson and Pollner, 1975, Anderson, 2000). Certainly gender as well as race and class are also involved in allocating this "dirty" work (Diamond, 1992). Gender also matters as female body workers stress affective components and 'caring' in their work. These workers also struggle to establish power, authority or expertise as they work against the devaluing of bodily labor. A study of gynecological nurses finds that they ascribe a gendered specialness to their 'dirty' work (Bolton, 2005b). While devalued, emotional labor can add value to (non-sexual) service industry exchanges (Hochschild, 1983, Hochschild, 2003, Adkins, 2001, Adkins, 2002, Adkins, 1995, Adkins and Merchant, 1996, Toerien and Kitzinger, 2007). For sex workers, emotional labor

can often enhance the value of their services. These findings suggest that workers struggle against the negative connotations of bodily labor (Bolton, 2005b).

Further, while studies of work frequently focus on employer control of gendered bodies, in today's economy, independent, flexible and contingent work is increasingly the norm. Jobs from models to masseuses to care workers are independently contracted. Workers must answer to both customers and contractors in regulating their bodies and emotions to successfully earn a living, and research finds that the service triangle means that workers engage in self surveillance. Indeed a study comparing emotional management strategies found that self employed workers were more likely to use deep acting while hourly paid hair stylists used surface acting (Cohen, 2010).

This makes it increasingly important to examine workers' mindfulness about their own bodies in the course of doing their labor.

### **The Research Methods**

Nevada's brothels are important sites for examining the labor of prostitution in a number of ways. Sexual services in Nevada's brothels are legal. Workers are independent contractors and do not have to deal with the same stressors, dangers or risk of arrest as illegal workers. As independent contractors, brothel workers are relatively free in how they choose to perform their labor; management does not provide a script or staging instructions. There is a range of services, from 30-minute sessions to, depending on the location, multi-hourly "dates" outside of the brothels. Workers negotiate their contracts to include either shift work for a set period of time, or one to three week stays in-house at the brothel. The amount of control over work conditions varies somewhat among brothels. All women told us they had the power turn down or kick out customers, though there is an economic incentive not to do so.

Nevada's brothels are also particularly rich place for studying the multidimensionality and diversity of sex work. There is diversity in the range and marketing of services (Brents and Hausbeck, 2007). Small rural brothels market primarily to working class mobile laborers, like truckers, migrant farm workers, and miners. Suburban brothels outside of Las Vegas and Reno see these same clients, in addition to a large number of tourists and affluent clients from the nearby urban areas.

Second, the legal setting allows for a wide variety of workers to come to one location. While workers were predominantly white, we found women with a wide range of occupational, educational and social class backgrounds (Brents et al., 2010). The workers rarely come from the town in which the brothel sits, coming instead from surrounding states and further away. Hence there is a great deal of potential variety in the ways women may do sexual labor.

This chapter draws on a ten-year multi method study of sexual labor in Nevada brothels. The original aim of this research was to examine the political and economic context of Nevada brothels (Brents et al., 2010). We conducted interviews with 38 women working at brothels across the state. The interviews were conducted in the brothels, lasting from a half hour to two hours. To understand how the women defined their work, we analyzed interviews for information on how workers described their labor process, their bodies, and their customers' bodies. We also draw from ethnographic data from brothel visits.

### **Labor Practices and the Multidimensional of Body/Work Nexus**

So what kind of labor is sex work? What our research shows is that there is no one way that women define their work. We found three general types of ways women talked about performing their work: body practices, caring practices, and holistic practices. These involved differences in how they conceptualized their bodies, how they conceptualized what they were selling, and strategies they employed to do their jobs. While there was overlap among these, we found that workers often subscribed to one practice over others, and frequently differentiated themselves from other workers based on these practices.

