Labor violations and discrimination in the Clark County outcall entertainment industry

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LABOR VIOLATIONS AND DISCRIMINATION
IN THE CLARK COUNTY OUTCALL
ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Labor Violations and Discrimination in the Clark County Outcall Entertainment Industry

by

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Researchers who insist that sexual exploitation is intrinsic to sex work have deflected attention from two key issues facing sex workers: labor violations and prejudice. The purpose of this study is to investigate unethical labor practices and institutional sexism, racism, and classism in the Clark County outcall entertainment ("escort") industry. To analyze these issues from a sex radical feminist perspective, I spent 820 hours engaged in covert participant observation while working as an appointment setter at two major outcall entertainment agencies in Clark County.

Much of the abuse that outcall entertainers in Las Vegas encounter could be eliminated by enforcing existing labor regulations. Other industry-specific problems could be solved with the repeal of repressive anti-prostitution laws. Unfortunately, combating racism, classism, sexism and whore stigma in the sex industry will require social change, as these issues are not restricted to the industry, but can be found in all areas of society.
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CHAPTER 1

OUTCALL ENTERTAINMENT IN CLARK COUNTY

Contemporary feminist debate about the sex industry reflects a polarization between those scholars who believe that sex work is an occupation that is no more – or less – problematic than the other forms of gendered wage labor that are created by and perpetuated in capitalism and patriarchy (Delacoste and Alexander 1998; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Leigh 1998; Chapkis 1997; Pheterson 1996; Shrage 1996; Rubin 1992), and those who equate commercialized sexuality with sexual exploitation (Farley and Barkan 1998; Barry 1995; Giobbe 1993; MacKinnon 1993; Hoigard and Finstad 1992; Overall 1992; Dworkin 1987).

Sexual service work in the contemporary period is inextricably enmeshed in both capitalism and patriarchy. Every form of sex work is gendered labor in a commercial context. However, the hypothesis that sexual labor is intrinsically harmful to sex workers cannot explain the variety of positive and negative experiences that current and former sex workers have had in every area of the sex industry. Furthermore, much of the academic writing on this topic has been produced by researchers with an admitted anti-sex work bias, which has been reproduced in their empirical work¹.

¹ See chapter 2 for an in-depth review of this topic and the social science literature on sex work in general.
By insisting that sexual exploitation is intrinsic to sex work, radical feminists have deflected attention from two key issues that sex workers face: labor violations and various forms of discrimination and prejudice. This study will show that much of the abuse that outcall entertainers in Las Vegas deal with on a daily basis could be eliminated if the Nevada Labor Commissioner would enforce existing labor regulations. Other industry-specific problems could be solved with the repeal of repressive anti-prostitution laws and regulations. Unfortunately, combating racism, classism, sexism and "whore stigma" (Pheterson 1996) in the sex industry will require social change, as these issues are not restricted to the industry, but can be found in all areas of American society.

Las Vegas, with its reputation as "Sin City" – an adult playground where sex is for sale – is an important and interesting site for the study of sex work. Prostitution is illegal in Las Vegas and surrounding Clark County, and legalized forms of adult entertainment, such as totally nude entertainment provided by outcall entertainment agencies (which are also commonly referred to as escort agencies) and nude or topless dance clubs, are heavily regulated. Las Vegas is also situated a mere hour from the closest of Nevada’s legal brothels. Yet, in spite of the illegality of prostitution in Clark County, the availability of legal sexual entertainment, and the proximity of legal brothels; illegal prostitution in the Las Vegas metropolitan area continues to flourish in many forms.
The purpose of this study is to investigate unethical labor practices and institutional sexism, racism, and classism in the Clark County outcall entertainment industry. I will explore the relationships between and among owners and managers of outcall agencies, the independent contractors or employees who answer incoming sales calls, and the independent contractors who are dispatched to entertain the customers. I will also analyze the discourses of race, class and gender utilized by customers, office personnel and entertainers.

Specifically, my research questions are: 1) What are the effects of third party control of labor on sex workers and other workers in the outcall setting? 2) How are these effects intensified or mitigated by the specific and complex legal and social position of outcall entertainment in Clark County? 3) What discourses are used to fetishize, commodify and/or nullify race and ethnicity in the research setting? 4) How do race and class affect subjects' perceived attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to violence, money-making potential, and class mobility? 5) How do race and class affect entertainers' and phone girls' actual money-making potential and class mobility?

In order to answer these questions, I spent 820 hours engaged in covert participant observation while working as a phone girl at two of the five major outcall entertainment agencies in Clark County, which I will refer to as Sweethearts and Playmates. In this position I was able to make direct contact with customers via the telephone, speak informally with other phone girls as we worked, and engage in

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2 The names I use for both agencies and all research contacts, are pseudonyms.
exchanges and negotiations with outcall entertainers, managers, and owners of the business. My study has been informed by the observations I made during this time, as well as an analysis of legal, promotional, and media documents related to the industry. In contrast, legislators and law enforcement personnel have shaped the history of outcall entertainment in Clark County based on political pressures rather than empirical evidence. In the section that follows, I would like to briefly describe that history.

Context of Study

Outcall entertainment services, defined as “a person or group of persons who send or refer another person to a hotel or motel guest room for a fee in response to a telephone call or other request for the purpose of entertaining the person located in the hotel or motel guest room”, are legal in Las Vegas and surrounding Clark County, provided the outcall entertainer and the agency are properly licensed. This type of adult entertainment has been available in Clark County since the 1960s. However, there have been a number of changes over the years in the laws regulating outcall entertainment.

The History of Outcall Entertainment in Clark County

The first outcall entertainment agencies were simply called escort agencies and were licensed as such. Around 1970, a Las Vegas city commission eliminated the escort service license, due to suspicions of prostitution in the industry. However, any

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3 Clark County Code 6.140.020
business that did not fit into a specific category was eligible for a general M-7 business license. Many of the escort services applied for the M-7 license and continued to operate as “tour guide” or “matchmaking” services (Langbell 1973).

In 1973, the City of Las Vegas passed a new escort bureaus ordinance. However, the application of the new law was problematic. According to legislators, this law was passed to eliminate prostitution from escort services, yet the law required escorts to have semi-annual examinations for sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, under the new ordinance only individuals, not corporations, were eligible to apply for the license, even though legally a corporation is recognized as an individual person. At the time the law was passed, sources close to city hall were suggesting that the ordinance was never designed for any actual licenses to be issued, but rather to eliminate escort services altogether (Langbell 1973).

From the time the new escort bureaus ordinance was passed in February 1973, the Las Vegas City Commission refused all applicants for the license, lending credence to the theory that the law was designed solely to prevent escort services from obtaining general M-7 business licenses. However, after repeated failed attempts by several individuals and corporations to renew old escort agency licenses or apply for new licenses, the applicants started suing the city, and in each case, the presiding judges forced the city to grant the licenses. In unincorporated Clark County, the County Commission, which had been engaged in a similar tactic, was also being forced by judicial order to grant escort licenses to qualified applicants under the corresponding county escort service licensing ordinance.
After several years of court battles, the City of Las Vegas began voluntarily granting escort service licenses for owners of escort services, escort licenses for escorts, and escort runner licenses for employees of escort services who were not escorts in March of 1976. These licenses were granted under a new set of regulations that eliminated mandatory health checks for escorts. However, this was only the beginning of the long war between outcall operators and the municipal, county, and state legislators and law enforcement. At the time the first new escort service license was issued, Las Vegas License and Revenue Director Ila Britt made a point to comment on the ongoing nature of the city’s battle with the outcall industry:

[Britt] didn’t expect even the strict new city laws to prevent outcall prostitutes from masquerading as escorts.

“No ordinance could be strict enough to do that if the girls are determined to do otherwise,” Britt said. “But with the new controls, we’ll be on top of them if they try [emphasis mine].”

She was referring to the four vice officers which the Metropolitan Police Department is expected to hire to beef up its enforcement of sex-oriented businesses in the city (Las Vegas Sun 1976).

During the late 1970s and into the 1980s, city and county officials tried to tighten their control over escort services by passing laws to control escort advertising, restrict who may apply for an escort or escort service license, and even ban escorting altogether. During this time, agency owners stopped trying to apply for licenses within the city limits and concentrated their efforts on unincorporated Clark County, since the new licensing laws allowed companies based in the county to send entertainers to locations inside or outside of the city limits, whereas companies based in the city were prohibited from sending entertainers into unincorporated Clark
County. The entire Las Vegas Strip is outside of the city of Las Vegas, in unincorporated Clark County and most of the agencies' customers are in that area, due to the tourist traffic.

Many court battles ensued, and while these cases were alternately won, lost and appealed by each side, eventually the escort services lost and escorting was banned in Clark County. However, as before with the M-7 licenses, the outcall operators refused to give up their businesses and they used semantics to their advantage. They stopped advertising as escort services, and started advertising as dating services, entertainment services, and nude modeling services.

During this time, Metro's vice squad doubled, but arrests were confined to individual entertainers who either solicited Metro officers for the purposes of prostitution or violated any one of a number of regulations, such as the prohibition against requesting tips from customers. It was very difficult for law enforcement to shut down an agency. Finally, in March of 1991, the state legislature stepped in, drafting a bill, AB 116, which would require privilege licensing for outcall entertainers and outcall agencies. The bill was signed into state law in April of that year.

To comply with the state law, Clark County and the City of Las Vegas drafted ordinances requiring a background check for outcall company owners and their entertainers before they are issued licenses. Each ordinance stipulates that outcall entertainers, agency owners, and managers cannot have any convictions for
prostitution-related offences on their record or they will not be issued a license.\(^4\)

However, these requirements did not eliminate outcall entertainment in Clark County, and there is still a great deal of animosity between the outcall services and local government and law enforcement agencies. Every few years a new "crackdown" on the local sex industry is announced. In December 1999, Clark County District Attorney Stewart Bell stopped offering plea bargains to any person arrested on prostitution charges. Originally, this policy was presented in gendered terms, as announced by the D.A.:

> It has been agreed amongst Metro, the district attorney's office and the city attorney's office that — except in the cases of first-time male offenders who opt for the diversion program (a class that costs $400) — we will not negotiate the nature of cases of soliciting prostitution nor will we agree that they may be in the future dismissed for any reason. The defendant will either plead guilty or be tried. (Koch 2000)

Bell later stated that he was distinguishing between sellers of sex and buyers of sex and that the diversion program he referred to was for male or female customers of prostitutes caught in reverse sting operations. He further claimed that if any male prostitutes were given deals, his deputies violated the policy and he would clarify his position to them in writing. While the Nevada ACLU fought this policy in court, they were ultimately unsuccessful, other than ensuring that the policy would be equally applied to males and females accused of working as prostitutes. Under the current policy of the District and City Attorneys' offices, individuals accused of any crime other than prostitution, including murder, rape, and other violent crimes are allowed

\(^4\) CCC 6.140.095 and Las Vegas Municipal Code 6.57.090 and 6.57.100
to plea bargain, and those plea bargains are commonly accepted. However, no plea bargains will be accepted from any person accused of selling sex, including outcall entertainers, strip club dancers, and street or hotel prostitutes.

In May 2002, Clark County Assistant District Attorney Mike Davidson launched a new campaign against the outcall industry, seeking a moratorium on outcall agency licenses. This campaign was concurrent with Davidson’s election campaign to succeed Bell, his boss and former law partner, as District Attorney. At the time, Bell was campaigning for a district judge seat and supported Davidson in his efforts. Of course, the pair also had the full support of Metro’s vice department, which had grown to 30 members by 2002. Davidson lost the District Attorney election, and current Clark County District Attorney David Roger has stated that the war against the outcall industry is “not a priority.” However, the county has continued to attack the local sex industry through new restrictions on lap dancing that were passed into law in September 2002 (Wagner 2003).

This history of the outcall industry in Clark County illustrates three important points: 1) Lawmakers and law enforcement personnel whose livelihood depends on fighting the local sex industry are not interested in listening to or presenting a balanced picture of outcall entertainment agencies, their owners, or their workers. They prefer to stage battles with the outcall industry for political purposes. 2) Outcall entertainment agency owners have been able to hold their own in legal battles with Clark County, the city of Las Vegas and the state of Nevada. The agencies have sustained some losses over the years, but the same individuals have been able to
continue running multimillion dollar businesses for periods of many years; 3) The only losers in this continuing battle have been individual sex workers who have been arrested, denied plea bargain agreements, and subjected to worsening work conditions over the years due to increased government restrictions and agency owners’ greed.

*Modern Outcall Agencies*

Currently, there are 124 active licenses for outcall entertainment agencies in Clark County, but most of those licenses are held by the same five agencies. (Wagner 2003, Velotta 1998). Outcall services charge fees of $100 to $250 for female or male entertainers to perform nude in the customers’ hotel room or private residence. When the entertainer returns to the agency office they have to turn in the entire fee. While it is illegal for outcall entertainers to request a fee or tip from a customer other than the basic agency fee, entertainers do not receive any portion of the agency fee.5 Entertainers work for tips only. In addition, entertainers must pay a $300 non-refundable bond fee to the company in order to work for the agency.

Outcall entertainment agencies advertise in the phone book, in trade publications, on the internet, through the distribution of flyers and cards, and on taxi-tops and billboards. Current phone book regulations do not allow photos or drawings of entertainers, so pictures of lingerie, high heels, hotel rooms, champagne glasses and other seductive imagery are featured, including fetishized images such as oriental-style

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5 LVMC 6.57.110 and CCC 6.140.140
fans and dragons, university campuses and dorm rooms, and even a medical exam room.

All of the other forms of advertising feature nude or scantily clad female and male entertainers. Ads use suggestive terminology that may lead customers to believe sex is for sale. Phrases such as “full service,” and “satisfaction guaranteed” are used in the majority of ads, and flyers, cards and internet advertising are even more risqué, using phrases such as, “I’ll cum to your room,” and “It’s legal in Las Vegas.” The latter statement is true, as outcall entertainment is legal in Las Vegas, but tourists may mistakenly believe that the statement refers to the legality of prostitution.

Customers call the numbers listed in the ads and are connected to a phone girl who collects the customer’s contact information, makes a sales pitch, and dispatches an entertainer to strip for the customer. If the customer requests an act of prostitution, the phone girl will always let him know that prostitution is illegal in Clark County, but that she can send him a beautiful girl or handsome guy for the purposes of nude entertainment. If he insists that he is only interested in prostitution, however, she must hang up on him. Outcall services will try to keep a customer who does not understand the laws in Nevada, and explain that they can accommodate his desires to a point, but one of the reasons that the county has been so unsuccessful in their attempts to shut down escort services is that phone girls are trained never to solicit a customer or accept a customer’s solicitation, and to hang up if he is unreasonably persistent and does not agree to simply accept nude entertainment.
*Sweethearts and Playmates*

While gathering data for this thesis, I worked for two of the top five outcall entertainment agencies in Clark County, which I will refer to as Sweethearts and Playmates. Both agencies were physically located in multi-room office suites near the Las Vegas strip, like all of the major outcall agencies in Clark County. Sweethearts was located in a commercial office building near a shopping center and Playmates was located in a commercial/industrial complex in an industrial neighborhood.

The offices each consisted of seven to nine rooms, including phone rooms, managers’ offices, record-keeping rooms, computer rooms, and supply rooms. In addition, the office at Sweethearts had a kitchen, a security room and a training room, while the office at Playmates had a small employee restroom. The main room in each office was the phone room, where the phone girls sat and answered incoming calls and the dancers dropped off money after each appointment. Each phone room had four desks with a switchboard-style phone on each desk. The phones had approximately 50 separate telephone lines on them, and each line was advertised with the name of a different agency or supposedly independent entertainer. Each phone line was marked so that the office staff immediately knew which ad a customer was calling on every time the phone rang.

The phone rooms also had safes in them, which were bolted into the ground, with a slot for cash to be dropped in. Workers did not know the combinations to the safes.

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6 Due to widespread customer dissatisfaction with agency policies and procedures, a large percentage of agency ads were written to mislead customers into believing that they were placed by independent entertainers.
and we were encouraged to think of the safes as bottomless holes: once money was dropped in it ceased to exist. If a phone girl’s tip was dropped into the safe, either by accident or because of a lack of change, it would not be refunded.

The offices were both completely wired with audiovisual surveillance, as are all major outcall agencies in the Las Vegas area. At both agencies, the focus of the cameras and microphones was the phone room, since both types of assets that could be stolen from the company, information and cash, came directly into that room. Customers’ names and locations were written on legal pads that were provided by the agencies. Staff members were never allowed to remove pads from the office. Pads were reviewed, page by page, by management during every shift. At Sweethearts, the used pads were filed in a locked office. At Playmates, the pages were shredded after the managers reviewed them.

At Sweethearts, the procedure for allowing an employee, dancer, or any other person into the office involved listening for the outside doorbell, buzzing only known persons into the building and ensuring that they were not accompanied by any other persons by viewing the outside security camera, waiting for the individual in question to ring the inside doorbell, rechecking their identity on the indoor security camera, and buzzing them into the office. At Playmates, dancers were only allowed into the office when they filled out their applications. Dancers dropped the agency fees they collected through a slot in the door. The same slot was used to pay food delivery people, who were instructed to leave deliveries outside on the sidewalk. After they walked away, a phone girl would request permission to open the door and the
dispatcher would watch the security monitor while the phone girl brought in the food. The same procedure was followed whenever phone girls entered and left the building at the beginning and end of their shift, or when a dancer had to enter the office for a specific reason.

The policies and procedures at the two agencies were almost identical and both agencies took advantage of their workers. Yet Sweethearts had very high turnover in phone girls and dancers, and a reputation as a bad agency to work for, while turnover was significantly lower at Playmates, particularly for dancers. This was due more to differences in management style than better working conditions. In addition, Playmates was a busier agency, and there was more potential for profit for phone girls and entertainers.

In addition, the dispatchers at Playmates made no effort to hire African American entertainers, and many of the new dancers at Playmates had been referred by current of former employees. In contrast, Sweethearts recruited dancers through the use of radio and newspaper ads, a method which attracted inexperienced dancers, and dancers who did not have many connections in the industry. Black dancers frequently signed up with the company, only to leave after a few weeks because they were unable to earn any money.

As a result, over half of the available dancers on Sweetheart’s list, which held around 150-200 female and 50 male dancers at any given time, were African American. Approximately 30-35% were Caucasian, 5-10% were Latinas, and fewer than 5% were Asian. Around 85% of the 125-150 dancers who worked for
Playmates were Caucasian. Another 10% were Asian, and the remaining 5% was split fairly evenly between African Americans and Latinas.

Overview

In the remainder of this thesis, I will explore the understudied outcall industry in Clark County, Nevada. In chapter 2, I will review the literature on the sex industry, including the scant literature on the outcall industry. I will focus on the contributions that radical feminism, socialist feminism, sex radical feminism, and Black feminism have made to the study of sex work, and also review the methodologies used in the sex work literature, focusing on outcall industry research and recent ethnographic studies of the sex industry.

In chapter 3, I will discuss my method of data collection, explaining how I gained entrée to and observed two of the top five outcall agencies in Clark County. I will describe how and why I chose ethnography as my research method, discuss various possible research roles that ethnographers can take, and explain my reasons for choosing full participation as well as a covert strategy for accessing the research setting.

In chapter 4, I will describe a typical call, outline the organizational structure of the agencies I observed, and explain in more detail the specifics of each role in the agency setting: phone girl, entertainer, manager, customer, and owner. I will also discuss the contingent nature of the sex industry labor force and describe the employment statuses and compensation structure used at each agency.
In chapter 5, I will discuss labor and management issues, including the illegal and unethical labor practices that are common in the outcall industry, and the role conflict inherent in the phone girl role. I will also discuss the response of agency owners and managers to the prevalence of theft in the industry and explain some differences between the management styles at Sweethearts and Playmates. I will conclude this chapter by answering two of my research questions, focusing on what happens when sex workers do not have control over their own sexual labor, and explaining how these difficulties are enhanced by the social and legal history of outcall entertainment in Clark County.

In chapter 6, I will focus on race, class and gender issues in the outcall entertainment industry, including discrimination, and economic concerns. I will end the chapter by answering my three remaining research questions, discussing how race and ethnicity are commodified, fetishized, and/or nullified through racial discourse; how race and class affect perceptions of attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to violence, money-making potential, and class mobility; and what the effects of these perceptions are.

Lastly, in chapter 7, I will present my conclusions and policy recommendations, which include investigating labor violations at outcall agencies and enforcing existing labor laws, decriminalizing prostitution in Clark County, and calling for social change to reduce the racism, classism, sexism and whore stigma” (Pheterson 1996) experienced by outcall agency workers. I will also suggest areas where further research is warranted.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review the academic literature on sex work. Scholarly attention to sex work first came from a deviance perspective, which studied sex work as a practice that violates social norms. I will start by giving a brief review of this literature. The bulk of the chapter will review the feminist literature on the sex industry, which has provided the most analysis in recent years. I will focus on four feminist perspectives on sex work: radical feminism, socialist feminism, sex radical feminism, and Black feminism. I will then review the scant literature on outcall entertainment, and conclude by reviewing the methods used in previous sex industry research, focusing on sex work ethnographies.

Sex Industry Research from a Deviance Perspective

There has been a long tradition of non-feminist research on the sex industry that studies sex work from a deviance perspective and pathologizes sex workers on moral, psychological and medical bases. This tradition began with the work of Parent-Duchâtelet, the first scholar to use the methods of behavioral and social sciences to research sexual issues. Parent-Duchâtelet’s research was groundbreaking, in that it represented the beginning of a shift from religious analyses of prostitutes as sinners to scientific analyses of prostitution that incorporated psychological, sociological and
economic explanations for women’s entrance into prostitution (Parent-Duchâtelelet 1836, cited in Bullough and Bullough 1998:31-32; Davis 1937; Ellis 1936; Sanger 1858).