Body practices were narratives of the work emphasizing physical performances of their bodies and the physical nature of the product they were selling. The women who relied on this narrative separated the physical labor from the emotional labor, emphasizing bodily skills, or the aesthetic assets of their bodies. Caring practices were narratives that

emphasized the caring, affective and emotional labor they provide as distinguished from the physical sex. These emphasized the emotional labor necessary for the job, and their mental work was often contrasted with the physicality of sex. Holistic practices were narratives of practices that combined physical sex and emotional connection to provide a sensual experience that engaged body and mind, for both worker and client (Brents et al., 2010).

There are several important points about these narratives. These women combine physical and emotional labor in different ways in the course of their work. Research sometimes varies in the definition of body work. Some paint with broad strokes, focusing on any labor where the worker and consumer are both physically present, regardless of what they are doing to each other (McDowell, 2009). Others prefer a narrow focus on work performed directly on the bodies of others (Twigg et al., 2011b). However, it seems to make sense to talk about body work as involving a variety of dimensions that can vary in the deployment of the body. Further, body work never involves just the body. We find, as Twigg et. al points out, that the boundaries around body work are fluid (2011). In their repertoires of performing bodily labor, sex workers in Nevada's brothels drew upon a variety of strategies and repertoires in their work. For example, in working on the bodies of others, the aesthetics of their own bodies became important. As such, aesthetic labor must be taken into account (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006, Warhurst and Nickson, 2007, Warhurst et al., 2000, Witz et al., 2003). Not only are they performing on the bodies of others, they are using their own bodies as instruments. They are not just performing physical labor, they are also performing emotional labor. And, importantly, their customers are in many ways also performing on them. As such we find it best to consider several dimensions, components or aspects of body work, many of which can be performed alone or in combination.

1. Physical labor: Labor performed by the worker's body where the body is the tool.
2. Aesthetic labor: Labor performed on one's own body to produce a particular image or style that is part of the job.
3. Bodily labor: Labor managing the customer's body as the object/point of service provision.
4. Interactive bodily labor: The customer touches back, the customer is allowed or encouraged to engage the worker's body, where the labor involves managing customers manipulation of the workers' body.
5. Emotional labor on three levels:
  - a. Attending to the physical sensations of customers.
  - b. Attending to the emotional needs of customers, producing an emotional result in the customer.
  - c. Managing and modifying your own emotions on the job and as a result of the work.

All of these factors are apparent in several kinds of service work, including the sale of sex. For example, brothels price services based on timed physical acts, like a 30 minute "half and half" (begin with oral sex, then move to penetrative sex), so it makes sense that women would talk about their labor in terms of the physical acts they perform. However, some workers emphasized certain kinds of strategies. Not surprisingly, many workers who spoke primarily of their work as body practices emphasized their own physical labor as it is performed on customers. Emili, 40, had been working at Sheri's Ranch for only seven months, and this was her first time working selling sex. She said, "I mean we have a menu and a lot of times I even go down the menu. Maybe they have either a blow job, a hand job or straight sex in mind or a combination of the three."

For those engaged in body practices, most of their descriptions of their labor, or the parts that vexed them in talking to us involved the physical labor of their own bodies. Celeste, age 45, then at the Green Lantern in rural Nevada, but who had worked in the industry for 13 years, talked a great deal about the physical labor.

"The thing is about genital warts, if it's way up the shaft, you know, its way up the base line, and it don't look bad. But there's no way I'm going to hit that area anyway. Because if you're good at what you do and you know what in the hell you're doing you can set the pace. You can set exactly, almost like a micrometer exactly, how deep they're going to go. I mean, just the benefit of one knee, yea, one knee down, it's only going that far."

Alice, 19, who had been working at the large suburban Moonlight Bunny for about six months, also her first time in the industry, described the 'great' hand jobs she learned how to give from porn stars.

"Yeah you know my worst thing that I'm trying to get over right now is how too deep throat. And you know that comes in time. You ask the other girls for techniques. You have to ask questions to learn anything, and you know most of the girls in here are willing to discuss that and teach you."