However, Parent-Duchâtelelet’s stated view that his experience as a sanitation researcher, handling filth in the sewers of Paris, prepared him to study the world of prostitution reveals his moralistic bias. After analyzing the physical and social characteristics of the prostitutes in his study, Parent-Duchâtelelet found that prostitutes do not differ physically from other women, and that, for most, prostitution is a temporary occupation entered out of financial necessity. Yet, elsewhere in his report, he ignored his own empirical findings and described genital, vocal, and other physical characteristics that he felt distinguished prostitutes from “virtuous” women. He also asserted that women are drawn to prostitution due to their own laziness (Parent-Duchâtelelet 1836, cited in Bell 1994:47-50).

This tradition has been continued in modern non-feminist research on prostitution, with its focus on prostitution as a public health concern, with the added implication of prostitution as a public nuisance (for example, see Nahmias 1989). A recent content analysis of an online database of citations and abstracts shows that 70% of articles about prostitution published in psychology journals between 1992 and 1996 are about HIV and STD transmission, with a focus on prostitutes as vectors, rather than receptors, of disease (Farley and Kelly 2000).

Current deviance-based sex industry studies mirror early sex research in three important ways (see critiques of this literature by Bullough and Bullough 1998; Earls
and David 1989). One, sex workers are essentialized as deviant when researchers design studies to find common traits, such as early drug use or early intercourse, that distinguish sex workers from non sex workers (for example, see Potterat et al. 1998; Silbert and Pines 1983; Silbert and Pines 1981). This is more sophisticated than Parent-Duchâtelet’s hypothesis that prostitutes in Paris have different physical characteristics than other women, but it follows from the same logic. Two, the perspective of sex workers was almost entirely absent from classical analyses of the sex industry and this continues to be the case in deviance studies of sex work. Regardless of whether researchers present themselves as sympathetic to prostitutes’ needs, the focus of the research is on sex workers as either passive victims of abuse or active vectors of disease (for example, see Kanouse et al. 1999). Sex workers are not allowed any agency and their voices are never heard. Three, studies focus on low class sex workers and extrapolate results to all sex workers. Parent-Duchâtelet studied poor registered prostitutes, rather than the courtesans of his era. Modern sex industry researchers focus almost exclusively on domestic streetwalkers and impoverished prostitutes in third world nations, sampling from arrest victims, drug addicts, and clients of social service agencies (for example, see Potterat et al. 1990; Centers for Disease Control 1987; Weisberg 1985; Davis 1971). For a methodological critique of this last issue, see Earls and David (1989) and Pheterson (1990).

While the deviance perspective has essentialized sex workers as deviant women (and men), feminism has moved beyond this perspective, first by introducing the concept of patriarchy, or gender oppression, then by integrating analyses of class,
race, and ethnicity. However, this has not been a seamless transition. Feminists with differing viewpoints have been strongly opposed to accepting arguments from opposing camps. First wave feminists opposed prostitution vehemently, and while their campaigns were not successful — actually worsening conditions for the prostitutes they were trying to ‘save’ — the abolitionist approach to prostitution politics is still advocated by many schools of contemporary feminist thought.

First Wave Feminist Responses to Prostitution

The campaign against male control over innocent women’s sexuality was a major focus of the early feminist movement. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, feminists and other reformers in Great Britain became concerned with the problem of prostitution as part of their fight against male vice. They focused attention on the alleged trafficking of English girls to continental Europe. By 1910, the panic had spread to the United States, and the Mann Act was passed to prevent the trafficking of American women across state lines. However, it is now generally accepted that the “White slave” trade was not a significant problem. Most of the women who entered prostitution did so due to economic concerns rather than through deception or coercion by procurers. (Rubin 1992; Dubois and Gordon 1983; Walkowitz 1983; Walkowitz 1980; Bristow 1977).

Feminist historians Dubois and Gordon (1983) criticize the early feminists’ refusal to question the idea that women were sexually powerless against men. By exaggerating the extent to which prostitution was explicitly coercive, feminist reformers denied the prostitutes any agency. This was partly because the fight against
prostitution was largely symbolic, signifying the fight against women's oppression and the frustration feminists felt with their own lives. According to DuBois and Gordon, "The class nature of American society encouraged these middle-class feminists to conduct their challenge to the double standard through other women's lives, and to focus their anger on men other than their own husbands and fathers (1983:15)."

In the following section, I would like to present the viewpoint of the radical feminists, who added an analysis of patriarchy to the prostitution debate, although their perspective is very clearly derived from first wave feminist work in opposition to prostitution.

Radical Feminist Perspectives on the Sex Industry

During the late 1970s, radical feminists developed theories of prostitution that mirrored nineteenth-century feminist thought on the subject. Kathleen Barry's work illustrates this viewpoint. In 1979, Barry wrote Female Sexual Slavery, which she describes as an effort "to integrate the violation of women by prostitution into the feminist struggle" (1995:9). Her more recent work, The Prostitution of Sexuality, developed out of Barry's efforts to publish an updated version of Female Sexual Slavery.

In Female Sexual Slavery, Barry argues that prostitution "is the cornerstone of all sexual exploitation" (1995:9). She decided to investigate the "most severe, global, institutionalized, and crystallized forms" of sexual power as a way to mobilize feminists against the class condition of women dominated and oppressed by male sexual power.
Her belief that “sex is power over all women” led her to the realization that the separation of whores and women was “utterly false, a patriarchal lie” (1995:9-10). In *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, Barry shifts her focus from the way that sexual power is deployed in prostitution to the way that women’s subordination to men has been constructed on a model of prostitution. She describes sexual exploitation as “the base from which discrimination against women is constructed and enacted” (1995:11).

Radical feminists who follow this argument hold commercial sexual transactions between consenting adults responsible for child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and rape (Barry 1995; MacKinnon 1993; Dworkin 1987; Barry 1979).

Barry fails to acknowledge that “sex” is a historical construct. By placing sex as we understand it as the cause and discrimination against women as the effect, Barry reveals the sexual essentialism inherent in her argument.

Barry describes four stages of dehumanization that are normalized in prostitution and harm all women: Distancing, Disengagement, Dissociation, and Disembodiment (or Dissemblance).

The first stage is distancing, whereby prostitute women “separate their sense of themselves – their own human, personal identity – from the act of prostitution” (Barry 1995:30). As examples, she cites geographic relocation and the use of a stage name while participating in sex work. Barry then dismisses the idea that these actions are simply, or primarily, a reaction to the social location of contemporary prostitution. She claims that if prostitute women are encouraged, or even allowed, to reject these distancing strategies due to increasing social acceptance of their work, the
damage of prostitution will be intensified, because the women will then be incorporating the knowledge of themselves as socially acceptable sexual objects into their identities (1995:31).

For Barry, distancing sets the stage for disengagement, the practice of establishing emotional distance from the sex act being performed. She cites respondents in studies of prostitution, who say things like, “I’ve taught myself to switch off...I don’t give a damn, as long as there’s money, it doesn’t have anything to do with feelings” (1995:31-32). Barry’s argument is that this is an explicitly female strategy used to give the worker emotional distance from the experience of sexual disempowerment in prostitution.

Barry’s third stage of dehumanization is dissociation. Even though the prostitute is disengaged from her work, she is expected to act as if she is engaged with the customer and the sex act itself.

The final stage of dehumanization for Barry is disembodiment and dissembling, where the prostitute constructs a disembodied self to protect herself from the harm caused by prostitution, including the harm caused by the first three stages of dehumanization. This disembodied self is characterized by the prostitute’s attempt to distinguish between her true emotions, which she must protect from the customer, and the semblance of emotion, which she must project to the customer. This is further complicated because it is possible to “actually feel sexual [during paid sex] because one has inadvertently sexually responded” (Barry 1995:35). Barry remarks,
"That women respond in the sexual acts that dehumanize them is testimony to the patriarchal construction of normal sexuality" (1995:35).

According to Barry, through this process of dehumanization, women become interchangeable with blow-up sex dolls differentiated only by their response to the sex acts they are performing. However, Barry claims that libertarians and sex radical feminists would have us believe that prostitution is an acceptable social institution, and a freely chosen occupation, due simply to the occasional "inadvertent sexual response" of a prostitute to a customer. "Response is the differentiating factor, because consistent with legalistic values of liberalism with the compulsive focus on will, response is considered an indicator of choice" (Barry 1995:35).

Studies of sex work from the radical feminist perspective are the first that introduce the concept of patriarchy. Barry claims that prostitution is the quintessence of male sexual power over women, and that this sexual power is the cause of all other forms of sexist oppression of women. In doing so, she essentializes sex and assumes that gender is the only dynamic that can be used to explain oppression in the sex industry. Furthermore, her four stages of dehumanization, which she claims occur in sex work exclusively, can easily be generalized to other forms of wage labor, especially service labor and industrialized labor, in a capitalist economy.\(^7\) She also focuses on third world cases of extreme exploitation of sex workers without

\(^7\) See Hochschild (1983) for an analysis of the emotional labor inherent in non-sexual service jobs involving customer contact.
analyzing the economic and racial factors affecting women and children in those countries.

In the next section, I would like to introduce the work of Gayle Rubin, who offers a critique of radical feminist analyses of sexuality. Her work was fundamental to the development of sex radical feminism, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Interlude: Thinking Sex

Rubin (1992) calls for a truly radical theory of sex. She argues that sexuality and sexual oppression ought to be understood as analytically distinct from gender and patriarchy. According to Rubin, conflicts over the morality of sexual practices are deeply symbolic. “Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity” (Rubin 1992:4).

During certain historical periods, these disputes escalate into moral panics. Moral panics occur when a society’s broad and unspecified concerns and misapprehensions crystallize and are displaced onto a social group that is then demonized as a menace to societal values and interests through stylized and stereotypical depictions by religious leaders, politicians, and the mass media.8

Periods of moral panic “recodify the relations of sexuality… leav[ing] a residue in the form of laws, social practices and ideologies which then affect the way that

sexuality is experienced long after the immediate conflicts have faded" (1992:8). One contemporary example is the AIDS panic that erupted in the 1980s, leaving a residue of laws and attitudes regarding sex workers in contemporary America. Prostitutes are perceived and represented by the media, the public and some academics as vectors of disease, spreading AIDS to their clients and their clients’ partners and children (for example, see Nahmias 1989).

The long-term impact of moral panics and the legal and social repression that emerges from such panics make it necessary to develop a radical theory of sexuality that “identifies, describes, explains and denounces erotic injustice and sexual oppression” (Rubin, 1992:9). Rubin (1992) identifies six assumptions ingrained in Western sexual thought that hinder the development of such a theory: sexual essentialism, sex negativity, the fallacy of the misplaced scale, the hierarchal valuation of sex acts, the domino theory of sexual peril, and the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation (p. 11).

*Six Axioms of Western Sexual Thought*

In her argument for a radical theory of sexuality that transcends these six features of contemporary sexual thought, Rubin challenges the assumption that feminism, the theory of gender oppression, is also adequate as a theory of sexual oppression. Women and men have been oppressed because of their sexual conduct and identities. The two issues should not be conflated simply because some of these groups are doubly oppressed due to their low status on both the gender and sexuality hierarchies. While the prostitute body has been explicitly written as female in cultural, academic
and legal texts, prostitutes as a group comprise female, male, and transgendered individuals. Moreover, the oppression that prostitutes experience cannot be reduced to simple gender oppression. Prostitutes are oppressed, not only as women, but also as deviants, criminals, and perceived vectors of disease.

*Sexual essentialism.* Sexual essentialism is the idea that human beings possess a natural sexuality that resides in their individual psyches or glands. This sexuality is a-historical and shapes, rather than being shaped by, social life and institutions. This idea has remained largely unchallenged in classical sexology due to the prevalence of medical, psychiatric and psychological models in that field.

*Sex negativity.* Sex negative thinking maintains that sexuality is dangerous, sinful and destructive. Unlike other activities, sex needs a redemptive *raison d'être*, such as procreation, in order to be legitimate. Other biological imperatives, such as the consumption of food for energy, can be harmlessly enjoyed for their own sake. However, sexual activity must always be justified. Sex in prostitution is purely recreational, and is therefore seen as unjustifiable.

*The fallacy of the misplaced scale.* This fallacy is responsible for the importance accorded to sex in our culture. Sex is always seen as a special case, which accounts for the idea that a woman who sells sex is ‘selling herself’ in a way that other laborers are not. Differences in sexual tastes or values are viewed with an anxiety that does not accompany differences in culinary or sartorial preferences.

*The hierarchical system of sexual value.* This system ranks sexual acts and rewards those who restrict their sexual behavior to the most privileged acts. Those individuals
whose behaviors fall lower in the hierarchy are punished with social stigma and legal sanctions. The original sexual hierarchy placed reproductive marital heterosexuality at the top, with commercial sex near the very bottom, above only sex between children and adults. However, the new politics of radical feminism have moved monogamous, non-kinky, lesbian sexuality to the top of the hierarchy.

The lack of a concept of benign sexual variation. In order to be non-repressive (in the political sense) and non-coercive, sexuality must be freely chosen, which is impossible without a concept of benign sexual variation. When one form of sexuality is imposed as the only safe or acceptable form of sexual expression, a hierarchy of sexualities is inevitable. Variation is seen as acceptable and even desired in cuisine, literature and fashion. We do not have to enjoy a sexual act in order to recognize that others may prefer that activity to those that we find enjoyable. It is dangerous to assume that this difference signifies a deficiency on either side.

The domino model of sexual peril. This model assumes that the sexual hierarchy is a slippery slope. Legal and ethical systems of sexual judgment draw a line between valued and devalued sexual conduct. Conduct that falls on the wrong side of the line may or may not be viewed as intrinsically dangerous, but it is always assumed to lead to behaviors that are further down in the hierarchy. Furthermore, only the sexualities on the proper side of the line allow for moral complexities. For instance, monogamous relationships can be abusive or loving, healing or destructive, but commercial sex is intrinsically harmful and abusive.
The Emergent Middle of Feminist Sex Theory

According to Rubin, the danger does not lie only in the full acceptance of these six sexual myths that are reproduced in radical feminist theories of sexuality. Rubin (1992) also worries about the “emergent middle” (p. 30) in the feminist sexuality debates, contemporary feminists who marginalize the sex radical viewpoint, depicting the sex radical feminists and the radical feminists as equally extremist. “Whenever there is polarization, there is an unhappy tendency to think the truth lies somewhere in between” (Rubin, 1992:29).

This position allows for more freedom of sexual expression than the radical feminist position. Not all sex is seen as inherently negative. However, commercial sex and non-mainstream sexual acts are problematized in a way that privileged sexualities are not. Firstly, moderates accuse sex radicals of “not paying enough attention to the meaning, sources, or historical construction of their sexuality” (Rubin, 1992:30). The hypocrisy in this accusation lies in the idea that only unorthodox sexualities should be questioned this closely. Sexual moderates are not willing to attack reproductive, monogamous heterosexuality in the same manner.

Secondly, moderate feminists argue against disapproved sexual practices on the grounds that sexual freedom or oppression cannot be distilled to the issue of consent. Again, this argument is used only against marginalized sexual populations. The argument is frequently made that the conditions under which commercial sex is chosen (economic needs, preexisting social norms, etc.) invalidate the very idea of choice. Rubin acknowledges that structural constraints greatly impede free choice.
regarding sexuality, but she argues against the idea that they coerce anyone towards abnormal sexual choices. “On the contrary, they operate to coerce everyone toward normality” (Rubin, 1992:31). For example, since women are economically disadvantaged in relationship to men, they can use their sexuality for financial gain by allying themselves to one man through marriage or another form of domestic partnership, or they can barter with many men on an hourly basis through overt prostitution or other forms of sex work. Most American women choose the former option, which is the socially acceptable action.

The work of Laurie Shrage and Christine Overall typifies the new “emergent middle” (Rubin 1992:30) of feminist sex theory. Both claim a middle ground for their work, which “suggests a partial resolution of the problem of the apparent conflict among some feminists and sex workers over the value of the work and the right to do it” (Overall, 1992:722) and “recognizes[s] the intellectual coherence and independence of the views of both feminist leaders and prostitute advocates regarding prostitution” (Shrage, 1994b:88). In the next section, I will discuss the work of these two socialist feminists, which focuses on economic class position and labor relations within the sex industry.

Socialist Feminist Accounts of the Sex Industry

Overall and Shrage are ostensibly on opposite sides of the dispute over commercial sexuality, yet neither one fully supports prostitution as a viable profession. In their debates, both examine the relationship of the sex industry to
work and economic exploitation in capitalist societies, and explore the effects of class, in the Marxist sense, on sex workers.

Shrage has argued for the legalization of prostitution (1994b:83-87 and 158-161)\(^9\) (1996), but her more recent work has promoted decriminalization (Shrage 1996). Her stated goal is to deter prostitution without marginalizing or punishing sex workers or their clients (Shrage 1994:158). Overall (1992) takes a similar stance, arguing against prostitution while attempting to “maintain a crucial moral distinction between prostitutes as sex workers and prostitution as a practice and institution” (p. 708).

Neither theorist manages to maintain this distinction, however. Shrage (1989) writes, “Rather than subvert patriarchal ideology, the prostitute’s action’s, and the industry as a whole, serve to perpetuate’ women’s social subordination” (p. 357, quoted in Overall 1992:723). Overall quotes Shrage and then follows the quote with her own injunction, “Thus if, as some sex workers claim, some prostitutes genuinely choose the work they do, then they carry a responsibility for that work: at the very least, to recognize and evaluate its meaning, its implications, and its effects on other women and on themselves” (Overall 1992:723).

In the same article, Overall (1992:710) quotes Rubin (1992) in an attempt to use immanent critique against the sex radicals’ support for sex workers, “A democratic

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\(^9\) Shrage acknowledges that state regulation of prostitution has “subject[d] prostitutes to the arbitrary and paternalistic authority of government officials” (p.159), but she believes, or believed, that a system of regulation can work, as long as it “avoids some of the problems apparent in systems build around publicly licensed public brothels, or in systems built on the public registration of prostitutes” (p.159). While the plan she details has various merits as well as some flaws, my main concern is that, until public opinion about prostitution changes, any attempts to introduce legislation regarding prostitution are vulnerable to conservative co-optation, and even egalitarian legislation is subject to selective enforcement.
morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide” (p. 15). Overall’s point is that prostitution is not always performed in a context of consideration, consent, and pleasure.

However, it should be noted that the next line in Rubin’s (1992) text is, “Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, [emphasis mine] with or without video, should not be ethical concerns” (p. 15). Rubin’s (1992) point is that every category of sexual behavior (commercial sex, homosexuality, reproductive sexuality, etc.) should be “accorded moral complexity” (p. 14). Individual sexual interactions can and should be judged according to the criteria listed above, but the idea that any entire category of behaviors can be judged by the failings of one act or a subset of acts can never be part of a radical theory of sexuality.

Overall lists and then dismisses four possible criticisms of prostitution from a feminist perspective. The first possible objection to prostitution listed by Overall is that prostitution has been a source of physical and psychological danger for women. Prostitutes may be at risk for AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, assault and battery, sexual assault, and psychological abuse. Overall concludes, however that these sources of danger are neither limited to nor intrinsic to prostitution. Prostitutes, like other laborers, experience working conditions that range from abhorrent to “luxurious” (Overall 1992:711).
The presence or absence of coercion is listed next. Overall cites the radical feminist argument that there is no meaningful distinction between free and forced prostitution, since sex workers are coerced into prostitution by economic need and lack of other viable opportunities. Again, though, this argument could be applied to any “other type of paid labor under the limiting and exploitative conditions of capitalism” (Overall, 1992:713) particularly those jobs available to persons with little to no educational, economic or social capital. Overall makes it clear that she does not want to fall into the radical feminist trap of assuming that there are certain sexual practices that are so repugnant that anyone who performs them has been forced, coerced or brainwashed (what Rubin terms the “brainwash theory”). “Women who say they choose to engage in activities that I personally find bizarre or repugnant cannot merely be dismissed as having ‘false consciousness’” (Overall, 1992:713).

Overall’s (1992) third argument regards the “surrender of personal power and control and loss of independence on the part of the women who engage in it” (p. 713). This argument has two parts. Overall claims that prostitutes are often controlled by pimps who limit their autonomy and take the bulk of their earnings. She also states that prostitutes may work very long hours, thereby limiting the amount of available time they can devote to leisure activities, interpersonal relationships, and personal development. She refutes this argument by placing it in the context of waged labor under capitalism. Most workers have less personal time than they want or need, work the hours that are set by their employers, and earn little in relation to the profits that are generated through their labor.
Overall's final potential feminist objection is that sex work is the non-reciprocal sale of intimacy. A satisfactory exchange requires only the customer's sexual pleasure, not the prostitute's. However, Overall recognizes that other seemingly intimate services that have been placed on the marketplace, such as therapeutic massage and psychotherapy involve a similarly one-sided exchange. “Clients do not provide massages for masseuses, nor do they provide therapy to therapists (Overall, 1992).” Like in these service-based occupations, it is only the illusion of intimacy that is for sale in prostitution.

After working her way through these four possible objections to prostitution, Overall admits that many feminist arguments against commercial sex have targeted worst-case scenarios. She explains what is really wrong with prostitution. “What's wrong with prostitution is not that it is the servicing of sexual needs, but, rather, that it is women's servicing of men's sexual needs under capitalist and patriarchal conditions” (Overall 1992:724).

Overall supports this argument in two ways. First, she claims that while other forms of labor are commodified, “these forms of labor can and do exist independently of any form of commercialization or exchange” (Overall, 1992:716). She cites jobs and duties, such as cooking, child care or nursing, which have traditionally been assigned to women, with or without pay. On the other hand, prostitution “is defined in terms of buying and selling” (Overall 1992:716). For Overall, domestic services are still labor if they are unpaid, whereas unpaid sexual interactions become a “sexual event or relationship” (1992:717).
Shrage rejects the semantics in this argument. Citing White's (1990) research on prostitutes in colonial Nairobi, she discusses cases where prostitutes' customers turned into boyfriends or even husbands. "Presumably in such cases sexual activity occurs in the context of ongoing social relationships whose purpose is not primarily individual material gain, and yet at the same time it is culturally constituted as 'work' or a 'service' from which each profits" (Shrage 1994a:68). The sex workers White studied provided domestic labor as well as sexual services to the men before any personal relationship developed, so we can assume that the women continued to cook and clean for their husbands and boyfriends as personal relationships developed as well. This example illustrates the false dichotomy Overall has set up between domestic services and commodified sexuality. Furthermore, one does not have to travel to Africa to find examples of domestic labor performed by women whose living expenses are paid by their husbands' participation in the paid workforce.

Second, Overall (1992) insists, "the inherent asymmetrical economic exchange in sex work, in which some persons sell sexual services to others, provides the context for other forms of asymmetry" (p. 717). She denounces sex work as "a classist, ageist, racist, and sexist industry, in which the disadvantaged sell sexual services to those who are more privileged" (1992:717). She goes on to claim that, unlike other gendered and exploitative service industries where the disadvantaged sell services to the relatively privileged, such as office work and domestic labor, sex work is irreversible and valueless. Overall (1992) explains this by stating:
According to the prevailing division of labor, then, sexual service, like nurturing and domestic work, is gendered: it is part of the work that is primarily allotted to women for the benefit of men. But though nurturing and domestic work is mostly performed by women for men, it is also work that seems to be what I shall call “reversible.” That is, there is nothing in the nature of the work itself, insofar as we can separate it from its working conditions, that would prevent it from being performed by men for men, by women for women, or, most significantly, by men for women. Moreover, the labor of office workers, sales clerks, cooks, cleaners, and child care workers has a value independent of the conditions of sexual and economic inequality under which it is done, and much of it would still be socially necessary in a postcapitalist, postpatriarchal world. (P. 718)

But there are types of sex work where the disadvantaged purchase sexual services from the more privileged and other types where the clients are disadvantaged on some axes and the workers are disadvantaged on others. Shrage (1994a; 1994b), again citing White’s (1990) research on sex workers in colonial Nairobi, presents the case of petty-bourgeois women who sold sex and provided domestic labor to the men who rented accommodations from them. According to Shrage (1994a), “Like small-scale capitalists, these prostitutes charged more for their wares than it cost to produce them” (p. 567). On the other hand, their clients were proletarian men, that is to say, wage laborers. Both the customers and the sex workers were part of the same colonized population, but while the men may have had the advantage of gender privilege, the women held a clear economic advantage.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the nature of prostitution that would prevent it from being performed by men for women. Indeed, while it is far more common for
sex work to be performed by women for men (and by men for other men), there are male (and female) sex workers who work primarily with female clients.

Shrage (1994a) refutes Overall's claim that "sex work is an inherently unequal practice defined by the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy" (1992:724). According to Shrage (1996), "Many on the left want to believe that prostitution would not exist or would not be common or tolerated in a world free of economic, gender, and sexual exploitation" (p. 41). However, for Shrage, this type of abstract speculation is useless. Prostitution is not a universal cultural practice with a clearly traceable historical background. Shrage (1994a) is "seeking, like Overall, to improve the socialist feminist account of prostitution" (p. 569). However, she wishes to "develop a socially contextualized and comparative account" that does not "seek the universal causes of sex work" or "presuppose the universal meaning of sex" (Shrage 1994a:569). Rather, this account should "seek to understand how the nature and meaning of particular sexual behaviors vary in relation to different cultural contexts," "acknowledge the fiction of treating prostitution as an isolable phenomenon possessing a single transcultural meaning," and "recognize that while the meaning of sex work in our society is determined by sexist, classist, and racist ideologies, in other contexts its meaning may be determined by dominant social ideologies that are not sexist, classist, and racist at all, or at least not in the same way as ours" (Shrage 1994a:569). Also, this socialist feminist account should not just assume that sex work would disappear in a postcapitalist, postpatriarchal world. "A socialist feminist need
not treat sex work as a special, and more egregious, case of capitalist exploitation – despite our own cultural sensibilities” (Shrage 1994a:569).

Shrage (1996) then admits that although feminists have opposed the criminalization of prostitution, there has been no real feminist movement to change the laws that punish prostitutes for their involvement in the illegal sex trade. Undoubtedly, feminists have worked harder to oppose sex businesses, criminalize pornography and other forms of sexual expression, and create civil ordinances to further restrict the sex industry than they have to decriminalize prostitution. According to Shrage, this is due to feminists’ enduring ambivalence about the issue. Most feminists, including Shrage, are still uncomfortable with the idea of prostitution. Many feminists have been concerned that decriminalization will lead to higher levels of prostitution and more abuses within the industry.

However, Shrage states, for an industry to be properly regulated, it must operate legally:

Such businesses would not be allowed to treat workers like slaves, hire underage workers, deprive them of compensation for which they contracted, or expose them to unnecessary risks. The businesses could be required to enforce health and safety codes, provide workers with minimum income and health insurance, and allow them to form collectives to negotiate for improved working conditions, compensation, and benefits. (1996:42)

This is a key issue in the analysis of the outcall industry in Clark County, which is a legal industry that is not properly regulated, due to the public perception of outcall as a front for illegal prostitution. Since legislators and law enforcement agents are only concerned with entrapping illegal prostitutes working as outcall entertainers,
labor violations are rampant. As independent contractors, entertainers and phone girls at outcall entertainment agencies are part of the contingent workforce (Parker 1994; Belous 1989). Previous studies of part-time, temporary, and subcontracted employees show detriments to contingent employees such as employment uncertainty, inability to work as many hours as desired, lower wages, fewer employee benefits, fewer advancement opportunities, and a higher level of boring or unsafe assignments compared to core employees (Parker 1994; Belous 1989). The situation at outcall agencies is perhaps more extreme, as my analysis in chapter 5 will indicate, due to a total lack of labor law enforcement.

Shrage's socialist feminist account analyses two important issues facing sex workers under capitalism: current restrictive laws that criminalize the actions of sex workers, particularly prostitutes, and a lack of labor regulations to protect sex workers. In addition, Shrage addresses the multicultural, fragmented nature of contemporary sex work. The next faction of feminists I will discuss, the sex radicals, has begun conducting empirical research to investigate how race, socioeconomic status, and relation to the means of production affect sex workers' experiences in the sex industry (Hausbeck and Brents 2000; Hohmann 1998; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; McElroy 1998; Chapkis 1997).

Sex Radical Sex Industry Research

Sex radical feminists realize that the restrictions that have been placed on women's sexuality are an integral part of gender oppression, and view radical feminists' attempts to further restrict human sexuality as misguided. Radical feminists
believe that one's sexuality is an inalienable part of one's self. With her research into the labor that sex workers perform, Chapkis (1997) refutes the sexual essentialism underlying this claim. Chapkis refers to sociology of emotion literature that denaturalizes emotion.

The insight that emotion is always already social -- and thus can be performed, created, objectified, and exchanged -- challenges its characterization as uniquely unalienable. (Chapkis, 1997:72)

She cites Hochschild's research on emotional labor. Emotional labor is defined by Hochschild (1983) as work that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7).

Once we accept that our sexuality is culturally defined, we see that it can be sold without requiring the sale of the self. The emotional labor performed by sex workers becomes no more – or less – problematic than the emotional labor performed by flight attendants. And, as Chapkis (1997) notes, the majority of the flight attendants that Hochschild studied felt positively transformed by the effects of doing emotional labor, "Emotion was no longer something that simply happened to them, they felt practiced in also creating and controlling it" (p. 75).

Chapkis also makes the point that "the conception of sex as inalienable pathologizes sex workers who have successfully distanced themselves from their work, and thereby deprives them of professional pride in what Hochschild describes as the most effective strategy [for avoiding burnout and guilt] on the job." (1997:79)

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As individuals, sex workers and former sex workers have had positive and negative experiences in the sex industries. According to Chapkis, “the source of those differences may lie less in the ‘nature’ of erotic labor than in the social location of the worker performing it and the conditions under which the work takes place” (1997:98). Chapkis identifies four factors that can affect a woman’s experience in the sex industry: third party control of labor, socioeconomic status, cultural attitudes about sex work, and position within social hierarchies such as race and age.

**Third Party Control of Labor**

Owners, managers and pimps regulate which clients a sex worker sees, what acts she performs, and how much is charged, as well as what she wears and what hours she works. Jo Doezema, a Dutch prostitute and activist, reflects on problems caused by the inability of brothel and escort prostitutes who work for third parties to negotiate directly with their clients:

> You can’t say in the beginning, “If you want this, this, and this, it’s going to cost this much, and this I don’t do”... I’ve worked in some private houses where the men pay fl. 100\(^{10}\), the women get half, and the clients expect to come twice. Unbelievable. I did escort work for awhile, too, but escort is only a little better than clubs... You have no sense of the client when you agree to go out on a job. You have to trust the escort bureau that they aren’t sending you into a dangerous situation, and they are so unscrupulous. They don’t care about you. I had them send me out to a guy who was really drunk... (Chapkis 1997:119-120)

In contrast, Terry, an independent call girl working in San Francisco reports:

\(^{10}\) Approximately US $50, leaving the prostitute with approximately US $25.
One of the reasons I think I can enjoy my work, is because I carefully screen my clients. I have no tolerance for any assholes... They have to show me the proper respect. I deserve that respect. If they don't think so, then they should keep their cock in their pants and their money in their pocket. (Chapkis 1997:100)

Chapkis notes that a shift in control from worker to manager can change the sex workplace and restrict the rights of sex workers, but also states that “self-employed workers face a different set of challenges in establishing control over clients and determining the limits of the erotic transaction” (1997:99).

Socio-Economic Status

Chapkis states that socio-economic status is the most important limitation on sex workers’ abilities to set boundaries in their work. Independent sex workers do not have an employer or pimp forcing them to see customers they are not comfortable with, or engage in practices that are unhealthy, or that they do not enjoy. However, sex workers who are living in poverty may stretch their own boundaries in order to make enough money to survive. Licia Brussa, who works on an educational project for migrant prostitutes in Amsterdam, states:

In general, migrant prostitutes do all work with condoms. But in really tight times, during the winter for example, the pressure is on to take more risks. (Chapkis 1997:99)

In contrast, upper class sex workers can avoid clients, situations, and activities that make them uncomfortable. These workers are also able to pursue other professional or academic interests, either while working in the sex industry, or by saving money while engaged in sex work and then transitioning into other employment.
According to call girl and author Carol Queen, the majority of the women at her level of sex work are able to support themselves through part time work:

A lot of women in my circle are graduate students, law students, or women who have “straight” jobs that they supplement with work as prostitutes. I don’t know too many women who are working full time at our level. And one of the reasons that is true is we don’t have to work full time to make ends meet. (Chapkis 1997:101)

By screening their clients, middle class and upper class sex workers are also able to reject clients who have extremely negative attitudes about sex work and the women who work in the sex industry. They are also able to work more discreetly, minimizing public perception that they are sex industry workers. This protects them, in part, from some of the effects of whore stigma, such as violence and the constant threat of arrest.

Cultural Attitudes about Sex Work

Negative cultural attitudes toward prostitution can harm workers in several ways. Clients who have negative feelings towards women in general may view prostitutes as less than human. These attitudes, which Pheterson (1996) labels “whore stigma” are predominantly displayed against female sex workers. Ans, a Dutch woman who worked in window prostitution for a short time, relates a disturbing anecdote:

With my second client on my first day, a condom burst. After that, I couldn’t shake the anxiety for the rest of the time I worked... The worst part of it was that the guy was so fucking unconcerned – he just laughed and said I was a good fuck. I was furious. (Chapkis 1997:116)

Besides showing a complete lack of concern for the well being of the prostitutes that they visit, some clients feel the need to verbally harass or degrade the women.

This is a more common problem for lower-class sex workers, who are doubly
disadvantaged. Marianne, a former street prostitute who works for the Red Thread, discusses the negative attitude she received from some of her clients,

Fl. 50\(^{11}\) was standard, and I never worked below the price. But somehow they always made you feel cheap. Especially after they came, then you were just another dirty heroin whore. You had seen them in a moment of vulnerability so it was like afterward they had to put you in your place. (Chapkis 1997:198)

In addition, prostitutes face stigmatization from the public, from certain sectors of the feminist movement, and even from family and friends. Women who work in the sex industry have to decide if they want to work openly and deal with the stigma of being a whore, or if they prefer to live a lie. Identifying openly as a sex worker can cause myriad practical and personal problems, including difficulty relocating, difficulty finding acceptable housing, and difficulty requesting help from law enforcement.

Sex workers also have to deal with their own internalized whore stigma. Some current and former sex workers are negatively affected by their work because they feel that there is something wrong with what they do. Susanne, an upscale call girl working in Helsinki, discusses her feelings on prostitution:

With some men, I have to close my eyes and think of the money, otherwise I would get up and run out of the room yelling, “Keep your money and get out of here. I don’t want to see you, don’t touch my face.” ... The fact is that I charge a lot. I don’t sell myself, my services, cheap. That’s not any excuse for being in this profession, but I pretend it is. I try to convince myself that I’m not so bad because I charge so much. I have to find something positive in this. (Chapkis 1997:96)

\(^{11}\) Approximately US $25.
Clearly Susanne has very negative feelings about prostitution, even though she is earning a lot of money and can choose her clients, whom she describes as "middle-class men, businessmen, husbands, fathers, people who are afraid of getting caught and are concerned about their health" (Chapkis, 1997:94). Control of one's own sexual labor and a high socio-economic status do not alleviate all of the problems caused by working in a profession that is not accorded any respect.

**Social Hierarchies: Race, Age, Nationality, Physical Appearance**

Chapkis also addresses the issue of various social hierarchies, such as race, age, and physical appearance. Some of the women she interviewed discuss modifying and maintaining their images with plastic surgery, cosmetics and costuming. Others manage their identities through discourse in order to appeal to mainstream consumers. Cheyenne, an African American sex worker, states:

> Over the phone, I describe myself as half Native American and half Black. That way I appeal to the guys who want something "exotic" but want it packaged more like the girl next door. When I just say I'm Black, I get skipped over again and again. Look, I'm not saying I want it to be this way, I'm just telling you what I've had to learn about packaging myself for this market. (Chapkis 1997:105)

In the next section, I would like to address this topic further by focusing on the subject of race, and racism within the sex industry, as discussed in Black feminist literature.

**Black Feminist Thought on Sex Work**

In her book, *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) criticizes the sex industry for perpetuating racist images of Black women as "sexually promiscuous,
potential prostitutes” (p. 174). Furthermore, she criticizes the Black feminist community for their “virtual silence...concerning the participation of far too many Black women in prostitution” (Collins 1990:164). She continues:

Ironically, while the image of African-American women as prostitutes has been aggressively challenged, the reality of African-American women who work as prostitutes remains unexplored. (Collins 1990:164)

Collins is correct in this regard, for in her work and in the work of other prominent Black feminists, the image of Black sex workers that is presented is of “Jezebels” and “hot mommas” who exude an animalistic sexuality and are desired by all men, particularly White men (Collins 1990, Walker 1986, Hansberry 1969). This image, in conjunction with the economic disadvantage experienced by many women of color, may help explain why African-American women are overrepresented in the lower echelons of the sex industry. However, Black women are actually underrepresented in outcall entertainment and in other upper class sectors of the sex industry, such as gentlemen’s clubs.

One reason for this is the perpetuation of racist standards of beauty in our culture. Collins (1990) discusses this concept through a review of African American writers’ work about skin color, facial features, and hair texture, but does not link it to her discussion of sex work. A more in depth discussion of the topic is provided by hooks (1995), who introduces the concept of the color-caste system. The color-caste system rewards lighter skinned African-Americans with greater success in White-dominated American culture. According to hooks (1995), this is a gendered system:
The exploitative and/or oppressive nature of color-caste systems in White supremacist society has always had a gendered component. A mixture of racist and sexist thinking informs the way color-caste hierarchies detrimentally affect the lives of Black females differently than they do Black males. Light skin and long straight hair continue to be traits that define a female as beautiful and desirable in the racist White imagination and in the colonized Black mindset. (P. 127)

This idea has been developed in two articles from *Whores and Other Feminists*, edited by Jill Nagle. In “Showing Up Fully: Women of Color Discuss Sex Work,” six women of color who have worked in various sex industry jobs (including stripping, prostitution and professional domination) discuss racism, monolithic beauty standards, and ethnic identities. Gloria Lockett, former prostitute and executive director of the California Prostitutes Education Project, talks about the way that clients desire and perceive sex workers’ ethnicities:

> When I was working as a prostitute I had a friend who was Black and a prostitute who looked a lot like me – a lot thinner and sort of taller – and she would wear long ponytails, okay? Her hair was shorter than yours but when she worked she wore this long ponytail and they called her Pocahontas. They wanted her to be anything but Black. (Aarens et al, 1997:199-200)

In “Dancing towards Freedom,” Siobhan Brooks discusses her experiences dancing at the Lusty Lady in San Francisco. Specifically, she addresses issues of discrimination in scheduling and wages as an African-American female. According to Brooks (1997), management at the club repeatedly informed her that Black dancers were not scheduled for the more lucrative private booth very often because “customers did not want to pay the extra money to see Black dancers in Private Pleasures” (p. 253). In addition, hourly wages were based on seniority and booth performances, so Black dancers were not eligible for the top tier of hourly wages.
While Brooks felt discriminated against by management, she also noticed that customers did treat her differently than they treated White dancers.

When I first noticed customers not paying attention to me and that I was not being scheduled for the booth — and therefore earning less than my White counterparts — I internalized the notion that I was not as attractive as the other dancers. Like most Black women in this country, I had to fight insecurities about my appearance in the presence of White women, since they are perceived as the ideal beauty standard. (Brooks 1997:253)

Although I have included these last two examples in the section on Black feminism, they exemplify the strengths of that school of thought combined with sex radical feminism. One of the most important aspects of sex radical feminism is that the voices of sex workers are heard.

In the following section, I will briefly review the scant literature on different forms of outcall entertainment. While exotic dancing (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Boles and Garbin 1974), street prostitution (Weinberg, Shaver and Williams 1999; Farley and Barkan 1998; Hoigard and Finstad 1992), illegal brothel prostitution (Heyl 1977) and the Nevada brothel industry (Radeloff 2002; Hausbeck and Brents 2000) have been the focus of various studies, sociological research on outcall entertainment agencies and escort agencies in North America has been limited to three published studies (Foltz 1979, Brock 1998, Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000).

Outcall Industry Research

In its broadest sense, the term “outcall” refers to any form of entertainment where entertainers are sent out to meet clients, rather than meeting them at a fixed
place of business. Therefore, this term can be used to describe the licensed entertainment services that are the focus of this study, as well as illegal escort agencies (Foltz 1979), licensed escort agencies (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000; Brock 1998), and independent outcall entertainers (Seppa and Sharp 2000). The term does not refer to the type of entertainment provided and is equally applicable to situations where the entertainer performs in costume, topless, nude or provides sexual services.

The outcall entertainment industry as it exists in Clark County is characterized by three features: 1) licensed businesses that are fully legal, 2) workers who are clearly informed by the company about the illegality of prostitution, and 3) suggestive, ambiguous advertising that allows customers to believe that sex may be offered for sale. While there has been no research to date that focuses on this form of outcall entertainment, three studies have been made of escort agencies in the United States and Canada that are similar to the outcall agencies in the Las Vegas area.

Two of the three published studies about outcall entertainment focus on the Canadian escort industry. They examine the effects of municipal licensing on the health and well-being of escorts (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000), and the creation of escort services to replace adult businesses that had been shut down due to public pressure (Brock 1998). Both of these studies used multiple methods, combining documentary analysis with qualitative interviews of public officials and sex workers.

Under Canadian law: 1) escort agencies are legal and licensed in some cities12, 2)

escorts can negotiate sexual services privately with clients\textsuperscript{13}, 3) "agencies cannot require escorts to provide sexual services to clients" (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000:440), and 4) "agencies cannot promise clients that particular sexual services, or any sexual services, will be provided" (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000:440).

The third study relied on interviews with one agency owner who the researcher admits lied to her or mislead her about several important topics. Foltz (1979) intended to supplement this data with interviews of escorts who worked for the agency, but the owner refused to provide access to her employees. Foltz eventually interviewed a number of massage parlor and street workers who had previous experience in the escort industry to verify and expand upon the information provided by her key informant. These interviews were obtained using a snowball sampling method.

According to Foltz (1979), at typical escort services in Southwestern City,\textsuperscript{14} 1) the agencies are neither legal nor licensed (p. 113), 2) applicants sign paperwork indicating that they are not associated with law enforcement and that they understand that they will not be engaging in prostitution while working for the agency (p. 116), and 3) after the applicants sign the paperwork and are hired as escorts, agency owners inform them that they are expected to perform sexual acts for money (p. 116).

\textsuperscript{13}Prostitution is legal in Canada, however, the laws regarding solicitation for prostitution are very strict. For an in-depth analysis of the legal status of prostitution in Canada see Brock 1998.