Another important component of the physicality of body work is the work of being a sensing body. Emili was talking to us about not really enjoying working with women who came in. In describing why she didn't like it, she talked about the sensory experience of working with men.

"I'm used to the smell of a man, the way that their facial hair is kind of rough. And their bodies are hairy. Ya know. Their smell is different. Their voice is different. Even when they breathe it's different. The way they look at you is different. Everything is different."

Likewise, not surprisingly, women who described their work as body practices also spoke of having to physically feel and read another's body to provide the necessary services. Celeste articulated much of what the women were telling us about body labor, or work on other's bodies.

"It's almost like choreographing a dance in bed...you have to pay attention. When you feel their buttocks tighten, or you feel a twitch here or a twitch there, what does that mean? Is that a good twitch or a bad twitch?...You've got to take stage directions well."

These stage directions, reading twitches, eye contact, hand gestures, helped women time their parties, making sure men orgasm at the right moment within the allotted time. For these workers, orgasm within the contracted time was the most important component of the work. That as well as knowing what services would bring the customer back for a repeat visit was critical.

Aesthetic labor was also an important component of their job. Particularly when customers are new to the brothel, or even for newly employed women, one's physical looks are what customers see first. Women in many brothels chosen by customers out of a line-up, where they are required to stand, smile, and say their names with little other interaction. Less frequently, women approach customers at the bar. In either case, looks are important. So it is not surprising that aesthetic labor undertaken on their own bodies to compete for clients is a significant part of their work. Women also have a lot of free time at the brothels. There can be hours, or even days when few customers show up. Aesthetic labor becomes much of what they do in their spare time. Women talked about working out using facilities at the brothel, or buying clothing from the many retail businesses that come to the brothel to sell clothing. Women often change clothes several times a day.

Aesthetic narratives mostly revolved around living up to clients (and other women's) standards of beauty. Costume changes, exercise, hair and make-up occupied large portions of the day. Surgeries such as breast implants or tummy tucks were significant to many workers. In the larger suburban brothels, breast implants were almost standard.

While there was a recognition that at the larger brothels, large breasts, lots of make-up, blond hair and youth were what men frequently looked for in a line up, women also worked at finding those aesthetic qualities that might not be so readily available, or make them stand out from others. Self branding is a critical part of the aesthetic labor process. For many women, this came in the form of assessing their particular bodies for how they could make it fit into a marketable niche. This was particularly important for older or larger women, and they worked at self presentation in contrast to hegemonically beautiful bodies. For example, Angela, 27, at the rural Green Lantern said, "They just want a woman who has meat. And I have meat."

While it is obvious that having sex with someone involves a great deal of physical and aesthetic labor, emotional labor was an important and complicated component of the job. There were two components to this, how women talked about evoking an emotion in the customer, and how women talked about managing their own emotions. How women articulated these two levels of emotion work varied in several ways.

For those who employed body practices, they still talked about needing to exert some effort in reading the emotions of customers, though it was secondary to meeting their physical needs. Celeste's attention to tightening of the buttocks or other physical cues ultimately required an assessment of the client's emotions as to whether this was a positive or negative experience. Zoie, in her thirties and working at the suburban Moonlight Bunny Ranch said,

With every man there's a plan in your head because your goal is to make them really happy. To 'get them off and get them out,' right? So as soon as you start touching them, or he's voiced to you what he likes, everything you do from that moment on is a calculated move to reach that goal.

The physical labor happens when "you start touching them," and in the focus on the "calculated moves to reach that goal." But the calculation itself, the emotion work to "plan in your head" with a goal of making "them really happy." Involves a combination of physical and emotional labor.

Other workers place much more importance on the emotional labor, and quite frequently downplayed the physical labor. We'll talk more about this below. But frequently the talk about the job was the felt counterintuitive dimension of needing to provide emotional labor for the client. Joyce, 38, who had been at Angel's Ladies for about nine months, maintained that sometimes, "they don't need sex, they just need to be touched, held." The work of the job was often figuring out which they needed.