\textsuperscript{14}Foltz describes Southwestern City as "a large metropolitan community with a population of about 1,300,000" during the time of her research, July 1976 to June 1977. According to the U.S. Census Bureau report on the Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places for 1970, Houston had a population of 1,232,802. There is no possibility that Foltz's research referred to Las Vegas, a much smaller town in 1976-1977, which did not make the 1970 list of the 100 Largest Urban Places.
In the same article, Foltz indicates that in other areas of the country, escort agencies instead provide dates with “women who may be taken out in public for an evening of dining, dancing, etc.” (1979:109-110). This is the only mention of this type of escort services in the sociological literature.\(^{15}\)

In an article that touches briefly on outcall entertainment, Ronai and Cross (2002), conducted life history interviews with 14 females and 10 males who had participated in one or more types of striptease: “revues, strip-o-grams, topless/table dancing, and nude dancing” (p. 399). Strip-o-grams, which are performed by outcall dancers, are usually sent by the customer to a friend or relative as a surprise for a birthday or similar celebration. The dancer arrives, often wearing a costume or other revealing outfit, and then performs a striptease for the recipient and his or her guests.

The article does not delve into the differences between dancers who perform outcall strip-o-grams and other types of striptease, and there is no discussion of the agencies where the outcall dancers work. Ronai and Cross (2002) focus on resisting stigma through biographical narratives. Race is therefore used as a way for some dancers to distance themselves from others that they perceive as more deviant. Specifically, White dancers construct narratives about Black and Latino/Latina dancers, stating that minority dancers are more sexual, more aggressive, and more likely to cross legal and ethical boundaries in sex work.

\(^{15}\) This type of escort service may have been more popular in the 1970s, but I am unaware of any similar services currently in operation.
The agencies in all of these studies provide outcall services. However, the laws, policies and customs regulating outcall entertainment vary greatly by location. Of these studies, only the research by Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale (2000) and Brock (1998) focuses on the effects of public policies on sex workers. These studies provide an excellent discussion of the overall stigmatization escorts and outcall entertainers experience at the hands of police, licensing agencies, and escort or outcall agencies. In the following section, I will explore their findings in more detail.

Outcall Industry Policy Studies

The Canadian escort agencies most closely resemble outcall entertainment agencies in Clark County, since agency personnel can neither promise sexual services to clients, nor require escorts to provide sexual services to clients. According to Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale (2000) agency personnel in Canada cannot even indicate to escorts “that they are aware of the sale of sexual services” (p. 441) or they will be subject to federal charges. The same is true for agency personnel in Clark County. The difference lies in the acceptability of sexual services being negotiated between entertainers and customers. In Clark County, where prostitution is illegal, outcall entertainers who negotiate to sell sexual services to their customers are also subject to criminal sanctions. In Canada, escorts may negotiate with clients privately for the sale of sexual services.

According to Brock, prostitution was not an overwhelming concern in Canada
prior to the 1970s. However, due to economic and social factors not directly related to sex work, certain areas of the sex industry, such as indoor prostitution taking place in massage parlors and adult encounter studios, were seen as unacceptable and were heavily raided during the mid- to late-1970s. This forced large numbers of prostitutes onto the street within a very short period of time, creating a moral panic when homeowners and neighborhood associations complained about increased levels of street solicitation in residential areas. The police and the media helped scapegoat prostitutes for problems as diverse as rising rates of property and violent crime, HIV transmission, and neighborhood disturbances, all of which were actually caused by social inequality, changes in the urban landscape, and changes in the world economy.

The problematization of both indoor prostitution taking place in a fixed locale (incall services) and outdoor prostitution (streetwalking) set the stage for outcall escort services to flourish in Canada. Due to the proliferation of escort agencies, some Canadian cities have passed legislation requiring escort services to be licensed.

In their study of the effects of municipal licensing on the health and well-being of escorts, Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale (2000) use a case-study approach to examine the situation in Windsor, Ontario. The licensing requirements in Windsor are similar to those in Clark County. There is a minimum age and applicants with a recent history (defined as two years) of prostitution, drug use, fraud, or violent crime are denied licenses. Names, addresses, phone numbers, and photographs of licensed escorts are kept on file by the agency, the licensing office, and the police. The Windsor bylaw also included requirements supposedly "designed to facilitate police protection of
escorts, the apprehension of customers when they engaged in crimes against escorts, and bylaw enforcement" (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000:440) such as the stipulation that escort services keep records of customer names and locations available for police to inspect.

Escorts initially felt that licensing conveyed three important occupational benefits: increased safety, added legitimacy, and more independence when dealing with escort agencies. Escorts felt that increased police protection, or the threat of increased police protection, might lead to a decrease in high levels of theft, fraud, and violence reported in the local escort industry, as well as a decrease in harassment from police themselves. Increased legitimacy would be beneficial for social as well as financial reasons. One interviewee gave the example that she could now show proof of employment as an escort when she wanted to lease a car (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000:440). Finally, licensing limited the role of the agency to answering customer calls, referring escorts to customers, and following up via telephone for security purposes. Many escorts felt this was necessary since some agencies were pressuring escorts to have sex with clients and making it difficult for escorts to negotiate their rates privately with customers (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000).

However, the authors conclude “that although the potential exists for such policies to enhance the health and well-being of sex workers, as such policies currently operate in Windsor, they are not healthy public policies” (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000:437). For example, policymakers claimed that collecting more information about escorts’ appointments with clients would assist police in protecting
escorts against theft or assault. However, police have not provided additional protection for escorts, and seem unlikely to do so in the future, given the attitude of a high-level law enforcement agent interviewed for this study:

Until these women hit rock bottom and experience hard times first hand they won’t get out. Making it easy for them isn’t helping. It just keeps them in the business. (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000:442)

There have been no ethnographic studies of the outcall entertainment industry published to date. However, there have been a number of ethnographies and autoethnographies of different areas of the sex industry, especially strip clubs, published in recent years (for example, see Frank 2000; Wood 2000; Ronai 1999; Flowers 1998a; Ronai 1998; Ronai and Ellis 1989). In the next section, I will review various methodologies used in previous sex industry research, explain why more ethnographic research is needed in this area, and examine some of the methodological successes and failures addressed in previous sex work ethnographies.

Methodological Review

Researchers studying the sex industry most often adopt outsider, or non-participant roles. Many studies that approach sex work from the deviance perspective have employed quantitative approaches, from classical studies (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Ellis 1936; Parent-Duchâtelet 1836) to contemporary research (Potterat et al. 1998; Kanouse et al. 1999). Quantitative studies, such as large-scale surveys, have also been used by feminist researchers who view sex workers as victims, rather than workers (Farley et al. 1998; Farley and Barkan 1998). However, the methodologies used in these studies have been plagued with problems.
Sampling has been a particularly problematic issue, as most of these deviance and victimization studies have relied on convenience samples. Respondents have generally been selected from populations who by definition fit the model that the researchers' hypotheses are trying to legitimize. Samples have largely been limited to street prostitutes, including those who have contacted service agencies because of their desire to leave the industry, those who have been arrested for prostitution, those who frequent free clinics due to poverty, and those who have simply been approached on streets that are frequented by the most disadvantaged streetwalkers (Farley and Barkan 1998; Potterat et al. 1998; Giobbe 1993; Hoigard and Finstad 1986; for a discussion of sampling problems in prostitution research, see Pheterson 1990; for an article exploring the possibility of using probability sampling techniques to study street prostitutes, see Kanouse et al 1999).

One notable survey of San Francisco street prostitutes that does not fall into either the deviance or the victimization categories examined the differences between the experiences of male, female, and transgender sex workers regarding income, occupational hazards, and sexual enjoyment with clients and partners. The researchers used a structured interview guide and interpreted the results quantitatively using statistical analysis (Weinberg, Shaver, and Williams 1999).

A series of excellent policy studies on the creation and enforcement of laws and regulations regarding sex work in Canada (Gemme and Payment 1992; Gemme 1993; Brock 1998; Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000), the United States (Pearl 1987), and more specifically, Nevada (Radeloff 2002), use multiple methods, including in-depth
interviews of sex workers and public officials, reviews of legislation and court decisions, and analyses of newspaper articles and other archival sources.

Most recent research on the sex industry, however, relies on qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviewing and ethnographic observation by non-participants or peripheral participant-observers who have entered the sex work milieu only for the purpose of gathering data, and who are unfamiliar with the lifestyle and work habits of the research subjects (for example, see Hausbeck and Brents 2000; Chapkis 1997; Barry 1995; Finstad and Hoigard 1992). This research has contributed significantly to the literature on sex work. However, these methodologies can only reveal information about the sex industry that members choose to present to researchers and other outsiders.

Specifically, there is a gap in the literature that can only be filled through covert observation by a complete participant in the sex industry workplace. This is the only method that will illuminate the daily practices and interactions that are unique to specific occupations within the larger sex industry. This research fills part of that gap by investigating the outcall entertainment industry in Clark County, Nevada from the perspective of a complete participant.

**Ethnographic Sex Industry Research**

Several good ethnographies of prostitution have emerged from anthropology over the years. Two recent examples are Nencel’s (2001) *Ethnography and Prostitution in Peru* and Hart’s (1998) *Buying and Selling Power: Anthropological Reflections on Prostitution in Spain*. Another notable ethnography, written from a social work perspective, is
Working Women: The Subterranean World of Street Prostitution by Carmen and Moody (1985). Each of these ethnographers chose a specific sex work locale, grounded in a particular historical moment, described that moment and that locale, and investigated the issues at hand for the sex workers present.

Nencel (2001) focused her research on two groups of prostitutes. The first was a group of older women in their late 30s and 40s, who worked during the daytime on one particular street in a slum in one of the oldest districts in Lima. Due to their age and class position, the women accepted around US $2.50 per client. According to Nencel (2001), this particularly low price places these women into the lowest class of prostitution in Peru:

Nevertheless, some managed to earn at least three times the official minimum wage (US $90 a month); a feat unlikely to be achievable working elsewhere because none of them had completed secondary school and several had not gone further than the first years of primary school. (Nencel 2001:77)

The prostitutes in the second group were younger, ranging in age from 18 to their early 30s, who worked in two locations in a tourist area. The women worked by streetwalking along a plaza, which they alternated with spending time at a particular club where prospective clients could buy them drinks. These women were higher up in the prostitution hierarchy, charging from US $15 to US $50 per client.

Nencel arranged an introduction to the first group of prostitutes through contacts with a religious NGO that did outreach to the prostitutes. She was introduced to the second group by a friend of her male research assistant, who had social contacts with some of the prostitute women who worked in the area. Nencel originally planned to
conduct life history interviews with as many prostitutes as possible. However, she
found that the women did not wish to speak to her on a formal level. They invited
her to socialize, observe, and ask general questions, but only five women allowed her
to complete actual interviews, and of these five interviews, “two of them resembled
interrogations” (Nencel 2001:86).

Due to problems she had imposing her original research design on her subjects,
and issues she faced with untruthfulness and illusion in the women’s lives, and
therefore in their relationship with her, Nencel (2001) states:

It is a usual occurrence to thank the people who wear the label of
research subject because obviously without their help, cooperation and
belief in the research and researcher’s commitment, the researcher
would never have been able to complete the project. However, in this
case I find it difficult to display my gratitude with any enthusiasm. As
will become clear in the course of this book, the word cooperation is
not the most adequate one to describe our relationship.

However, her ethnographic account of the women’s lives is rich with data and
meaning, and the reader is left with the impression that if Nencel would have allowed
herself to simply experience el ambiente\(^\text{16}\) sooner, she would have been able to
uncover even more information. The lives of sex workers are shrouded in secrecy and
direct questioning is not often the best way to gather data. And the deceptions that
frustrated Nencel are an integral part of the sex work environment, and, as such, are a
part of the phenomenon to be studied, rather than a barrier to break through.

\(^{16}\) Literally translated from Spanish, this phrase means “the environment,” but the prostitutes in Lima appear to
use the phrase much as American prostitutes use the expression, “the life,” to mean the world of prostitution.

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Hart’s (1998) study examines power relations in the context of gender and class issues between clients and street prostitutes in a poor, run-down barrio in a coastal Spanish town. Hart completed 15 formal interviews with barrio clients, and spoke informally to about 85 more men who were uncomfortable with the interview process. While she appears to have had a very similar experience as Nencel, her reaction is strikingly different:

[The] specifically tape-recorded interviews provided me with a great deal of useful information. However, they were not entirely worth the considerable energy put into obtaining them, as similar interviews could mostly have been undertaken on a more informal basis with the same persons...

I began to see that I was using the taped interview method as a kind of defensive shield, a shield that represented ‘scientific’ authority. Whilst clients may have been much more at ease without a tape recorder, and may have revealed a great deal more about themselves informally chatting to me at the bar, I wanted to put them in a more formal situation where I was clearly the researcher, authenticated by expensive recording equipment. (Hart 1998:65)

Hart also spent many hours observing and interacting with sex workers and clients in the barrio. Her original introduction to the study population was through a Catholic social welfare agency, but she soon realized that while the introduction itself was invaluable, she would have to distance herself somewhat from the nuns, who were treated with formal respect, if she was going to fit in to the barrio and be allowed participate in the daily activities of sex workers and their clients.

Carmen and Moody (1985) began their fieldwork with New York street prostitutes and massage parlor workers as social service outreach workers. The pair engaged in direct outreach and observation for eight years as founders of the Judson
Church Prostitution Project, which provided medical services, a professional journal for sex workers, and a mobile drop-in center, which was located on a renovated bus that made scheduled stops at areas where sex workers congregated.

While the middle class authors had difficulty gaining entrée into the setting of street-level prostitution, their perseverance paid off, and once a few solid contacts were made, their project took off. Perhaps due to the non-academic focus of the project, Carmen and Moody were able to focus on relating to the women instead of sticking to a rigid plan of action. The data in the book also reflects the depth of the relationships that were forged over such a long fieldwork period.

Like sex industry research in general, most sex work ethnographies, including the three examples I have reviewed here, focus on low-level sex work, in particular street prostitution.

Summary

Radical feminism has shed light on the significance of patriarchy in the sex industry, yet this perspective has essentialized sex and assumed that gender is the only dynamic that can be used to explain oppression in sex work. Socialist feminist perspectives added a focus on labor relations and the position of sex workers in a patriarchal, capitalist society. Sex radical feminists have given more attention to sexual oppression as a separate system, and also have pointed to the importance of honoring the lived experiences of sex workers, including their experiences of socioeconomic class, third party control of labor and whore stigma. Black feminists have focused on racist standards of beauty, discourses of race and ethnicity, and racial discrimination.
An in-depth examination of the outcall industry is needed to determine how all of these issues affect upper-level sex work. However, the research on outcall entertainment is extremely limited, as is the research on middle and upper class sex work in general.

In particular, no research to date has examined the outcall entertainment industry in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. By drawing on the strengths of the feminist perspectives outlined above, I plan to answer five questions about the outcall entertainment industry in Clark County, Nevada. 1) What are the effects of third party control of labor on sex workers and other workers in the outcall setting? 2) How are these effects intensified or mitigated by the specific and complex legal and social position of outcall entertainment in Clark County? 3) What discourses are used to fetishize, commodify and/or nullify race and ethnicity in the research setting? 4) How do race and class affect subjects' perceived attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to violence, money-making potential, and class mobility? 5) How do race and class affect entertainers' and phone girls' actual money-making potential and class mobility?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Due to the secretive nature of the outcall entertainment industry, it is very difficult for researchers and other outsiders to gain access to the owners, employees, and customers of outcall agencies. In the next section, I will explain how I gained entrée to and observed two of the top five outcall agencies in Clark County.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe how and why I chose ethnography as my research method, discuss various possible research roles that ethnographers can take, and explain my reasons for choosing full participation as well as a covert strategy for gaining entrée to the research setting.

Data Collection

I became interested in studying outcall entertainment agencies ethnographically during the summer of 2001, while I was employed as a phone girl for Sweethearts, a large outcall entertainment agency in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. The job was lucrative and, with my experience, easy to procure. Yet it was impossible for me to ignore the importance of the access I had into a world that most sociologists were not familiar with and would not be comfortable in. In addition, I had been frustrated by my lack of success in previous attempts to research the local sex industry using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.
I decided to use my position as a phone girl to covertly observe outcall entertainment agencies from a worker's perspective. In order to further analyze the race, class and labor issues that I had observed at Sweethearts, I applied for and obtained a position as a phone girl for Playmates, another large agency.

*Accessing the Setting*

I applied for both positions by answering employment ads printed in the daily newspaper. In both cases, the fact that I had previous experience working as a phone girl was helpful as a job qualification, but more than anything, my knowledge of the occupational and social norms within the outcall agency setting helped me know how to present myself in a manner that would get me the job.

I did not request permission from either agency owner to observe the agencies for academic purposes. Revealing my status as a researcher, either before or after securing employment as a phone girl, would have compromised my ability to access the research settings.

*Observing the Setting*

I spent 430 hours working in the office at Sweethearts and 390 hours working in the office at Playmates. During my shifts, I made direct contact with customers who called the agencies, spoke informally with other phone girls, and engaged in exchanges and negotiations with entertainers, managers, and agency owners. I also spent many hours socializing with three phone girls in particular who became my friends. During these times, the topics of our discussions varied, however, like most colleagues, we would often return to the subject we had most in common: our work.
It would be difficult to estimate how many hours I spent in the field in this manner, but the data collected this way was invaluable.

In the next section, I would like to discuss the ethnographic approach, specifically the method of covert participant observation, and explain why I believe this is the best method for examining upper-level sex work, such as the outcall entertainment industry.

Method Selection

Due to the interpersonal nature of the data to be collected, quantitative methods would be completely inappropriate for this study. Data was created in the interactions among subjects and between the subjects and the researcher.

Some feminist researchers continue to reject positivism as an aspect of patriarchal thinking that separates the scientist from the phenomenon under study. They repudiate the idea of a social reality "out there" independent of the observer. Rather, they think that social research should be guided by a constructivist framework in which researchers acknowledge that they interpret and define reality. In this context, feminist fieldwork has a special role in upholding a nonpositivist perspective, rebuilding the social sciences and producing new concepts concerning women. (Reinharz 1992:46)

Quantitative methodologies generally rely on assumptions of value-neutrality, objectivity, and ontological truth claims. While some social science research can be carried out using the methods of the natural sciences, these methods would not be

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the most effective in the outcall industry setting for three main reasons. 1) Research subjects can not always be expected to respond truthfully to direct questioning, especially when there is a great deal of social stigma attached to the topic to be studied. This is particularly relevant in the occupational subculture of the sex industry where deceptions are common because it is often in members' best interests to lie about or conceal certain information. 2) Researchers do not always know the right questions to ask, especially given the lack of information about the outcall industry. 3) Subjects don't always understand the questions put to them, especially in studies that use self-administered surveys or interview schedules that are designed to process as many respondents as possible to ensure large enough sample sizes for quantitative analyses.

Even qualitative, in-depth interviews might fail to capture themes that subjects, or the researcher, were unaware of or unwilling to discuss in a research setting. For previous research, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews (Seppa 2000) and used self-administered surveys (Seppa and Sharp 2000) to explore the issue of burnout in legal and illegal sex work. However, I was extremely disappointed with the difficulties I encountered recruiting participants. The superficiality of research results was also a concern with the self-administered surveys. Many of the respondents did not answer all of the questions on the survey, perhaps skipping the questions that they did not fully understand or that they were uncomfortable answering.

Since this study is of a setting that has not been researched in the past, ethnographic methods seemed most appropriate. As a participant, I could observe
the situation and record the most striking or prominent themes. Further research using other methodologies, such as in-depth interviewing, to elicit deeper responses on specific topics highlighted by this preliminary study may be warranted.

In addition, due to the nature of the outcall industry, recruiting participants in an unbiased manner would not be possible using traditional sampling methods. One similar study of workers in a phone sex workplace included a participant observation component, supplemented by qualitative interviews. However, the interview data, which was the only data published in the finished dissertation, was collected from informants who had self-selected themselves for inclusion into the study after reading an ad the researcher had placed in the local sex trade papers (Flowers 1995). 19

In sex industry research, the only way to ensure a representative sample is to participate fully in the operations of the sex workplace. Even then, the sample is only representative of the specific population studied. This research may have implications for the wider sex industry, but my findings are limited to sex workers at large outcall services in Clark Country, Nevada.

Characteristics of Ethnographic Research

Three features characterize ethnographic research: empirical observation, rather than deductive introspection; openness to new data, in contrast to a reliance on pre-existing knowledge; and grounding social facts in their specific field, instead of analyzing data out of context (Basanger and Dodier 1997). Historically,

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19 Flowers was advised by her dissertation committee to suppress the data she collected as a participant observer, due to their discomfort with her use of covert methods and with her status as a sex worker/researcher. This data was later published in book format (1998a). Also see Flowers (1998b) for a discussion of the issues of ethics, censorship and stigma that led to the loss of her data.
ethnographers have followed a naturalistic tradition that focuses on minimizing presuppositions in order to understand subjects' worlds on their own terms, becoming a participant in the subjects' worlds, and representing those worlds faithfully (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). To this end, a variety of methods are used, although participant observation is generally considered the most central to the ethnographic project.

Contemporary ethnography or fieldwork is multimethod research. It usually includes observation, participation, archival analysis, and interviewing, thus combining the assets and weaknesses of each method (Reinharz 1992:46).

Some topics that are particularly appropriate for ethnographic fieldwork are groups or phenomena that have not previously been studied, groups or subcultures that view their worlds very differently from how outsiders view them, and phenomena or interactions that are hidden from public view (Jorgensen 1989). Outcall entertainment agencies, and the people who work for them, fit all three of these criteria.

In the next section, I will summarize some of the potential roles an ethnographer can take, including levels of participation and secrecy. I will then discuss some of the issues inherent in full participation as an employee in the research setting, and the use of a covert strategy for entrée into the research setting.

**Ethnographic Research Roles**

The key feature of participant observation is that the researcher observes and participates directly in the daily lives of the research subjects. One popular typology of roles the researcher can take while collecting data includes: the complete
participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant and the complete observer (Gold 1958; Adler and Adler 1994:379). Some feel that this typology is too rigid, obscuring that the role that the researcher assumes can often change as the research progresses. Jorgensen (1989) prefers to view research roles as varying along a continuum from a marginal, or complete outsider, role to a membership, or complete insider, role.

From the beginning of my fieldwork, my status as a worker made me a complete participant in the office, yet I would only label myself as a complete insider in relation to the phone girl role. Since the outcall agencies are staffed, owned, and patronized by distinct groups with very different priorities, inclusion in one group automatically means exclusion from another.

Another scheme for classifying research roles has been proposed by Mitchell, based on cognitive and affective aspects of the researcher's relationship to the group she is studying. The four roles are: informed-sympathetic, informed-unsympathetic, naïve-sympathetic, and naïve-unsympathetic (1993:14). Researchers may not choose their cognitive-affective role in the same way they choose their level of participation in the research setting, but it is ethically important to reveal this role in disseminating research results. When I entered the field, I was both knowledgeable about and sympathetic towards sex industry workers, so my role was that of an informed-sympathetic researcher.

Ethnographers who identify or sympathize with their research subjects have been criticized for 'going native' or over-identifying with subjects to the point that they can
no longer analyze them critically. According to Jorgensen (1989), this difficulty can be overcome by using other members of the sociological community as sounding boards to "talk out the analytic sociology of what [one is] doing and separate it from the intrusion of the [member's] perspective" (p. 64). As long as the researcher can separate these two perspectives (member and researcher), the strategy of becoming the phenomenon can provide a level of insight into the insider's experience that cannot be accessed in any other manner (Jorgensen 1989:64-65). In the following section, I will review the positive and negative implications of my participation as a worker at the outcall agencies I observed.

*Full participation.* Most sex industry researchers do not opt for full participation in the occupations they study. This is due to several reasons, including the stigma attached to participation in the sex industry, the difference in the type and amount of training required to work in the sex industry versus academia, and the illegal or semi-legal status of many types of sex work.

Through full participation as an employee in the research setting, I was able to access information about outcall entertainment's backstage that was unavailable to outsiders. The three main issues that I feel could not have been resolved without becoming an employee of an outcall entertainment agency are: admittance to the setting, training in the daily operations of an outcall entertainment agency, and the empathic understanding I gained by working under the same conditions as the other phone girls.
By working as a phone girl, I was able to access an otherwise closed setting. In Clark County, outcall agencies are open for business 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. However, the office doors are always kept locked and only employees are allowed inside the office. Security is tight due to concerns about information theft, armed robbery and other forms of assault against agency owners and personnel. The identity of persons requesting entrance is ascertained via the surveillance monitor outside each office. Casual observers are not allowed in the office and any inquiries about office policies and procedures, or even the locations of the offices, are rebuffed.

As a new phone girl, I was given three days of unpaid training at each agency. The training procedure at Sweethearts included reading a comprehensive training manual and policy handbook, watching a training video, observing senior phone girls at work, and role-playing to practice accepting telephone calls. At Playmates, the training period comprised one-on-one instruction from the dispatchers and senior phone girls, as well as an observation period and role-playing exercises. At both agencies I was encouraged to take comprehensive notes on everything I read and observed. However, I was not allowed to take my notes or any other training materials home, as agencies are very secretive about their business practices. The information in the training manual, and all other information about office policies and procedures, was kept secret from dancers, employees of other agencies, and outsiders.

In addition, since I had the same duties and responsibilities as the other employees, I was able to experience the setting from the perspective of a phone girl, thereby allowing me to understand the emotions and actions of the research subjects.
in a way that would not be possible without actually participating in the day to day operations of an outcall entertainment agency. I not only understood academically, but also felt the same pressures that the other phone girls felt as a consequence of their work environment and the expectations that were placed on them. While my long-term dependence on the job was not high, due to my educational attainment and other work experience, I was still dependent on the income I was earning at the time of my fieldwork, as I was not employed by the university or any outside employer at that time.

There are also several difficulties associated with taking the role of an employee in the research setting. Marquart (2001) discusses the moral and ethical dilemmas of full participation in a setting where illegal activities may occur and the researcher may discover “discrediting information” (p. 44) about his or her research subjects. He has two main observations about this issue. First, he states that he had an obligation “not to use information to injure the subjects” (p.44). For example, Marquart refused to testify in a case against the department of corrections where he worked. Secondly, he points out that:

Complete involvement or immersion means just that, and like it or not, the insider must sometimes come to grips with various difficult and trying situations... In some cases, getting too close to the data might force the observer to compromise his or her values and morals in order to remain a trusted member. In the end, ethics are purely situational and no research method is completely safe for the researcher and the subjects.

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20 Styles 1979 (citation in original).
21 Humphreys 1970 (citation in original).

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While this is certainly a dilemma for researchers who choose full participation, other methods that allow the researcher to avoid knowing too much about the population under study obviously are missing important aspects of the research setting. In research settings where “discrediting information” exists, the researcher must uncover this information or risk having only a superficial understanding of that setting.

According to Marquart (2001), three main problems with the participative research role in the prison setting, which also apply to the outcall entertainment milieu, are occupational pressures, reactivity, and coping with violence.

Marquart (2001) describes three methods he used to keep his sociological perspective, despite the occupational pressure of being “expected to think, act, and talk like a guard” (p. 41) during the period of his fieldwork: leaving the research site on his days off and discussing his experiences with fellow sociologists, refusing to insult or fight inmates for his own amusement, and writing at length about the experience of role conflict. I used similar techniques during my tenure as a phone girl, discussing the frustrating events of the day with friends who had experience working in the sex industry, other sociology graduate students, and my professors; attempting to enforce the agencies’ unreasonable policies as fairly as possible; and writing daily field notes about the sociological implications of the role strain I was experiencing, as well as the actual events of the day.

Working as a phone girl is very stressful due to the fast pace, the pressure to make money for the company and for oneself, the attitude of the agency owners and
managers, and the ethical dilemmas present in the job. Phone girls at outcall agencies are expected to manipulate and coerce entertainers to accept appointments they do not wish to accept, remain in situations in which they are not comfortable, accept tips that are below their standards, and pay exorbitant fines; all in order to maximize profits for the agency. Many of the tactics that were encouraged, including intimidation, deception, and lying outright, were against my personal belief that sex workers should be treated with respect.

However, while working as a phone girl, and having the same tactics used on me by management, it was difficult to resist adopting the same perspective as the other phone girls. I knew that my income depended on booking appointments and ensuring that the entertainers not only stayed and entertained the customers, but also reported their tips honestly. I was often very frustrated by the difficulty we experienced in keeping dancers on call during slow periods, making sure they arrived at their appointments on time, and making sure that they did not steal from the company. At times, I felt that dancers were indeed lazy, lying thieves and I worked hard at foiling their efforts to deprive me of my hard-earned tips. While dealing with these occupational pressures was difficult for me personally, I do believe the experience was invaluable in understanding the role conflict experienced by phone girls, which was merely enhanced by my additional role as a researcher.

According to Marquart (2001), “the issue of reactivity specifies the proclivity of the research subjects to alter their behavior as a consequence of the researcher’s presence” (p. 42). This problem was vastly reduced for me due to the fact that I did
not present myself as a researcher, and to my knowledge, no one in either setting ever suspected that I was fulfilling that role. My previous experience as a phone girl allowed me to relate to, and fit in with, the other phone girls from the beginning of my fieldwork. Conversely, my role as a phone girl made it more difficult to interact with the dancers at each agency. Dancers concealed information from phone girls on a regular basis in order to maximize their own profits and avoid getting in trouble. In general, I was able to cultivate a friendly, if superficial, relationship with most of the dancers on my shifts, while some of the other phone girls followed the agency rules so strictly that they were hated by the dancers. Yet, my attempts to be personable and fair could not completely mitigate the fact that I was in a position of power over the entertainers, which did not allow for as many meaningful interactions as I would have liked.

While there were only a few seriously violent incidents during my fieldwork, the threat of violence is always present in the agency setting. One of my managers openly carried a gun with him at all times, and he would often leave the office with his gun drawn when he saw something suspicious on the surveillance monitors. The security procedures used in both offices had been developed due to countless past incidents of armed robbery and assault that had occurred at these places of business. Current and former phone girls at one of the agencies told me that a family member and business associate of the owner had demanded money from the phone girls at gunpoint and even raped phone girls in the office. At times this man was banned from the office, but at other times I saw him enter at will. On one occasion I watched
a manager lift up an angry dancer and throw her into the hallway. In addition, verbal abuse of phone girls and dancers by the managers was a common occurrence at both agencies, and there was always the possibility that a dancer might be assaulted by customers or the police when I sent her on a call.

Like Marquart, I dealt with actual and potential violence by accepting it as an inevitable element of the research setting. This is another area where my previous experience as a phone girl was invaluable. Compared to some incidents I had experienced while working at a previous agency, my two fieldwork experiences were relatively uneventful. In comparison, some of the novice phone girls who did not have previous experience in the field were unable to cope with the verbal abuse and/or the threat of violence and quickly quit the job, sometimes even before their unpaid training period had been completed.

In addition to the level of participation in the setting, a distinction can be made between researchers who enter the setting in an overt manner, "openly requesting permission to observe" (Jorgensen 1989:45), versus those who gain access in using covert strategies, by "assum[ing] some participant role without informing people in the setting that research is under way" (Jorgensen 1989:46). Overt strategies are considered more ethically acceptable by mainstream academics, however this method of gaining entrée leaves the study in question open to the Hawthorne effect, whereby research subjects change their behavior simply because they know they are under study (Babbie 1998:235-236, 286; see also Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939). In addition, access to many settings, especially criminal, deviant, or elite populations,
may be denied to any researcher who attempts to gain entrée using an overt strategy (Jorgensen 1989:42-49). In the section that follows, I will review some ethical and practical issues relevant to the use of covert observation.

**Covert observation.** Most methodological discussions of covert participant observation focus on the “deception debate” (Miller and Selva 2001; Bulmer 1980; Galliher 1973; Humphreys 1970; Roth 1962) regarding whether the use of secrecy in social science research is ethical or unethical. More recent work on the subject has focused on the practical aspects of using this method, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the method (Hilbert 2001; Miller 2001).

According to Miller (2001), there are various methodological and theoretical reasons for engaging in covert participant observation, including the impossibility of gaining access to certain populations using overt methods, and the desire to avoid distorting data through a “qualitative Hawthorne effect” (p. 17).

Miller (2001) specifically mentions that persons and groups “engaged in illegal or unconventional behavior” and “those in powerful and authoritative positions” are particularly “secretive and difficult to openly observe” (p. 17). The entire sex industry falls in to the first category, due not only to the illegal or quasi-legal nature of many types of sex work and the current or past criminal activity of sex industry workers and business owners, but also due to the social stigma attached to all types of sex work, regardless of legality. Outcall entertainment agencies in particular fit into the second category. Outcall entertainers are elite sex workers, and many hide their participation in the sex industry from friends, family, and the public. Therefore, they
are not as visible to researchers as lower status sex workers, such as street prostitutes. In addition, agency owners have the power and authority to completely restrict access to the research setting.

Since the goal of this study was to understand what actually occurs in a stigmatized setting that is generally obscured from public view, it was necessary for this research to be conducted covertly (Mitchell 1993). There are two main reasons why this project would not have been possible if I had attempted to request permission from an agency owner to conduct a study. First, due to the competitive nature of the outcall entertainment industry, agency owners do not allow information about their companies' customers, policies, or daily operations to leave the office in any form for any reason. Second, worker-management relations were one of my main areas of inquiry. In the unlikely event that an agency owner was to accept my research proposal, I feel that my association with management would compromise my investigation. I wanted to know what policies and procedures management was able to enforce, what workers feel comfortable saying about relations with management, and what actually occurred when the two groups interacted.

The American Sociological Association’s Code of Ethics states that informed consent may be waived “when (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk for research participants, and (2) the research could not practicably be carried out were informed consent to be required” (ASA 1997). Furthermore, the ASA Code of Ethics states that when informed consent has been waived, “the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information must be maintained” (ASA 1997). These
requirements have been met and this research has been approved by the UNLV Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board.

As conducted, this study presented minimal risks to the research subjects. Due to the social stigma surrounding the sex industry, research subjects could have suffered social, emotional, and/or psychological harm if their identities were publicly revealed. However, since I did not collect any information about my research subjects' identities, they are assured of complete anonymity, not just the promise of confidentiality. Within the outcall industry, the use of pseudonyms is universal. Owners, managers, support personnel and sex workers all use work names rather than their legal names. In my notes and in this thesis, I have used a pseudonym for both companies I studied, and I have disguised the identities of individual subjects by creating another pseudonym to replace their work names. Since my research interests were in the interactions between individuals, I had no reason to keep records of identifying information.

The other main risks to research subjects were the threat of arrest for any entertainer who was participating in illegal prostitution and the threat of violence from a customer. During the course of my fieldwork, I sent dancers on calls where they were arrested, threatened, and in one case, physically assaulted. Still, as an experienced phone girl, I employed the best techniques I could to avoid these outcomes and I believe that the rates of arrest and violence on my shifts were as low as could be expected within this particular setting. Sex work is often dangerous work.
Nevertheless, more research that changes public perceptions of sex workers and public policies on sex work is essential to change the material conditions of sex workers lives, including lifting the threat of arrest and reducing on-the-job violence.

Regarding the practical aspects of covert participant observation, rather than any ethical concerns, Hilbert (2001) states:

My concern lies mainly with the nature of covert participant observation per se, that is, what it is that covert analysts are actually doing when they engage in covert activity. I will argue that analysts' practical concerns with protecting their identities closely coincide with other methodological strategies of ethnographic investigation. (p. 21)

Hilbert's (2001) main point is that, through the act of concealing the secret of their alternate identity as researchers, covert participant observers learn what “typical members” do to maintain their membership in the group. He goes on to list eight “general features of social settings which covert participant observers can depend on” (p. 24), one of which is particularly relevant to my study.

According to Hilbert (2001), “First and most useful is the tendency for people to view others as what they claim to be in cases relevant to this discussion, as fellow members.” Like Hilbert, I did not encounter any suspicion that I was secretly researching the setting. While agency personnel were concerned with ensuring that information did not leave the offices, their suspicions regarding my potential secret agenda, or that of any other phone girl or dancer, was limited to secretive or dishonest activities that were typical of the setting. Phone girls and dancers were routinely accused of stealing information or underreporting tips in order to increase

22 See Goffman 1959 (citation in original).
their profits. New hires were sometimes suspected of spying on the agency for another agency owner or even law enforcement, but no one was ever suspected of investigating the agency for academic or journalistic purposes.

Hilbert (2001) states, "to sociologists entering a setting for covert research purposes, the likelihood of exposure may be drastically overestimated" (p. 25). Due to my own fear that my research interests would be discovered, I presented myself as an undergraduate sociology student at UNLV, rather than a graduate student. However, at no time did any member of the setting, even those who became my close friends, ask substantive questions about my schoolwork. Questions and comments were restricted to mundane topics such as the date of my graduation, the difficulty of working full-time and also going to school, and the desire expressed by some other phone girls to start (or return to) college or trade school.

I even worked with one other phone girl who was a graduate student in a different department at UNLV. While she did not exactly fit in with the other phone girls, as she was quieter and better spoken, with a more conservative presentation of self, no one questioned her presence at the agency. In general, agency personnel felt that working as a phone girl was a lucrative, if stressful, position, suitable for anyone who could handle the pressures of the job.

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined my method of data collection, explained how I gained entrée to both of the agencies where I was employed, and discussed my reasons for choosing ethnography as the research method for this project. In
addition, I have justified my choice of full participation as a phone girl at each agency, and my use of a covert strategy to access the research settings.

In the next chapter I will discuss the process of booking a call, dispatching an entertainer, checking her in and out of the call, and collecting and dropping the agency fee. I will also describe the duties associated with each occupational role in the agencies, and explain the compensation structure for dancers, phone girls and dispatchers.
CHAPTER 4

AGENCY OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATION

In this chapter I will describe a typical call, outline the organizational structure of the agencies I observed, and give a brief demographic sketch of the customers who called the agencies. I will also give a profile of each occupational role within the agency setting: phone girl, entertainer, manager and owner, and explain the compensation structures and employment statuses that the agencies use.

A Typical Call

Outcall agencies advertise in phone books, in trade publications, on the internet, through the distribution of flyers and cards, and through outdoor advertising, such as taxi-tops and billboards. The content of ads has changed over the years, due to legislation that restricts the wording than can legally be used to describe the services provided, as well as changing guidelines by publishers such as Reuben H. Donnelly, producers of the Sprint Yellow Pages.

Currently, ads typically refer to “stripers,” “girls,” or “entertainers,” who can be sent to clients’ hotel room to strip totally nude. Some ads claim to be placed by individual entertainers or state that the entertainer is “not an agency.” Other ads describe the entertainers available as “sorority sisters,” “college co-eds,” “student
nurses,” “Asian dolls,” or some other specific female population. Independent entertainers do place ads in the same venues as agencies. However, a large number of ads that refer to non-agency entertainers are actually placed by agencies.

When a customer calls the agency and a phone girl answers, she will greet him politely but sexily. The phones used at outcall agencies are large switchboards, and each line is labeled with a word that refers to the ad where that line’s phone number appears.

If the phone line that the customer called in on is matched up with an agency ad, such as the Yellow Pages ad that states, “Full Service Asian Connection – Exotic Females – Licensed Outcall Service – Adults Only – Private Parties – Call 24 Hours a Day, 7 Days a Week,” (Sprint Publishing & Advertising 2002:696) the phone girl is told to greet the customer with, “Hello, can I help you?” However, if the phone number is matched up to a non-agency advertisement, such as the one that states, “Not an Agency – Brandy – Beautiful Lady – 24 Hours – 7 Days,” (Sprint Publishing & Advertising 2002:732) the phone girl is told to greet the customer with a simple “Hi,” to encourage him to believe that she is an actual entertainer answering her own phone.

At this point, the customer may or may not greet the phone girl in return. He will often jump straight to his first question, which usually has to do with the price of the entertainment or the physical attributes of the available entertainers.

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23 To maintain the confidentiality of my research sites, I have chosen ads that illustrate my points from all available ads, and have not limited my selections to ads placed by Sweethearts and Playmates.
A good phone girl will ignore his question and steer the conversation to who the customer is and where he is staying. This is important because once a customer knows – or thinks he knows – how much his entertainment will cost him, he is ready to get off the phone and call around for a better price from another agency. If the phone girl doesn’t have the name of his hotel, his room number, and the full name of the registered guest, she has no way to call him back or send an entertainer over to his room, and the call will go to a sharper phone girl. However, if she can divert him from his line of questioning by asking his name, and then use a rapid-fire series of questions to get these three critical pieces of information, known as “full information,” then she can call him back to verify that he is actually in the room.

This is done for several reasons. One, she has now verified that the call was not a prank. He may still be a “parader”, a caller who requests entertainers from multiple agencies for the juvenile thrill of seeing them arrive in his room and getting to reject them, but at least he is not a prank caller who simply enjoys harassing phone girls and having them describe entertainers’ physical characteristics over the phone.

Two, she can now send an entertainer up to his room, whether he decides to make an appointment (“book a call”) or not. Often, customers refuse to book a call with the first few phone girls they talk to, instead calling various agencies for the best prices or the prettiest-sounding dancers, but the call usually goes to the first dancer who gets to the room, not the dancer from the agency that actually booked the call. Since the company does not pay the dancers for their time, gasoline, or other
expenses, agency owners have nothing to lose by enforcing a policy of sending out a dancer every time a phone girl gets full information from a potential customer.

Three, she can now reach the customer and the entertainer in the room during the call. She can let the dancer know when her time is up, and if there is a problem with the call, she can speak to the customer while the entertainer leaves the room. If a call is going badly, for example if a customer does not want to let an entertainer leave because he did not feel that he received his money's worth, agency personnel would prefer to talk to the customer and resolve the issue in that manner. However, during my fieldwork I heard of rare instances where phone girls felt that the entertainer was actually in physical danger and hotel security was called.

After the phone girl verifies the customer's information, she describes ("pitches") the entertainers on duty to the customer and quotes a price to him. At Sweethearts, the standard agency fee is $175 in cash, $225 on a standard credit card, or $250 on American Express. If a customer asks about tipping, phone girls are required to state that tips are "appreciated but not required," regardless of the fact that both dancers and phone girls depend on customers' tips for their income. At Playmates the usual fee is $250 in cash or on credit and phone girls are allowed to tell customers that they are expected to tip the entertainer.

The agency fee can be lowered to $100 cash at either agency if the customer is unwilling to book the call at a higher price, or if he has been quoted a lower price by a competing agency. However, if the price is lowered and the entertainer earns a tip,
she\textsuperscript{24} has to pay the difference out of her tip. So, if a call is booked at $125 and the

girl makes another $200 in tip, she has to bring the agency fee up to $175, which

reduces her tip to $150. This is particularly important because a guy who dickers over

$50 or $100 in agency fees usually isn’t going to be the best tipper, so her tip is going
to be small anyway.

At all Las Vegas area agencies, these prices are for “up to the hour.” If a customer

asks what up to the hour means, he is told that it can mean any amount of time up to

sixty minutes, and that the more he tips, the longer the girl will stay. However, a

“dancer’s hour” is actually forty-five minutes long, so up to the hour really means any

amount of time from one minute to forty-five minutes. After forty-five minutes, the

entertainer must collect another agency fee from the customer or leave. Otherwise

she will be fined for the price of an additional hour.