The part of the job in producing an emotional response in the customer is often discussed as a kind of manipulation of self, involving work on one's own emotions. Ricki, 35, at suburban Miss Kitty's talked about having to have a dual persona in enticing a customer to your room. "You've got to be someone's fantasy. You basically have to manipulate and be someone that you're not to entice them to go to your room."

Many studies have found that women talk about acting as a critical part of the labor (Sanders, 2005a, Brewis and Linstead, 2000, Abel, 2011). The job involves not just manipulating your emotions, but really taking on a different persona. Likewise, hiding or modifying one's own emotions is necessary. Bretney, 31, at the Moonlight Bunny Ranch talked about being homesick at the brothel, but as she said, "Nobody wants to be with somebody that's this close to tears all the time. You know, homesick. Yeah, so you're happy, all happy." Hochschild sees this acting as a kind of betrayal of one's inner emotions in order to match the demands and feeling rules of the job.

But what became important for a number of sex workers was that the customer's emotions were really the core of what the job was about, not an secondary component. These were the caring practices, where it was the emotional, not so much the physical response that was most important. Workers who engaged in caring practices primarily differentiated the way they performed the job from the physical element.

"It's [the job] complete acting, that's how I look at it," said Alicia. But for Alicia, the acting was less about fulfilling a sexual fantasy and more about being a counselor. "When I act with a customer, I like to act like I'm their advisor, you know I like to listen to people, listen to their problems or their dreams or their goals." Importantly, for her, it is the role of advisor that she highlighted in doing the job.

Ricki saw this caring work as especially helpful.

"The older I get and the more trials that I have to go through in my life, the more I can relate sometimes to people that are coming in and they're going through stuff with their kids, or they're going through stuff with their parents, or they're going through stuff with their significant other. And, and I can relate, and I can listen and I can just be there. I'm there to just make you feel better." Ricki, Miss Kitty's

Another element of the labor involved in modifying one's own emotions was the selling that has to go into the work. The women told us that sociability is central to the job, and the women often reported that humor or knowing how to "talk to people" is important. Bev Waters, 21, an adult film star now working at Miss Kitty's says, "but there are a lot of us who are very quiet--- and to be in this industry you have to be talking and communicate and sell yourself and your party. Sell your party more than yourself."

For Emili the up-front selling job caused her the most agony, especially as she was new to the job, "You think it's not a lot, it's a lot. Because you're learning how to sell yourself, you're learning how to present yourself in a way that you're valuable, your time is valuable."

Alice at the Moonlight Bunny said, "You know if you say I want \$10,000 for an hour and you don't believe you'll get it, then you won't get it. You have to believe that you'll get that money."

For Emili, the work was intellectually difficult in a way that surprised her. "Trying to remember in what order to ask them... You start with a Jacuzzi suite information, you let them know that it books for \$500, I mean that's the booking fee for anything [activities are added on] And that can generate whether they're willing to spend that much or not willing to spend that much just by their expression. Ya know. Then you know up or down, as far as price. Little keys, little factors, which you have to be a good listener and you have to be good at presenting."

Many also talked about those first moments when the customers had to be sold and led on what they wanted. Joyce told of the work that went into sensing the needs of a "real shy" customer in order to evoke emotions from him,

He was very nervous and when I came back in I said, you know just let me give you a hug. And I held him and he held on to me. And I could just sense that he hadn't had the human touch. It had been a long time. Ya know?

What is perhaps the most distinct for sex work is the interactive body work. In few other jobs does the customer touch back, or engage the workers' body as extensively as for sex workers.<sup>ii</sup> The work involves an active client and the service involves intensive engagement by the client's body with the body of the worker. This is perhaps one of the more unique aspects of the job, and behind much of the concern about the level of control the worker has over the intimacy. The permeability of a sex workers personal and professional identity can rest on this notion that a customer is allowed to act on the workers' body in ways that other body work doesn't allow. Many studies of sex workers talk about the boundary work that is necessary because of this the intimate level of the exchange (Sanders, 2002, Vanwesenbeeck, 2005, McKeganey and Barnard, 1996, Brewis and Linstead, 2000).

How do sex workers themselves talk about this aspect? How important is this aspect of the job? There were workers who sort of begrudgingly acquiesced that you have to let the customer have the illusion of control. Jackie, in her early thirties, working at the rural Calico Club, articulated what many women told us,

"If a guy takes a long time, long time, you're like, God, you know, least amount of work for the most amount of money. That's the way I was taught, you know. And to me, it's a lot easier just to lay there, you know. It's easier than it is to give a blow job."

In other words, the work here was in just letting them go at it. They could satisfy themselves with minimal effort on her part.

At the same time, the sex worker must at least act like what the customer is doing is also enjoyable to them. Many workers joked that what woman doesn't fake an orgasm. Jackie also talked about clients being fascinated with her breasts.

"The first thing they do, bury their heads in them. And I'm wondering why this is such a fascination? You know. I just don't get it. Because it doesn't turn me on when they're doing that. You know? I have to remember to make noises. I make them up, because it doesn't turn me on."

Misty and Celeste were talking about the challenges in figuring out what customers wanted to do to you and how to interact. Misty says, "even looking at them, they want to stare at you, but they don't want you to look at them. That's fine too." Celeste then says, "That's when you know right away to close your eyes and just do that 'oh moans of ecstasy' thing." Likewise, she said some guys want you to touch yourself, some find it a total turnoff, so you have to know the cues.

But customer's concerns about the engagement of workers had another side. Many, saw clients' engagement as endearing, as a positive part of the job. For Dizyer, a long time worker in her forties, now at Angel's Ladies, "people can be very Christian, very compassionate and very mannerly. I mean just subservient down to 'Can I move my arm? Can, can I tilt this way?' And they'll have a good party. And I love people like that, because they appreciate all the excitement and the attention." It is interesting that she put subservient in the same category as compassionate and mannerly.

Angela said, "Sometimes when they [clients] go to a room they just want to lie down and give the girl a back massage or just get a back massage themselves." Ricki at Miss Kitty's, like



Jackie, reiterates this idea that they don't really get a lot out of the basic sexual interaction, and see that part as rather one-sided. At the same time, they enjoy the interaction and bodily contact afterward.

It doesn't take any time to do what they gotta do. Sure they can pay the time. You know. I'll take all the money you got. But I'll guarantee, more than likely you're gonna end up spending the rest of the time doing me, and massage and talking. You know. Which is cool with me.

Holistic workers, in particular, saw the interactive body work very differently as we will discuss more below. These worker, as well as some others women clearly enjoyed the physicality of the sex. A few talked about having orgasms only on occasion, and were often surprised when they did. Even Jackie said, "I've had guys that you'd never think they'd be that good, but were really good. You look at them like going... like, "Oh damn."

Overall, and most interestingly, the interactive component was not what workers talked about the most. Why this is the case is interesting, and worthy of further research.

### Resistance and reproduction of gendered narratives

While the women had different ways of configuring the elements of body work it is also clear that the different sets of practices had different implications for reinforcing or resisting traditional gendered sexualities. One important point in understanding the body/work nexus is in how workers construct conceptions of their own bodies. The critical difference we found in the three typologies of practices was how workers reproduced, or not, the mind/body dualism and accompanying hierarchies that label some body work as dirty work.

Those who emphasized caring practices talked about how the job was not about "sex" but predominantly about the emotional labor. Worker after worker talked about how they had customers, who just wanted to watch TV with them or talk or give or get a massage. One worker estimated that 30% of her clients don't want sex.