Once the customer has selected an entertainer and he and the phone girl agree on

a price, she writes up his information on a special form, known as a “ticket”, and she

either selects a dancer to take the call or requests that the dispatcher does so,

depending on the preference of the dispatcher on duty. If the call is undesirable, the

phone girl may be in the position of having to sell the customer to the entertainer,

convincing her to accept a call that she does not really want to take.

Even if the customer has requested a specific entertainer, based on her
description or a picture in an ad, the agency does not worry too much about sending

\textsuperscript{24} Although there were male and female entertainers at each agency, I have used feminine pronouns when
discussing entertainers for ease of reading, as most calls were for females.

\textsuperscript{25} Daily totals at Sweethearts ran from 8 am to 7:59 am the next day. At Playmates, the workday ran from 7 am
to 6:59 am the next day.
that particular entertainer on the call, because she may not be available or even actually work for the agency. Many of the pictures used in agency ads are of professional models or entertainers who are no longer with the agency.

The phone girl and the dispatcher will try to match the customer's request to the best of their ability by matching the characteristics described to the customer with the most similar available dancer. However, a dancer must be sent to entertain the customer, regardless of whether or not she fits the customer's request. When the dancer is dispatched, the time is written down on the ticket, and she has twenty minutes to arrive at the client's hotel (or residence). If the hotel or house is further than twenty minutes away from the Strip, the dancer is given additional time.

When the dancer arrives at the lobby or parking garage of the hotel, she calls the agency and is told the customer's name and room number. She then has three to five minutes to get up to the room and call the agency from the telephone in the customer's room.

The dancer is supposed to call the agency as soon as she arrives inside the customer's room. She then attempts to collect the agency fee while she is still on the phone. By telling the customer that she can get off the phone and begin his entertainment as soon as he pays the fee, she may be able to divert his attention from what the fee actually covers. If the customer insists on negotiating before paying the agency fee, the entertainer has five minutes to complete the negotiations and collect the agency fee.
If the dancer cannot come to an agreement and collect the agency fee, she must call the agency back and then leave the room immediately. If this happens, the phone girls are required to send another dancer to the room to “back-up” the call, whether or not the customer is still interested in paying for entertainment. Most agencies, including Sweethearts and Playmates, will keep sending back-up dancers until the customer agrees to pay for entertainment or until five dancers have been to the room, whichever comes first.

After collecting the agency fee from the customer, the entertainer calls the agency back and lets the phone girl or the dispatcher know that she is “checking in”. Once she has collected the agency fee from the customer, there are no refunds for any reason and the entertainer becomes responsible for paying that full amount to the agency. If she returns the money to the customer for any reason, or if the customer takes back the money by force, she owes that amount to the agency out of her own pocket.

At this point the phone girl will ask the entertainer if she wants five, ten, fifteen, etc. minutes with the customer, all the way up to 45 minutes, until the dancer says yes. This is known as the dancer’s “wake-up” call. If the dancer has not received her tip yet, she may ask for only five minutes before her wake-up call. Then, after using that five minutes to negotiate and collect her tip, she will ask for up to 40 minutes more, based on the amount of the tip and how long she thinks she needs to entertain the customer. If he does not tip very well, she might simply want ten minutes with him. If he has tipped her well, and especially if she thinks she can get more money
out of him if she has an uninterrupted period of time with him, she might ask for the full 40 minutes.

When the allotted time has passed, the phone girl will call the entertainer back and ask her if she wants to “check out” or if she needs more time. If the entire 45 minutes has passed, she will ask the dancer if she think she can convince the customer to pay another agency fee for another hour. If not, the entertainer must get dressed and leave immediately.

The dancer can use these wake-up calls to request more tip money from the customer, stating that she is needed on another call, and that she has to leave unless she gets more money.

After the entertainer leaves the customer’s room, she calls the agency to let them know she is out and then she has another twenty minutes to arrive back at the agency with the agency fee. If the agency is busy and the entertainer is needed at another call, she may be dispatched directly to another hotel or residence, but only if her or his bond is paid, and then only to one more call, never more.

Upon returning to the agency, the dancer turns over the agency fee and the phone girl’s tip. If she owes any money to the agency for bond or fines, she is encouraged to pay off at least a portion of the debt out of her tip money. Dancers are not allowed to tip the phone girls if they owe money to the company for bond or fines. Any money they plan on tipping the phone girl with must be turned over to the company and applied to their bond or fines. After the dancer drops off the money, she is either dispatched to another call or told to go back to the Strip and wait for a call. Many of
the dancers waited at the bars in the major casinos, while a few who had apartments near the Strip went back home to wait on slow nights. Sometimes dancers would call the office to say that they had met a prospective customer in a bar and that they would call back on when they were done entertaining him.

The number of successful calls booked varied greatly by shift, agency, and season, but on a typical Saturday, about 50 calls might go through at Sweethearts, while Playmates would usually put through about 75 calls. At both agencies, Saturdays and Fridays were the busiest days. The Friday and Saturday graveyard shifts were equally busy, but Saturday was busier during the evening shift. Thursdays and Sundays were moderately busy, and Wednesdays, Tuesdays, and Mondays were slow to extremely slow. It was not uncommon for there to only be 3-5 calls at Sweethearts or 5-10 calls at Playmates on a Monday or Tuesday.

Agency rules are designed to regulate the phone girls’ and dancers’ work so that calls conform as closely as possible to the method outlined in this section. However, the type of entertainment provided on a call can vary depending on the customer’s interests and budget, and the entertainer’s personal policies and limits. In the next section I will provide a general demographic overview of the types of customers who use outcall agencies.

Customers

Customers were divided into two main categories: those who were staying at hotels and motels, and those who wanted entertainment in their homes. It was also
important to ascertain if the customer wanted to see a female entertainer or a male, and whether he was seeking one-on-one entertainment or entertainment for a group, such as a bachelor party. About a third of all customers stated that they had never used an outcall service before. Others indicated that they had had unsatisfactory experiences with agencies in the past and wanted the phone girl to know that they understood the system and were trying to manipulate it to their advantage.

Phone girls did not ask customers if they were African American, but they did write this information down, based on the sound of the customer’s voice. Only a small percentage of customers were Black, but this percentage increased dramatically during certain cultural events, such as nights when there were boxing matches or music award ceremonies. Many of the dancers would not entertain Black customers and they would complain if a phone girl did not tell them in advance that a customer was Black.

Phone girls only asked customers about their age if they sounded underage, but sometimes customers would volunteer this information, along with information about their marital status. Customers were of all different age ranges, from 18 to 70+, but those extremes were rare. Most were between 30 and 55. Some were single or divorced, while others were married or had a significant other. A significant minority stated that they were sharing a hotel room with their wife or girlfriend, who was out shopping or sightseeing.

Over 95% of all customers were male and the vast majority of female customers were part of a male/female couple or else part of an all-female group looking for
entertainment for a party. The 'typical' customer was a White male tourist staying at a major hotel on the Las Vegas Strip who had never used an outcall agency before and wanted to see a blonde Caucasian female entertainer for one-on-one entertainment.

The main types of customers in rough order of frequency were: a male calling alone for entertainment by one female entertainer, a group of males calling for one or more females to entertain at a bachelor party or similar event, a male calling alone for a male entertainer, a group of females calling for one male to entertain at a bachelorette or birthday party, a male/female couple calling for entertainment by a female, two to four males calling together to be entertained separately by an equal number of females, a male calling alone to be entertained by a male-to-female transsexual entertainer, and, rarely, a female calling alone to be entertained by a female entertainer. About 65% of all customers fit into the first category, with another 20% falling into the second category.

In the next section I will describe the different roles that phone girls, managers, dispatchers, agency owners, and other personnel play in the operation of the outcall entertainment agencies I observed. I will also give brief biographical sketches of some of the workers at each agency.

Work Roles

Managerial hierarchies vary from agency to agency. Owners may be more or less involved in the day to day operations of the agency, and workers may be supervised by managers who have a strictly disciplinary function enforcing company policies, or dispatchers who take part in the process of booking and filling calls. However, the
bulk of the labor at all of the large agencies is performed by an expendable workforce of phone girls and entertainers.

**Phone Girls**

Customers call the numbers listed in each agency's ads and are connected with a female employee or independent contractor known as a phone girl. The phone girl is responsible for answering incoming sales calls, finding out the prospective customer's contact information, and making a sales pitch.

**Sweethearts.** At some agencies, such as Sweethearts, the phone girls are also responsible for dispatching entertainers to appointments, verifying that the entertainer has actually collected the money from the customer once she arrives at the appointment location, notifying the entertainer that her or his time is up, and collecting the money when the entertainer returns to the office.

Two to three phone girls work each shift. One or two phone girl trainees may be observing or working at the same time. One girl per shift is selected to sit at desk one, where dancers drop off agency fees and all other money owed to the agency. In general, since the position entails more responsibility, either the phone girl with the most seniority or the most competent girl on a shift sits at desk one. The phone girls usually negotiate among themselves to determine who sits at desk one. At times, the managers or the owner specify which girl should sit at desk one during a particular shift. This generally happens when they want to give more responsibility to a girl who is learning to perform the desk one functions and will be supervised by another phone girl. At other times, managers may seat a specific phone girl at desk one.
because they suspect another phone girl of theft and do not want her handling the money or keeping the financial records for that shift.

While many phone girls were hired and fired in the time I worked for Sweethearts, only 6 other phone girls were employed for over a month during my fieldwork. Lainey was hired at the same time I was, and was fired a week or two after me, so she was employed for a little over three months. She was White, 20 years old, with a high school education and hopes of attending beauty school someday. She had never worked as a phone girl before. Lainey and I became friends during the time we worked together and I kept in touch with her until I moved away from Las Vegas.

The phone girl with the most seniority at the time I was hired was Ashley, who had been working at Sweethearts for five months. Ashley was White, 20 years old, with a high school education and no phone girl experience prior to working at Sweethearts. She worked for Sweethearts for seven months before she was fired. Afterwards, she worked as a phone girl for a smaller agency and then took a low paying job as an appointment setter for a non-adult company. She later applied for a job at Playmates, but was told that she could not work there because of her friendship with Lainey, who was working at Playmates at the time Ashley applied for a job there. Agency owners discourage any friendships between and among phone girls and dancers. I was told that the reason for this was because employees who know each other might partner up to steal money from the company.26

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26 See the section on theft prevention policies in chapter 5 for ways that this might be accomplished.
Karen was White, 21 years old, with a high school education and a part-time retail job that she kept throughout the time she worked at Sweethearts. She had no prior phone girl experience. She was hired about a month before I was and fired after three months of employment. She later applied for a job at Playmates, a few days before I did, and she began the training period, but she was fired within a couple of days. At the time I was hired, I was asked if I knew Karen, and I later overheard Kay telling another dispatcher that she fired Karen because she didn't trust her.

Melissa was White, in her late teens or very early twenties. She did not have a high school diploma or GED. Prior to working at Sweethearts, she had worked on and off for a local chain of take-out pizza parlors. As a young teenager, she had worked in street-level prostitution and had spent many years under the control of one or more violent pimps. She worked for Sweethearts for a total of about five months and was fired during the time of my fieldwork. A few weeks after she was fired, she called and begged for her job back. She simply didn't have any better prospects. At that time, she was not hired back by the company.

Sonya was Latina and White, in her early 20s, with a high school diploma. She had quit Sweethearts once before and been allowed to come back. I estimate that she worked at Sweethearts for a total of five or six months. When I spoke to her a couple of months after she had been fired, she told me that she was working as a secretary at a law firm and had no interest in ever returning to agency work.

Marilyn was a White woman in her 50s with a spotty employment history. She had worked in non-adult telephone sales, but had no previous phone girl experience. She
had been with Sweethearts for two months when I was hired and was fired less than a month after I was, for a total of almost six months of employment. However, it took her five entire months to work her way off of the day shift, because she was not a good closer, but she was very methodical with the morning paperwork. She later told me that she would like to find another agency job but that she didn’t know if that would be possible, since she had been fired from Sweethearts. While she felt that the managers had been very abusive at Sweethearts, she was not doing very well financially and felt that working as a phone girl was the most lucrative employment option she had.

*Playmates.* At Playmates, one to three phone girls work each shift. During busy shifts a senior phone girl is designated as the assistant dispatcher. In addition to her regular duties, the assistant dispatcher is responsible for assisting the dispatcher in counting money, recording the amounts, and dropping money into the safe. Only girls who the owner and the head dispatcher want to promote to dispatcher are given the privilege of working as an assistant dispatcher. Girls are selected based on their level of experience, but also on their aptitude and personality. I was promoted to assistant dispatcher in my second month at Playmates, while several girls had been working at the company longer but were not trusted to ascend to this position.

Several phone girls were also hired and fired during the time I worked at Playmates, although the turnover was somewhat lower. Lainey was also employed at Playmates during the time I worked there. She had been hired two months before I applied for a position with the company and promoted to assistant dispatcher after
working there for one month. After two months, she had been given her own
dispatching shift. After she had worked for the company for six months, she was
fired due to a disagreement with the owner. She applied for a job with a brand new
agency that Ashley told her about, but quit after working an eight-hour shift during
which the phone didn’t ring once. After not working for several months, she started
doing some freelance work as an adult phone actress, and was also trying to earn
additional income as a freelance phone girl by placing internet ads for independent
entertainers and collecting a commission if the ads resulted in any calls.

Dana was another phone girl who had worked at Sweethearts for a brief period of
time. She was in her late twenties, Caucasian, with some college coursework, but no
degree. She had been working at Playmates for three months when I was hired, and
was employed there for seven to eight months before she was terminated. After
leaving Playmates, she worked with Lainey placing internet ads for independent
entertainers.

Shelly was an African American phone girl in her mid-twenties who had a day job
at a financial institution and was also pursuing a graduate education. She worked the
day shift on weekends the entire time I was employed at Playmates, but I do not
know how long she had been employed before I was hired or whether or not she was
eventually terminated. However, she did state that she was working two jobs in order
to pay for her education, and that she was planning to go to law school after she
received her Master’s degree. Of all of the phone girls I worked with at both agencies,
Shelly was the only one who seemed to have good future prospects for employment in the straight world.

Lori was 27 years old, White, unmarried, with a young child. She was hired at the same time as me. She had no previous phone girl experience, but stated that she had always wanted to work for an agency because she had known a phone girl when she was in her teens and that woman had always had a lot of cash to spend. After about a month and a half of working at Playmates, she was told that she was not booking enough calls and she was given take-home assignments about the art of selling that she was required to read. She complained to me about this, but accepted it, and after another two weeks she was put into training to be an internet girl instead of a phone girl. She was employed at Playmates for at least four months, but I do not know what happened to her after I left the company.

Managers

At Sweethearts, there were managers who were responsible for hiring new phone girls and supervising the phone girls and dancers. During most of the time I was working at Sweethearts, the managers were two men who were relatives of the owner. When they were present, they collected money from dancers and assisted the phone girls by dispatching dancers to appointments. Due to low call volume, the morning shift, which runs from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., was generally unsupervised at Sweethearts. One manager, Larry, was roughly responsible for the swing shift, which runs from 4 p.m. to midnight, while the other manager, Nick, was mostly responsible for the graveyard shift, which runs from midnight to 8 a.m. However, neither manager kept
to a schedule, and as a worker, it was impossible to know if a particular shift would be supervised, unsupervised, or if the owner would simply be watching and listening in over the security cameras. Near the end of my employment at Sweethearts, both Nick and Larry were fired and the owner's fiancée, Maria, who had worked for the company as a phone girl for several years, came back to work as a phone girl and as the night-time manager.

Dispatchers

At Playmates, the dispatcher on each shift supervised the phone girls and dancers, collected the money that dancers dropped off after each call, recorded the amounts collected, and dropped the money into the safe. They were also responsible for deciding which dancer will be sent on which call and dispatching the dancers to the location of each call, but these responsibilities were often delegated to the phone girls. During the time I worked at Playmates, there were three dispatchers who worked full time in that position, as well as three phone girls who were given one or two dispatching shifts per week.

All of the dispatchers were female, and were expected to answer customer calls if the phones were busy. Kay, the head dispatcher, was very knowledgeable about the business and had worked with many of the dancers for a number of years, both at Playmates and at other companies. During the early nineties, she had managed Sweethearts for several years, and she had been working with some of the dancers for almost a decade. She was also very close to the owner. She didn’t answer the advertised lines very often. If a customer or dancer asked to speak to her directly, the
phone girls were instructed to put the caller on hold and ask her if she wanted to take the call. Kay spent most of her time managing and disciplining the entertainers, wooing high-roller customers, and discussing business and personal matters with the owner. She often spent many hours during each of her shifts in discussion with him, either in person or on the phone. She told the phone girls that she was absolutely not to be disturbed when she was speaking to the owner, even if an important decision needed to be made.

Anna and Kristy, the other full-time dispatchers, spent more time managing their shifts. They were responsible for delegating work when the phones were not busy, such as directing phone girls to do “callbacks” (calling customers who had seen a dancer within the past week to try to book another call), clean the office, take out the trash, or stuff envelopes with promotional materials. They also answered calls from customers and dancers.

The three phone girls who worked part-time as dispatchers, Lainey, Becky, and Gina, dispatched during slower shifts with only one other phone girl working. Therefore, their responsibilities were more like the desk one girls at Sweethearts. In addition to answering the telephone and dispatching dancers, they were responsible for ensuring that all agency fees and fines were dropped in the safe after each call, and that the proper amounts were recorded on each day’s call sheet.

Internet Girls

In addition to the phone girls and dispatchers, Playmates employed workers who are responsible for responding to email sent by potential customers to a variety of
addresses posted online, as well as minor maintenance to the company’s websites. During the time I was employed, one girl worked exclusively in this position, one worked as a phone girl and an internet girl on different days, another worked as an internet girl on all of her shifts, but answered the phone as a phone girl if the other phone girls on duty were all on other lines, and another worked full time as a dispatcher, but also had the duties of an internet girl on some of her shifts. One other phone girl was being trained to work as an internet girl when I left the company.

Entertainers

Each agency had a list of entertainers, also referred to as dancers, who were on call for the company. The lists were categorized by gender, race, and hair color, and included the entertainers’ cell phone and pager numbers. At Playmates, this information was posted on large erasable white boards that hung on the phone room walls. At Sweethearts, the lists were kept in three-ring binders and also included basic physical statistics on the entertainers, including their measurements, height, build, and eye color.

The dancers were dispatched to customers’ hotel rooms and homes to provide totally nude entertainment to the customers. The type of entertainment offered by the dancers during each call varied depending on the dancer’s limits, the customer’s preferences, and the customer’s budget.

Each entertainer was responsible for collecting the agency fee from the customer as soon as she arrived at his hotel room or residence. After she collected the fee, she was expected to entertain the customer as quickly as possible in order to be available
for another call. The agencies preferred that customers be satisfied with their entertainment so that they would become repeat customers, but dancers were rarely chastised for not providing quality entertainment, whereas they were often reprimanded for taking too long to get to a call or taking too long to entertain a customer.

If, after the agency fee was collected, a customer and an entertainer could not come to an agreement about the tip and the type of entertainment to be provided, it was considered acceptable for the entertainer to undress quickly for the customer and then get dressed and leave immediately. The only times that the managers or dispatchers at both agencies would discipline an entertainer for shortchanging the customers was if she got into the habit of accepting a tip and then leaving the room without getting nude or spending any time with the customer. This would sometimes happen when an entertainer got tired of the work or dissatisfied with the tips she received.

Nadia, an entertainer who worked at Sweethearts, started telling all of her customers that she had to go down to the casino to buy something before she could start her entertainment, and then she would leave the hotel. After one night when Maria was unable to rebook any of the customers who Nadia had seen on the previous day, she informed the phone girls that we could not send her out on any more calls, even though she was a good tipper. When Nadia complained that she was not getting any calls, she was told to talk to Maria, who let her know that she would

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have to stay and entertain every customer if she wanted to keep her job. Nadia
stopped cheating her clients, but she quit Sweethearts shortly thereafter.

Other Personnel

At Sweethearts, a general office assistant performed all accounting and payroll
functions. Her duties were restricted to billing disputes, paying employees and
vendors, and other similar tasks. She had her own office and did not enter the phone
room or answer any customer calls unless the owner scheduled a meeting for all of
the phone girls to attend, which happened twice during the period of my
employment. In addition, there was one account executive who had his own office in
the suite, but he was involved with a new internet venture that the owner was
promoting, and his duties did not have any relation to the operation of the actual
outcall agency. I was told that there was also a webmaster who sometimes came into
the office to take pictures of the dancers for the company's website, but I never met
him.

At Playmates, there was a webmaster who came in a few times a week to take
pictures of the dancers and also to do major site upgrades that the internet girls could
not handle. Playmates had a various websites used to promote the agency and
generate appointments, while Sweethearts simply had a few adult pay sites with
pornography and live shows. Customers could not view photos of Sweethearts’
dancers or request appointments with dancers from online.
Owners

Owners vary in the amount of work and hands-on supervision they do at their agencies. Both agencies I observed were owned by men. Neither owner worked on a schedule. When they did appear, the entire atmosphere of the office changed. All of the phone girls at both agencies were afraid of the owners, since they often came in yelling and would fire phone girls for minor infractions. The owner at Sweethearts preferred to sit at home and watch the phone room on his remote surveillance system, barking commands over the intercom and only showing up at the office on occasion. The owner of Playmates came in more regularly, usually during the three shifts per week that his head dispatcher was present. The owners of outcall agencies in Clark County are very secretive about their identities and their business practices, so I do not know if either owner had any silent partners.