"Everybody is under the conception that it is just all about spreading your legs. Wrong, wrong... It's almost like being a psychologist, you know you're listening to people's problems, you're making them feel okay about them. You're giving them something, where, you know, everyone you touch, whether it be sexual or not, the hugging, the feeling, you know..." Ricki, Miss Kitty's

The important point for us was in how these women talked about this phenomena. It was brought up as a counter to the narrative that prostitution is only about physical gratification. The unspoken narrative was that providing raw sexual gratification was, "dirty work." Emphasizing counseling or emotional support elevated their work. "It's not just sex. It's, you know, a lot more than that" said Angela. Thus defining themselves against the stigma associated with body work was central.

Those women who adopted caring practices resisted devaluing of body work, by elevating caring labor. At the same time, these reproduced fairly traditional gender roles.

"I think me being emotional and me being probably overly compassionate, and sometimes a doormat, but at the same time it benefits me in my job, because I truly care. ...I think I'm a better listener because I am not there to advise, I'm there to just make you feel better." Ricki, Miss Kitty's

The qualities that mattered to Ricki were highly gendered and heteronormative, reproducing the concept of women as natural caretakers of men. Indeed, the brothels are very heteronormative spaces where it is predominantly women serving male clients. The women workers are sexually and emotionally attentive to male client's needs, reifying modern notions of women's caretaking and nurturing responsibility toward men. This stereotypical heterosexual interaction is the one of the cornerstones of Nevada's brothel industry.

Joyce at Angels Ladies, in explaining what she is really selling, said of one shy customer, "We just snuggled up, ya know, um, and just, I just, ya know, just held him, ya know? And I enjoyed that, because I enjoy being that person for people." Another worker articulated how she sees her job as a counter to the instrumental, alienating nature of many relationships today, "I think it's really hard out there to find someone that you can, ya know, there's so much bullshit, games and stuff, ya know?" Likewise, Alicia at the Green Lantern compared

the work of the prostitution against the emotional failures of women in some marriages. "People that might be in a marriage, but they are on both ends of the bed and there's no touching, there's no feeling there's no emotion." Alicia at the Green Lantern goes on to say her job as a prostitute is to truly care, give that emotion.

"But one guy the other Monday night, he paid a good amount of money too, and the time he had was an hour and a half, the sex itself probably lasted 15 minutes, but he gave me a massage, and then we ended up talking for the last half hour. We just talked, we talked about kids, we talked about wives, husbands, we talked about life. And he was just like the sweetest guy."

Several workers also said that the caring actually increased the monetary value of the party. In one discussion between workers, Sadie said, "Believe it or not, there have been customers that will come in here and don't want sex at all. They just need to lie in your company." Joyce replied, "And those ones, you get paid the most, too." The added value of caring may be because of the way it reproduced traditional heteronormative non-commodified relationships. Several studies have shown that the girlfriend experience is a highly valued commodity for the most high end sex workers (Bernstein, 2007).

Even those who adopted body practices resisted the stigma and devaluing of body work. Like Bolton's gynecological nurses, they emphasized the skill of their work. As Celeste said, "Flying by the seat of your pants in this business doesn't work, ya know. Anyone can fuck and suck." Celeste's discussions of the physicality of her work were frequently prefaced by allusions to the skill of the work. Celeste, in the quote earlier in this chapter begins the description of the physicality of the work with "if you are good at what you do." A few seconds later she says, "you can do it gracefully, very gracefully. It is almost like choreographing a dance in bed. I mean I can do 25 positions." For Misty, 34, even the small things are skills to be developed and used, like looking at them, and knowing whether to make eye contact or not.

Often older women in the brothels talk about skill as something that can outweigh looks. Zoie, in her late thirties, has been working on and off in prostitution for 16 years in various settings, "I know what I'm doing. I've been doing it a long time. I'm pretty good at my job, even now with girls that are ten years younger than me."

There is also an acknowledgement among sex workers that the customers that usually come in the brothels are likely not those who can easily attract women in the bars. Sometimes these men have physical or other qualities that makes them unattractive by hegemonic standards of beauty for me. Many workers talked about strategies to avoid undesirable clients. However, there were just as many who dealt with this dirty work narrative by insisting that they draw on higher powers to see the beauty in clients. Ruby, in her twenties at the Moonlight Bunny Ranch, expounded on her relationships with her customers.

"Nobody I bring back here is revolting to me in any way. So I'm kind of looking forward to it at that point in time. There are a lot of really super business minded girls and I, too, I will do men that I wouldn't ordinarily do. But you know, to me that's also part of the job, being able to see something attractive in somebody's eyes that other people don't see. In trying to find and focus on that one attractive quality that that person has. You know."

Ruby admitted that she had done clients that she wouldn't ordinarily do, but still she saw her job as a courtesan to focus on attractive qualities in a person. Magdalene Meretrix said, "Whether they are fat, skinny, covered with scars or whatever. They get the same level of attention and compassion from me."

Perhaps the most radical challenge to the traditional female narrative came from holistic workers, of which both Ruby and Magdalene were ones. They rejected mind body dualism itself. Like those who talked about the physical labor, they talked about skill. Like Bolton's gynecology nurses, they reclaimed the dirty work. But unlike the nurses they integrated body and mind.

Holistic practices were in many ways a distinct contrast to much of what we have read in the sex work literature about how women think about their work. These women explicitly rejected a mind body dualism and the narrative of body work as dirty work. Even though there are plenty of incentives for sex workers to "get 'em in, off, and out," the majority of women who use holistic practices spoke with disdain about those who worked that way.

Holistic workers consider their level of emotional investment as more specialized and skilled than the other workers. Holistic workers distinguish themselves from other workers not by ignoring body work or interpreting care labor as separate from sex, but by correlating sexual pleasure with bodily and mental engagement.

Women who use these practices talk about the intersection of physical sex, caring, and connection as they provide a holistic experience that engages body and mind for both herself and her client. Holistic practices combine physical labor, bodily labor, emotional labor, and, uniquely, explicitly discuss the reciprocity of bodily exchange with the client. Holistic practices situate a paid sexual encounter in terms of mutuality. Holistic workers were more likely to talk about the sensual pleasure they gained from the work. They were less likely to discuss controlling or manipulating the exchange and more likely to discuss building body work *with* their clients.

Magdalene Meretrix has worked in a range of venues including Nevada's suburban brothels. She wrote a book on become a sex worker detailing the more meditative side of her work (Meretrix, 2001). She describes her work as an "exchange of sexual energy...I have been a healing force in their life. I've given them healing, unconditional love." Bretney also talked about how she awakens in her clients "the wonderful, fairy joy feeling that people don't always want to give themselves the permission to experience." With holistic practices, the value of sex at work is not conceptualized as purely emotional, or purely physical. Physical and emotional connections are wound together in a way that is articulated as mutually reinforcing.

Ruby, unlike many sex workers, kisses some of her clients, "because that's the art of being a courtesan. You have to sell intimacy as well."

Importantly, these workers tend to talk about enjoying their work, resisting the narrative of self denial and embracing their own pleasure. The narratives also reflect a different gendered narrative than traditional sexual expectations: women enjoy sex, enjoy guiding the sexual encounter, and build a mutual sexual encounter with the male client. There is a reciprocity of emotions between workers and their clients. Says Bretney, 31, who had been contracting off and on with the Moonlite Bunny Ranch for three years, "I love to fuck. So it is fun for me and very athletic." In calling the work as athletic, she invokes a narrative of self monitoring and achievement, not just skill for the benefit of the customer. She goes on to talk about the work, "I have my tantric customers that I like to party with because they like to use more yoga positions." In invoking yoga, she invokes a practice that seeks to dissolve a mind/body dualism.