In the next section, I will describe the contingent nature of the outcall agency workforce and explain the compensation structure that agencies use to pay their workers.

Compensation and Employment Status

According to Parker, contingent workers are “employees with a looser, nontraditional affiliation with their employers” (1994:1). This category includes day laborers, guest workers, part-time workers, subcontracted workers, temporary workers and independent contractors. Independent contractors are workers who derive their entire income from tips or commissions and do not receive any compensation or benefits from the company. These workers often have to pay a fee
or a percentage of their earnings to the company and are not eligible for
unemployment benefits if the company decides that their services are no longer
needed. All outcall entertainers at Las Vegas agencies are independent contractors. At
Playmates, phone girls were also independent contractors, while at Sweethearts phone
girls were minimum wage employees.

The entire agency fee that the customer is quoted over the phone goes directly to
the agency owner. None of that money goes to the dancer who entertained the
customer, the phone girl who booked the call, or the dispatcher who managed the
shift. All of the workers earn tips only. The only exception was the two male
managers at Sweethearts, who were relatives of the owner. I was never told how they
were compensated, but they did not receive tips.

Turnover at both agencies was high among phone girls; however, turnover was
much higher at Sweethearts. At Sweethearts, turnover was also very high among
dancers. New dancers were hired on almost every shift, and dancers quit or were fired
every week. At Playmates, the top dancers had been working for the company for
many months or even several years, and dancers were rarely fired. A few new dancers
were hired every week, but many were referred to the company through current
employees.

Entertainers

Agencies may be more or less active in recruiting new entertainers. Some agencies
run ads constantly in the newspaper, on the radio, or online. Others may place ads
when their list of on-call entertainers is low, or when they need a specific type of
entertainer. For instance, Sweethearts ran ads constantly, but never had enough Asian entertainers. Management tried to correct this imbalance by running ads for Asian entertainers. There was much less turnover at Playmates, so the company did not run any ads for entertainers during the time of my employment. All of the dancers who were hired during that time period had either called one of the numbers listed in the yellow pages, or had been referred to the company by a friend or relative.

However, all major agencies hire every prospective entertainer who inquires about a job, as long as she meets three basic requirements. 1) As required by law, entertainers must obtain a scope from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. The scope is a document that lists an individual’s arrests and convictions. Prospective entertainers must not have any convictions for prostitution. 2) The entertainer must have a cell phone or pager in order to be on call for the agency. 3) The entertainer must pay a $300 non-refundable bond to the company in order to work. This amount is standard among all of the major agencies in Las Vegas and was originally a refundable form of insurance. The standard agency fee in Clark County used to be $150. By holding $300 worth of bond money the agency could send an entertainer on two calls without worrying that she would run off with the company’s money. Generally, whoever is doing the hiring will try to convince the new entertainer that she must come up with the entire amount before she is allowed

27 The “hiring” process refers to the collection of necessary paperwork to retain the individual as an independent contractor. However, the term “hire” may be more appropriate than not, because dancers were treated like employees in many ways. See the section on illegal labor practices for more information.
to work. However, if she only has a portion of the money, that amount is accepted and she is told that she can work off the rest.

Entertainers negotiate with each customer individually for a tip, which can range from $50 on the low end to several thousand dollars on the extremely high end. These negotiations are conducted privately in the customer’s hotel room or home, however, my research leads me to the conclusion that tips in the $100-$500 range are average for a call where the dancer stays and entertains the customer. However, many times the customers does not understand the tipping system and girls leave the room without collecting the agency fee (referred to as a “no-go”) or after collecting the agency fee, but without coming to an agreement about a tip and without entertaining the customer (referred to as a “base call”).

In addition, an entertainer may be on call for an agency but not receive any calls. The dancers who consistently earn the most money for the agency and the phone girls are sent on as many calls as possible, while the less successful dancers are sent out only when a top girl isn’t available.

**Phone Girls**

Phone girls earn their money from the dancers’ tips. Entertainers must tip phone girls 20% of what they make on a call. However, phone girls at both agencies are prohibited from accepting tips from dancers who owe fines or bond money to the company. Audiovisual surveillance ensures that the employees record all incoming money and do not violate any of the rules regarding tips, including returning a portion of tips back to the company.
At Sweethearts, phone girls are employees, earning minimum wage in addition to their tips. However, this money goes straight back to the company in several ways. First of all, phone girls are required to clock out after every eight hour shift, and are paid for a maximum of 40 hours per week (netting a grand total of $187 per week), even though they are required to work double shifts and additional shifts whenever another phone girl quits, is fired, or simply doesn’t show up for her shift. So phone girls often put in around 20 hours of overtime per week for which they receive no pay other than tips.28

Second, phone girls are required to pay a portion of each tip back to the company. This is mandatory, and based on a sliding scale from 25% to 45%. For example, if a phone girl receives a $20 tip, she has to tip out $5, or 25%, to the company. The percentage increases with the size of the tip, so for tips of $100 or more, the phone girl has to pay 45% of her tip to the company.

Third, phone girls are fined for various offenses, such as failing to fine dancers, not “backing up” calls, which means failing to send up to five dancers to a customer until he selects one, not sending a dancer when the phone girl has a customer’s full information, having too many calls no-go, etc. These fines are generally low compared to the fines for entertainers, often only $25 apiece. However, phone girls are often fined in groups on nights when revenues are low, in order to bring up daily or weekly totals. Also, there are often situations where a phone girl cannot avoid

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28 I often worked ten-hour shifts, and it is not uncommon for phone girls to work sixteen-hour shifts if the phone girl who is due in for the next shift suddenly quits or is fired. See the section in chapter 5 on illegal labor practices for more on this issue.
getting fined. If a customer gives his name, hotel and room number to a phone girl but states that he did not want to see an entertainer, the phone girl can choose between sending a dancer and getting fined for having the call no-go, or not sending a dancer and getting fined for failing to send on full information.

Fourth, phone girls work long shifts and are not allowed to leave the office, except to use the restroom, for periods of eight hours or more. Management at Sweethearts decided to take advantage of this by putting in vending machines at twice the regular price. One of the managers, Nick, told me that the vending company asked them what they wanted to set the price at and they said they might as well set it high and make money off us because we can’t go anywhere else. When I heard this, I started extending my bathroom breaks and stopping at a vending machine on the other side of the building to buy beverages, but I was soon reprimanded. I was told that I could leave the office only to use the restroom and that any drinks or snacks must be purchased from the company.

At Playmates, phone girls are independent contractors and are not paid by the company. Phone girls pay desk rent of $25 per shift in order to work at the company, although this policy is enforced during good weeks and good shifts and not enforced during slow times. I never saw any phone girl pay desk rent out of her pocket during a shift when she had not made any money. Since Playmates had a dispatcher on duty during each shift who collected all of the money from the entertainers, phone girls were unaware of how much tip money they were earning until the end of the night. Instead of openly collecting money from phone girls as a set percentage of each tip,
dispatchers pooled all of the tip money together and turned a portion over to the owner, based on how well the shift had gone. Only phone girls who were in training to become dispatchers were told about this practice.

After the company’s percentage is taken out, the dispatcher divides all of the money up between herself and the phone girls on duty. Phone girls are told that the split on each call is either 50% to the phone girl who actually booked the call and 50% to the dispatcher or 50% to the dispatcher and the other 50% divided among all of the phone girls on duty (for instance 50%, 25%, 25% if there were two phone girls working a particular shift), depending on the preference of the dispatcher or the phone girls working a particular shift. In reality, dispatchers gave more money to phone girls who were acknowledged as moving up in the company hierarchy, and often the owner would tell the dispatchers to cut into a certain girl’s tips when she was on her way down the company ladder.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed booking calls, dispatching entertainers, backing up calls, checking entertainers in and out of calls, and collecting and dropping the agency fees. I have also described the duties associated with each occupational role at an outcall agency, and explained the compensation structure for dancers, phone girls and dispatchers.

In the next chapter I will discuss common outcall industry labor violations, employee theft and the methods that agencies use to reduce the risk of theft, the role conflict that phone girls experience, and the differences between the management
styles at Sweethearts and Playmates. I will conclude by answering my first two research questions: 1) What are the effects of third party control of labor on sex workers and other workers in the outcall setting? 2) How are these effects intensified or mitigated by the specific and complex legal and social position of outcall entertainment in Clark County?
CHAPTER 5

LABOR AND MANAGEMENT

In this chapter I will discuss common outcall industry labor violations, agency policies designed to combat theft, the conflicting expectations that phone girls must meet to earn money and keep their jobs, and the differences between the management styles at Sweethearts and Playmates. I will conclude by answering my first two research questions: explaining the problems that are caused by third-party control of sexual labor, and focusing on how these difficulties are enhanced by the social and legal history of outcall entertainment in Clark County.

Illegal and Unethical Labor Practices

While Clark County politicians and vice officers work hard to police the outcall industry for violations of local prostitution laws, labor violations are rampant. There are 30 vice officers working for the Metropolitan Police Department, yet only 4 investigators working for the Southern Nevada office of the state Labor Commissioner.

According to Nevada law, employers are required to notify employees of their rights by posting an abstract of chapter 608 of the Nevada Revised Statutes,
“Compensation, Wages and Hours: General Provisions” in a conspicuous place.\textsuperscript{29}

This information was not posted in the offices at Sweethearts, Playmates, or any of the three other outcall agencies I visited during my fieldwork. In addition, many of the provisions specified in the Nevada Revised Statutes and the Clark County Code were not being met.

Due to the nature of each position, the labor violations outlined in this chapter affected phone girls and dancers differently. Under Nevada law, dancers are independent contractors and therefore not protected by most labor laws. While phone girls at some agencies are treated as independent contractors, they do not qualify for this status under Nevada law, and legally are entitled to employee status. Therefore, the majority of this section will address violations of phone girls’ legal rights as employees.

\textit{Illegal Use of Independent Contractor Status}

The phone girls at Playmates were hired as independent contractors rather than employees, so that the company would not have to pay us wages and would not be liable for unemployment insurance. At Playmates, we did not earn any wage other than tips from the entertainers. However, an independent contractor is defined by Nevada state law as “a natural person, firm or corporation who agrees to perform services for a fixed price according to his or its own methods and without subjection

\textsuperscript{29} Nevada Revised Statutes 608.013 Employer to post abstract of chapter. “Every employer shall conspicuously post and keep so posted on the premises where any person is employed a printed abstract of this chapter to be furnished by the labor commissioner.”
to the supervision or control of the other contracting party, except as to the results of the work, and not as to the means by which the services are accomplished."\textsuperscript{30}

Phone girls at Playmates were subject to supervision and control by the agency owner and the dispatchers, and were therefore eligible for hourly wages. Phone girls worked set shifts, and were required to answer the phone in a particular manner. Although we were usually only scheduled for 40 hours of work each week, we were expected to stay at work until all of the paperwork for each shift was completed and the next shift of phone girls had arrived. On busy shifts, we were not allowed to leave if the call volume was too high for the number of phone girls scheduled to stay.

While I was working at Playmates, I typically worked 50 hours per week, which was about average for the other phone girls as well.

When the phone lines were not busy with incoming calls, we were also required to call customers who had seen entertainers on previous shifts and customers who had missed their appointments or rejected all of the girls who were sent to see them, and try to convince them to see another entertainer. In addition to our primary job of setting appointments, we were required to do work that did not directly affect our tips, such as stuffing envelopes with advertising materials, and cleaning the office.

Also, since phone girls are dependent on tips from dancers, they cannot be considered to be working for a fixed price. We were not even paid a commission on

\textsuperscript{30} NRS 284.173 Definition; contracts for services. Section 2. See also NRS 617.120 "Independent contractor" defined. "Independent contractor' means any person who renders service for a specified recompense for a specified result, under the control of his principal as to the result of his work only and not as to the means by which such result is accomplished."
the amount that the agency earned for each call. Agency owners in Clark County have effectively created a system of compensation that does not include any positive financial incentive for phone girls who increase company revenues. Phone girls are motivated to work hard for the company only through threats, intimidation, and the fear of being fined or fired for violating company policies.

Unpaid Overtime

Phone girls at Sweethearts were paid minimum wage for 40 hours of work each week, but we were often required to work over 40 hours per week. We were required to clock out after 8 hours of work each day, and we were not allowed to clock in on our sixth or seventh work day of the week. Regardless of the number of hours worked each week, we were only paid for a maximum of 40 hours of work.

According to Nevada state law, employers are required to pay wages for every hour the employee works. In addition, employers are required to pay one and one-half times an employee’s regular wage rate whenever an employee works over 40 hours in one week or over 8 hours in any one day.

During the time I worked at Sweethearts, I generally worked 50 hours per week. Most of the phone girls worked at least this many hours, and several worked 60 hour weeks. When I asked other phone girls why they put up with this practice, a few told me that they did not realize that it was illegal for the company to require unpaid

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31 NRS 608.016 Payment for each hour of work; trial or break-in period not excepted. “An employer shall pay to the employee wages for each hour the employee works. An employer shall not require an employee to work without wages during a trial or break-in period.”
32 NRS 608.018 Compensation for overtime: Requirement; exceptions.
overtime. However, most of the phone girls simply stated that being a phone girl was a good job and they did not want to be fired.

Maureen, who was one of the oldest phone girls working at Sweethearts when I was hired, became disgruntled and started to complain to the rest of us about the working conditions at the agency. She stated that she planned to sue the company for unpaid overtime and other labor violations. She was fired soon after she started making these threats. Since the entire office was under audiovisual surveillance, I assume that management heard her comments and fired her for that reason, although I was never told the reason for her dismissal. I never heard anything about a lawsuit actually being filed against the company.

If her dismissal was due to her intent to sue the company for unpaid overtime, Sweethearts was also guilty of violating the Nevada state law against threatening or penalizing employees for bringing a labor complaint against the company.33

Illegal Fees, Fines, and Salary Reductions

In Nevada, it is illegal for employers to take any percentage of employees’ tips.34 Yet, at both Sweethearts and Playmates, the agency owner collected a percentage of

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33 NRS 608.015 Unlawful to induce employee to refrain from testifying. “It is unlawful for any person by force, intimidation, threat of procuring dismissal from employment or in any other manner to induce or attempt to induce an employee to refrain from testifying in any investigation or proceeding relating to or arising under this chapter, or to discharge or penalize any employee for so testifying.”

34 NRS 608.160 Taking or making deduction on account of tips or gratuities unlawful; employees may divide tips or gratuities among themselves. “1. It is unlawful for any person to: (a) Take all or part of any tips or gratuities bestowed upon his employees. (b) Apply as a credit toward the payment of the statutory minimum hourly wage established by any law of this state any tips or gratuities bestowed upon his employees. 2. Nothing contained in this section shall be construed to prevent such employees from entering into an agreement to divide such tips or gratuities among themselves.”
the tips that the phone girls earned on each shift. The agencies did not collect any tip money directly from the entertainers, but since the phone girls’ tips came out of the entertainers’ tip money, the company was, in effect, taking a percentage of entertainers’ tips as well.

At Sweethearts, phone girls were informed that they must pay a percentage of their tips to the company. The entertainers came into the office to drop off the agency fee and the phone girl’s tip after each call. The phone girl collected the tip immediately and had to make change out of her own pocket to pay the company percentage, which had to be dropped into the safe with the agency fee. If the phone girl did not have correct change, she had to drop her entire tip into the safe and would not be reimbursed for this amount ever.

There was a chart on the wall that indicated how much of each tip would be turned over to the company. The percentage ranged from 25% of a $20 tip, to 45% of any tip that was $100 or more. However, the chart was expressed in concrete amounts, rather than percentages, listing a $5 kickback on a $20 tip, $10 on a $30 tip, and so on, up to $45 on a $100 tip. When I questioned other phone girls about having to pay such large percentages of their earnings back to the company, it became clear that some of them had not realized that the amounts were calculated on a sliding scale.

At Playmates, phone girls did not accept tip money directly from the dancers. The dispatcher collected the agency fees and the phone girls’ tips directly from the dancers. The entertainers were required to place each amount in a separate sealed
envelope with the amount written on the front. They were not allowed to ask for change or combine the agency fee and the tip in the same envelope. The envelopes were dropped through a slot in the door and the dispatcher often did not open the envelopes until the end of the shift. Phone girls were not told how much of a tip they earned from each dancer, and they did not receive their tip money until the end of the shift or even the next day.

The dispatcher for each shift was in charge of dividing up the tip money, and she always took a portion out for the house before she divided the tips among herself and the phone girls. When I was in training to become a dispatcher, I was told that there was no set percentage for the "house drop" but that if it wasn't enough, the owner would be upset. If the night was bad, the house drop had to be high enough to make up for it, and if the night was good, the house drop had to be high, too, because it wouldn't be fair for the phone girls to be greedy and take all of their tips home when they had earned so much. Kay, the head dispatcher, encouraged me to think of the house drop as "job security". When I was promoted to dispatcher, I should drop as much as I could to the company so that I would be allowed to keep working good shifts.

At both companies, phone girls and dancers were continually fined for both major and minor rule violations. The rule at both agencies was that every call that was booked had to be paid by either a customer or a dancer. If the customer did not want to see the first dancer, the call was backed up four times. If none of the five dancers were able to collect an agency fee from him, then company policy dictated
that the first dancer be fined for the price of the call. This policy was based on the assumption that the dancer had accepted a tip in exchange for entertainment without collecting the agency fee.

In addition, dancers were also fined the entire agency fee if their tardiness caused the customer to cancel the call or see a dancer from another agency. Dancers could also be fined for not calling on when they were scheduled to work, not answering their pages when they were on call, and quitting without giving notice. This last fine was applied retroactively when a dancer who had quit abruptly decided that she wanted to come back to work for the agency. She would then be charged the total of the fines she had accrued before quitting, plus an additional fine. The amount charged to return to work was often several hundred dollars, although the amount could total up to two thousand dollars.

Fines were calculated in part based on how much the dancers could afford to pay. If a dancer earned a lot of money with one of the agencies, she was fined more often, because management knew that she had the financial resources to pay the fines. She would also be more willing to pay to stay employed at the agency.

Phone girls could be fined for not taking out the trash, not booking enough calls, having too many no-gos, or less frequently for tardiness. Phone girls were almost always fined the amount of $25. Occasionally, if a phone girl did something that resulted directly in the loss of a call, she would be fined the cost of the agency fee. This amount could be split among two or three phone girls if they were all responsible for the error.
At both agencies, phone girls were often fined in groups instead of individually. If
the office was found to be a mess when the owner visited one afternoon, every
phone girl who had worked the previous two shifts would be fined. If the weekly
revenues were low, all of the phone girls currently working for the company would be
fined.

The owners of both agencies were aware that it was illegal to fine dancers and
phone girls, so we were not allowed to use the word “fine” in the office. Instead, we
used the abbreviation “D.O.” which stood for “does owe”.

*Equal Opportunity Employment*

Managers at Sweethearts openly discriminated against Black women who applied
for employment as phone girls. I was told that the owner had an explicit policy
against hiring African American phone girls. According to the Nevada Revised
Statutes, “It is an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to
hire or to discharge any person, or otherwise to discriminate against any person with
respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment, because
of his race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability or national origin.”

Racial discrimination was discussed semi-openly in the office and neither the
owner nor the managers seemed to be at all concerned that they might be sued or
prosecuted for racial discrimination. For a more discussion on the racist rhetoric used
to justify racial discrimination at Sweethearts, see chapter 6.

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35 NRS 613.330 Unlawful employment practices: Discrimination or segregation on basis of race, sex, sexual
orientation, age or disability; refusal to permit guide, hearing or helping dog or other service animal at place of
employment.
Lookism

One of the phone girls’ duties at Sweethearts was to prescreen applicants who called about the agency’s employment wanted ads for phone girls. Since the company was continually running ads, each phone girl fielded several of these calls every day, especially on the day shift. When prospective applicants called in, we were supposed to ask three questions before explaining the job to the caller: Are you over eighteen? Can you work any shift, twenty-four hours a day? Do you have reliable transportation and childcare? If an applicant answered no to any of these questions, they were told that they did not meet the criteria of the job.

We were instructed to then tell the applicant that our job involved sending adult entertainers to perform totally nude in the privacy of our customers’ hotel rooms. We then asked if the caller was comfortable with this. If the applicant said yes, we asked if they had any experience as a dancer, whether for a service or in a club. Often, callers answered this question affirmatively. They may have assumed that revealing industry experience would work to their benefit.

However, any applicant who revealed previous experience as a sex worker was immediately disqualified. If an applicant stated that she had previous experience working as a phone girl, or if she had a good phone manner, this was a plus, and we were supposed to note that next to her name and number on the applicant list. If a caller passed the screening, we would set up a time for her to come in and fill out an application. Callers who did not pass were told that a manager would call them.
Then, when the agency needed more phone girls, which was often, due to the random firings as well as women quitting because they didn’t want to put up with the abuses of the job, the managers would call back those phone girls who had filled out an application and have them come back in for an interview. The interview was generally short and many girls started their unpaid training on the same day.

It was my belief that management only hired phone girls who were significantly overweight (200+ pounds), older (over 35), or did not fit agency standards of beauty due to being ugly, plain or having a particular aesthetic (such as a punk look). This belief was due to my own observations, as well as conversations I had held with other workers at the agency and other individuals who were familiar with the outcall industry. The interview may have been a simple way to ascertain that the applicant fit the physical description required to work as a phone girl, since there were no real occupational requirements for the job.