Finally, it is important to note that the women with the most resources were more likely to embrace holistic practices. And their longer more engaged interactions bring in the most money. Ruby, Bretney, Dusty (40s), and Magdalene are high earners, working at higher end suburban brothels outside of Reno and Las Vegas. They will spend a whole day or more with a client, particularly with repeat customers. Ruby said she was once paid over \$8,000 for two days with a regular client. This practice combines bodily exchange labor, bodily labor, and physical labor with all three aspects of emotional labor as women attend to the physical sensations and emotional needs of customers, as well as their own emotional needs and physical feelings.

## Discussion

In all, we find that sex workers have different ways of ordering and combining emotional, aesthetic, physical, bodily and interactive body work. Consistent with research on emotional labor, sex workers employ a variety of management strategies to accomplish their work. There are overall patterns in how they organize the key elements of their job. We found that the biggest organizing principle was in how they conceptualized body, reproducing a mind/body dualism, or rejecting this. In caring practices, workers value affective and caring over physical or body labor. True to the traditionally feminine role, caring itself is the intrinsic reward. They use traditionally gendered language. These workers tend to be at rural brothels, likely catering to more working class men. The women are more likely to come from the service industry with less cultural capital and a lower socio-economic status.

Women relying on body practices also separated mind and body. But they rejected the stigma of "dirty work" by emphasizing bodily skill and expertise in required on the job in ways similar to Bolton's gynecological nurses (2005). The services they provided were a skill, better than sex you can get at home. They saw the work as performed *on* bodies, and they

had the skill to take cues from their client's bodies and the skill to manipulate and control their client's bodies. These workers also tended to be in more rural brothels and engage in shorter exchanges. Similarly, they had less cultural capital and educational backgrounds that ended with high school or some college.

Holistic workers provided the most radical resistance to traditional gendered ideologies by defying the mind/body dualism, and rather emphasized a mutual and fully pleasurable experience for customer and worker. They provided what they saw as a spiritual and bodily connection. These workers also allowed themselves bodily pleasure in the work. Women who use holistic practices tended to earn the most money, and provided longer services for fewer customers. They also tended to be the most educated sex workers, with bachelor's or master's degrees.

The configuration of practices organized around body work is multidimensional. They embody a range of interplay between the five types of labor: aesthetic, emotional, bodily, bodily interaction, and emotional. It appears that workplace organization, setting, and the class and resources of both workers and clients, matters. We argue that the legal, semi-autonomous context allows more diversity in these sex workers' approaches to labor. Hence the changing nature of leisure and the increasing commodification of all aspects of human life are giving workers more tools to use in negotiating the body/mind/work nexus.

We urge much more research on diversity and variety in post industrial embodied labor. Sex work, like sexual surrogates, practice models for medical students (to practice pelvic exams, for examples), pregnancy surrogates, are unique forms of body work in that the client touches the worker. Such labor is often written off as caring, or medicalized and sterilized, or, as is often the case of sex workers, type-casted as deviant, coerced, or unhealthy.

We found no evidence in their self-descriptions that they felt brothel work was harmful in and of itself. Indeed, like other research has found, the workers are seek the practices that work for them, emphasizing the aspects of labor that they feel are the most important. Further, women's labor strategies reflect how women actively define gender and sexuality, both resisting and accepting cultural constraints. These conceptions affect how they experience sexuality, pleasure, self and service work. The demands of a growing sex industry may be reshaping our understanding of heterosexuality as successful high end workers provide holistic labor that pushes beyond dualities of mind and body.

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<sup>i</sup> We recognize that men and transgender people also engage in commercial sex, but up until 2010, only women could sell sex in the legal brothels due to a law requiring all brothel sex workers to submit to a cervical exam. This was overturned in late 2009 with the assistance of the local ACLU. Less than a handful of men have been hired since the change.

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