For example, when I started working at Sweethearts, Nick and Larry were responsible for hiring all new phone girls. However, as they began skipping more and more of their shifts, or showing up near the beginning of their shifts only to disappear soon after, this responsibility shifted onto the current phone girls. I usually worked on Nick’s shift, and one weekend while he was putting together the schedule he told me that I would have to “get some phone girls in here for training.” He gave me the list of names and phone numbers of the prospective applicants who had passed the initial screening and I asked him what he was looking for in a phone girl.
Nick let me know that he didn’t want me to hire anyone who I found out had worked as a dancer, anyone who revealed that they had friends who worked as dancers, or “anybody who seems screwy.” However, other than relying on my general impression of whether she had a good voice and whether it seemed like she could handle the pressure of working on the phones, he didn’t state any positive basis on which to evaluate applicants, such as previous experience in related fields. In this way, he made it clear to me that the application itself was the least useful tool in evaluating a job applicant.

This is partly because phone girls were required to attend three days of unpaid training, including one day of actual work on the phones, so management felt that unprofitable workers could be weeded out without incurring any labor costs to the company. Also, even unproductive phone girls paid at least $185 back to the company every week in fines and tips, so whether or not they were good phone girls, they brought in more in petty cash than their minimum wage paychecks took out in labor costs.

This additional task of interviewing phone girls gave me an opportunity to test my assumptions about management’s lookist policies for hiring phone girls. On one occasion when I was interviewing phone girl applicants, I came across a stellar applicant who was also a very beautiful woman. Nicole had worked for many years as

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36 I already knew that prior phone girl experience was a plus, but very few phone girl applicants at Sweethearts had prior experience.

37 This is also illegal according to NRS 608.016 Payment for each hour of work; trial or break-in period not excepted. “An employer shall pay to the employee wages for each hour the employee works. An employer shall not require an employee to work without wages during a trial or break-in period.”

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an executive assistant for one boss, and he had written her an excellent letter of
recommendation. While she had never worked in the adult industry, neither had the
other two phone girls I hired that day. She was personable and professional in her
demeanor and I knew that she had the skills necessary to do the job well. I hired her,
as she was clearly the most qualified applicant for the job. However, I did not think
that management would be happy with my choice.

The next day, Nicole arrived for her first day of unpaid training, wearing a white
button-down blouse and a professional-looking skirt, cut above the knee. Her hair
was attractively styled and she wore makeup that was appropriate for an office
setting. I left her in the training room with the phone girl manual and a pad to take
notes on and went back into the phone room. A few hours later Larry arrived late to
manage the afternoon shift and I buzzed him into the office. Since the monitors in
the phone room only show the outside door to the building and the inside door to
the office, I did not witness Larry’s initial reaction to Nicole’s presence in the training
room, however, I didn’t have long to wait. Within five minutes, he stormed into the
phone room, dragging her behind him by her elbow. He screamed at me,

L: Is this what you think a phone girl looks like?
Me: [Larry]...
L: (Cuts me off) We don’t hire phone girls that look like this. Look
around. This ain’t what phone girls look like. This girl looks like
a dancer. (Turns to Nicole) Did she ask you if you wanted to be
a dancer?
N: (Bewildered look on her face) I applied for the position of
phone girl. I don’t want to be a dancer.
At this point he turned on Nicole, accusing her of actually being a dancer, screaming that she had applied for the position in order to steal calls or spy on the company. She denied this and was sent to the next room to wait, at which point Larry continued yelling at me, saying that I should not be hiring phone girls if I did not know what I was doing. Yet I had followed the procedure exactly as it had been explained to me. Nicole left that day and I never saw her again.

While this incident occurred at Sweethearts, my experience at Playmates as well as other agencies, leads me to believe that all of the established agencies in Las Vegas use this technique of hiring phone girls that management believes are not attractive enough to work as dancers.

In general, labor violations and poor working conditions went unreported because the women who worked as phone girls and dancers were generally not aware of their rights as employees. In addition, they did not feel like the system would work for them if they chose to enter a complaint against the agencies. Neither the Las Vegas Metropolitan police department nor the Nevada Labor Commissioner’s office take the task of protecting the rights of sex workers very seriously, and I would have to agree that workers who complained about the working conditions at outcall agencies would be faced with the loss of their jobs and no possibility of real justice.

Before I began my fieldwork, I was involved in an incident where an acquaintance of the agency owner I was working for at the time came to my apartment and threatened me at knifepoint. I told him that I did not have any cash on me, and luckily some neighbors called apartment security before he was able to harm me or
escape. However, once the Metro officers arrived, they were more interested in how I knew the man and what I did for a living than anything else. He was arrested, and I was called upon to testify, but when I was on the stand my profession and reputation were repeatedly maligned, and I was harassed by the police after the trial was over as well. This is the type of experiences that outcall agency employees have had with the police in the past, and most are reluctant to bring law enforcement into any situation.

Theft Prevention Policies

Many outcall agency policies are designed in response to real or imaginary theft by employees and others. It was difficult for me to determine the amount of actual theft by phone girls and dancers actually occurred at the agencies. While some amount of theft does occur, some rules and strategies seem designed mainly to intimidate and disenfranchise workers in order to maximize profits for the company.

For example, during my first day at Playmates I was taken into the owner’s office and grilled about my association with Sweethearts. The owner and the head dispatcher, Kay, took turns asking me questions. Did I know that some of the phone girls I had worked with at Sweethearts were now working at Playmates? Who had I worked with when I was at Sweethearts? Had I maintained any connections to the managers or employees at Sweethearts? Did I know why certain employees had been fired? The message was clear. Management wanted to know everything they could about their employees and about other services, but any sharing of information outside of one’s current service would not be tolerated.
I believe this interrogation was conducted more to intimidate me, rather than to uncover any information about Sweethearts that the management at Playmates did not already know. As long as the phone girls felt that they could be fired at any time, they were unlikely to complain about poor working conditions, and they were more likely to comply with the agencies’ rules and regulations.

There were three basic types of theft that did occur at the outcall agencies. Stolen calls were the most common, since the calls occurred in hotels and private homes, away from the agencies’ surveillance cameras. Embezzlement and armed robbery were less common, but also a concern.

**Stolen Calls**

A major focus of the anti-theft policies is deterring workers from stealing calls. Since entertainers and phone girls are not given any portion of the agency fee, many workers choose to steal calls, especially in cases where they would otherwise not make any money. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

One, a phone girl can call or page a dancer who is not working for the company and give her the customer’s information while delaying giving the information to the company’s dancer. This can be achieved due to the rapid pace of agency business, especially on weekend evenings and nights.

In order to prevent this from happening, owners prohibit phone girls from bringing in any cell phones, pagers, and even pens; anything that could conceal a recording or transmission device.
Another way phone girls can steal calls is by recording or remembering the information of customers who have pre-booked calls for later in the evening or on another day. The phone girl can leave work after her shift and then visit the customer herself or send an entertainer who works exclusively for her to the call. Timing is everything, as whoever goes on the call must arrive before the agency’s dancer does.

Either of these plans can be combined with the tactic of not writing a ticket for the call. The ticket is the official record of the customer’s appointment, and is used to schedule and send out a dancer on the call. If there is no ticket, the company will be unaware that the customer requested a dancer.

However, owners combat this trick by giving phone girls legal pads to write down the details of each phone call. Each page of the pad is divided into eight squares, and each square represents a telephone call into the agency. The phone girl’s name and the date are printed at the top of each pad. The phone girl must mark each square with a highlighter to indicate whether or not that call was booked. If a phone girl has a customer’s full information in one of the squares, but has not written a ticket for the call, she will be fined the entire price of the call, under the assumption that she stole or intended to steal the call. Constant audiovisual surveillance is also used as a deterrent to this type of theft.

Entertainers can also steal calls in a variety of ways. The simplest method is to convince a customer to tell the agency that he has changed his mind and is no longer interested in entertainment, and then collect the agency fee as her tip. It is my impression that the dancers only engage in this type of call theft when the customer...
does not have a lot of money to spend, perhaps only the agency fee. In this case, the dancer can choose between collecting the fee for the agency, being stuck in a room with an angry customer who feels that he has been defrauded, and wasting approximately an hour of her time, or collecting the money for herself and entertaining the customer quickly before she has to be back to the agency.

To combat this type of theft, agencies impose strict time limits on dancers. If an entertainer has a call no-go, she has to leave the room immediately and drive all the way back to the agency to sign a no-go slip. She only has 20 minutes to do this or she will be fined the entire price of the call, again under the assumption that she did actually entertain the customer and collect a tip from him without collecting the agency fee.

When a customer states that he has changed his mind about getting entertainment, or if he says that he simply doesn’t like the dancer at his door, another dancer is immediately dispatched to his room. If there are many dancers available at the time two or three may be sent immediately. If any of the back-up dancers see the first dancer just leaving when they arrive, or if the customer refuses to open the door for the back-up dancers, management assumes that the first girl stayed to entertain the customer and she is fined the entire price of the call. It was agency policy at both Sweethearts and Playmates to keep sending back-up dancers until the customer agrees to see one or until five entertainers have been to the room, whichever comes first.

Another way that entertainers can steal calls is by riding with a dancer who is not signed up with the agency. The dancer who is signed up with the agency accepts the
call and they both drive to the hotel. When the dancer gets the customer’s full
information, she gives the information to her friend who goes up in the elevator first.
When the company dancer arrives upstairs a few minutes later, if her friend has been
successful in collecting some money from the customer, the company dancer calls the
agency and tells them that a girl from another agency beat her to the call. The friend
then stays and entertains the customer, and the company entertainer drives back to
the agency to sign a no-go slip.

While agency policies were often inflexibly applied to situations where theft had
not occurred, it is also true that dancers often stole calls. During my fieldwork at both
agencies, I and the other phone girls on my shifts usually caught a dancer stealing a
call at least once a week. We strongly suspected, but could not prove, theft on many
more occasions, up to two or three times per shift. Managers and dispatchers at both
agencies encouraged us to combat theft by backing all calls up aggressively, sending
more than one dancer at a time if we had enough entertainers on call. We were also
encouraged to think up creative ways to catch dancers in the act, such as calling the
customer after the dancer was on her way back to the office and pretending that we
were her. For instance, I might call a customer in his hotel room and pretend ask if it
he could look for an earring that I lost while entertaining him. If he went to look for
the earring, that was considered proof that the dancer had actually stayed and
entertained.
Embezzlement

Agency owners at both agencies also guarded against the theft of cash by phone girls and other employees. Phone girls and dispatchers are required to keep detailed records of all agency fees and fines that are collected. Each fee or fine must be wrapped in a separate piece of paper before being dropped into the safe, so that the written records can easily be reconciled with the amounts in the safe. Each deposit (or “drop”) into the safe must be counted by the dispatcher or desk one girl and verified by another phone girl. Both employees must initial the slip of paper around the cash, as well as the sheet where all of the deposits are recorded (the “drop sheet”). This way, if any cash is missing, the owner knows who was responsible for that amount. At Sweethearts, phone girls were also required to clap their hands and show their palms to the camera after every deposit into the safe, just like casino dealers.

Armed Robbery

Both agency offices were kept locked and under audiovisual surveillance 24 hours a day. One reason for this was the threat of armed robbery. Phone girls and former phone girls at Sweethearts told stories about employees being held at gunpoint by strangers as well as known associates of the owners. While no one related a story in which they were the victim of such a robbery, these stories were too widespread to be without basis.

Two phone girls who I worked with at Sweethearts did say that one of the owner’s brothers, a man who was said to have raped and robbed girls at gunpoint
before, had asked them for a loan of several hundred dollars in cash one day. While he did not threaten either of them, they did not feel comfortable turning down his request.

Stories also circulated about various agency owners ordering contract killings of other agency owners in order to gain control of the Clark County outcall entertainment market. Newspaper reports confirm that in 1998, several men connected with New York crime families planned to kill or intimidate the owners of three major outcall agencies in order to eliminate competition for the owners of the remaining two large agencies (Smith 1998; Fink 1998). Media reports also verify an apparently successful L.A. mob attempt to secure, through the use of force and intimidation, a large amount of cash and a future percentage of revenue from one agency owner in 1996 (Smith 1998).

At Playmates, the owner was convinced that the owner of another agency had a hit out on him, and he was extra cautious about the procedure for opening the front door, even for a restaurant deliveryman, when he was in the office. The head dispatcher, Kay, stated that the office had been robbed before, and that the owner had been threatened by other owners.

Role Conflict

One of the major difficulties phone girls face is the role conflict inherent in their job. According to Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998), “Role conflict occurs when conflicting demands at the job have to be met” (p. 82). The structure of outcall entertainment agencies and the attitudes of the owners preclude any win-win
situations. Rather, all of the persons involved have mutually exclusive goals, including
the phone girls. Unless all of the other parties meet their goals to some degree, the
phone girls cannot be successful in their jobs.

Owners

Agency owners want to charge the highest possible agency fees, committing the
customer to spend the bulk of his money just to meet the entertainer and leaving him
little or no money to tip the dancer for any actual entertainment. For this reason,
owners do not want the customer to realize that the dancers do not receive a portion
of the agency fee. Owners push phone girls to gloss over the subject of tipping, or
downplay the cost of tips to the customers, even if this results in the customer
spending all of his money on the agency fee, not having money to tip the dancer, and
not receiving any entertainment for his money. In addition, phone girls are expected
to book calls at the highest possible price, with multiple entertainers for multiple
hours, if possible. Owners also want the phone girls to be hard on the entertainers,
always checking up on them to reduce theft, sending three to five entertainers to the
same call to avoid no-gos and stolen calls, and fining entertainers for the smallest
infractions.

Dancers

Dancers want the customers to spend as little as possible on agency fees, in order
to leave money for high tips, which are the dancers’ only source of income. If a
customer sounds like he is on a budget, dancers would prefer he be talked out of
requesting multiple entertainers or multiple hours. Dancers will also often request
that the agency fee be lowered for customers who do not have enough money to pay the fee and also tip. If a dancer collects the agency fee from a customer who has no more money to tip, she has already wasted a significant amount of time, because she still has to return to the agency to drop off the agency fee, in addition to paying transportation costs, such as gas and valet tip or else taxi fare. Also, she is now alone in a hotel room with a man who is generally quite angry that he has paid $100-$250 (or more for multiple entertainers) for absolutely nothing.

At both agencies, approximately two or three times per busy shift, a dancer would call the office to let us know that the customer refused to tip at all and was mad that he would not be receiving entertainment. The phone girls would then have to talk to the customer and convince him to let the dancer leave the room. We often had to lie and tell him that we would send him another dancer and that her tip would be covered by the fee he had already paid. Then he would call repeatedly to ask where his free dancer was. When he finally realized that his free dancer didn’t exist, he would ask to speak to the manager, scream at the phone girls, threaten to call the cops or the better business bureau, etc. This happened on every busy shift, and we usually just started putting the call on hold as soon as we realized it was the same customer calling back.

Due to the difficult position they are put in, dancers will sometimes try to steal calls, telling the phone girls that a call is a no-go, when really they have stayed and entertained the customer without collecting an agency fee. In this case, the dancer cannot tip the phone girl because the phone girl would then know that the call had
gone through. Of course, dancers also prefer to be treated reasonably by the phone girls and do not like being fined for minor rule violations, or being sent to “back up” calls where a customer has already turned away up to four other entertainers.

Customers

Every customer who calls always wants to negotiate the lowest possible price for his entertainment. New customers try to negotiate the lowest agency fee, and experienced customers want an entertainer who will stay and entertain for the lowest possible total price, including the agency fee and the dancer’s tip. Customers will call dozens of phone lines, including multiple lines at the same agency, in order to get lower quotes. About one out of every ten customers was a serious budget customer, who wanted to get the agency fee down to a hundred dollars or less and planned on tipping about fifty dollars.

These same customers are invariably disappointed when they see the quality of entertainer that phone girls send out to budget customers. They will call back repeatedly and state that a certain entertainer is not up to their standards, but they will not pay more to see a more attractive dancer. Often, if a customer rejects a homely entertainer and requests someone more attractive, the phone girl who booked the call has to send in a better-looking entertainer in order to avoid having the call no-go.

The pretty entertainer will collect the low agency fee and then request her usual tip, which is way above the budget customer’s expectations. At this point, he can either pay the amount she is asking for or forfeit the agency fee, which to him is a lot of money. If he refuses to pay the high tip, or if he simply does not have the money,
he will often call the agency repeatedly to complain, harassing the phone girls at the agency. Of course, since the dancer did not earn a tip, neither did the phone girl who booked the call, and all of the phone girls have to put up with verbal abuse from the disgruntled customer, even though the owner is the only person who earned any money on the call.

*Phone Girls*

Since they only earn a percentage of the dancers’ tips, it is in the phone girls’ best financial interests to maximize the dancers’ profits, rather than the agency’s profits or the customers’ satisfaction. However, a phone girl who does not book enough calls, repeatedly books calls at low prices, or allows calls to no-go will suffer the consequence of being yelled at, fined, and eventually fired by the owner. In addition, if the customers are not happy with their entertainment, the phone girls will be yelled at and threatened by the customers as well.

The same problem exists when fining dancers and sending them on undesirable calls. If a dancer does not like how a particular phone girl treats her, she is more likely to lie about whether she got a tip, or pretend her tip was smaller, in order to avoid paying the proper percentage to the phone girl. However, owners and managers repeatedly state that the phone girls should not care if they are popular with the dancers and that phone girls caught giving dancers breaks will be fired. They expect the phone girls to act in the owners’ best interests instead of their own without giving any incentive to do so, other than keeping their jobs.
For example, if a customer calls Playmates and inquires about having two dancers entertain 6 guests for a 2 hour-long bachelor party, the phone girl must quote him the price of $250 per dancer per hour, totaling $1000. If the customer states that the group only has a grand total of $800 to spend, the owner expects the phone girl to reduce the rate to $200 per dancer per hour in order to accommodate the customer’s request and maximize profits for the agency. However, this does not leave any money for the dancers’ tips.

If the customer accepts this price, he will pay the dancers when they arrive, only to find that they refuse to entertain him unless he or his guests dig deeper into their wallets or visit the ATM machine to withdraw several hundred dollars for tip money. From the dancers’ point of view, it would have made more sense to convince the customer to see one dancer for up to one hour. Even at the standard agency fee of $250, this would leave $550 for tips, which could be considered reasonable, depending on the type of entertainment the customers requested.

This would also maximize profits for the phone girl who booked the call, who only earns a percentage of the dancer’s tip, not the agency fee. However, the phone girl also has to keep in mind that if she is caught convincing a customer to give less to the agency and more to the dancer, she will lose her job. Since all of the phone lines are tapped and the entire office is bugged, she can never be sure if the owner is listening in, or if he will review the tapes later and discover what she has done.
Management Styles

While both agencies applied the same abusive policies to their workers, Sweethearts had a particularly bad reputation among phone girls and entertainers. Turnover was very high in both positions. Experienced phone girls and dancers sometimes called the help wanted ads placed by Sweethearts. However, once they found out what agency placed the ad, they were often unwilling to come in and fill out an application.

In contrast, many of the entertainers who worked at Playmates had been with the company for a period of several months to several years. Kay, the head dispatcher, had a good working relationship with the dancers at Playmates, especially the very successful entertainers. The turnover rate was still high for phone girls at Playmates, but it was only about half as high as at Sweethearts.

This difference in the way the two agencies were perceived may have had more to do with each agency's management style and less to do with which agency actually took advantage of its workers to a greater degree. The management at both agencies relied on intimidation to maximize profits and reduce theft. However, at Sweethearts, the managers were less flexible and more abusive. The owner and all three managers at Sweethearts verbally abused the phone girls and dancers on a regular basis.

At Sweethearts, the company was very strict on the amount of time that entertainers had to arrive at a hotel, get into the room, and collect the agency fee. Entertainers were told to literally walk into the room, introduce themselves to the customer, and ask to use the phone. The dancer should never negotiate or even
mention tips before the agency fee had been collected. Only once the entertainer was on the phone should she ask for the agency fee. If for some reason she could not get the agency fee while she was on the phone, she had 5 minutes to collect it.

This is a workable policy in many situations, since it not only reduces theft by entertainers, but also gives the customer less time to question whether he wants to see an entertainer, whether he finds this entertainer attractive or personable enough for his tastes, and whether he really has enough money to afford an agency fee plus whatever tip the girl might request for herself. However, management at Sweethearts did not see individual persons and situations as variable and saw any deviation from the proper script as an excuse to increase revenue by fining the entertainers, even if they were simply delayed due to traffic or slow elevators, or if they were unable to bully the customer into handing over his money without negotiating, or “talking tips,” first.

At Playmates, where a large percentage of the entertainers had been working for the company for many years, and many had even worked for Kay, the head dispatcher, at other outcall agencies for up to a decade prior, this level of distrust was not present. Entertainers were expected to move quickly so that they wouldn’t lose calls to other agencies. However, they were not timed so precisely and the dispatchers stated that it was more important to give the dancer time to negotiate a good deal so that she could earn a good tip in addition to the agency fee.

On my first day of training for Sweethearts, I was watching a company video in the training room when I heard Larry yelling at Kim, the office assistant, outside in
the hallway of the office suite. She had asked him for a raise, as the office manager was leaving the company, and Kim would be taking over her duties. Larry screamed that she shouldn’t be asking for a raise, because he didn’t even know if she could handle the added responsibility yet. He berated her, “I could pay you $100 an hour and it wouldn’t help you if you can’t handle the job, because in three days I could fire you, and you’d be working at McDonalds.”

At one employee meeting, the owner walked into the room and threw a stack of no-go tickets at the assembled phone girls. He yelled at us for losing money for the company and fined us each $25. While he was still working for the company, Larry yelled at the phone girls on swing shift almost every day that he made it into the office. Nick was more easygoing on a daily basis, but he carried a gun with him at all times, and I once watched him throw a dancer into the hallway of the office building when she started arguing with him.

Although Larry and Nick could be quite intimidating, they had allowed the rules to become more relaxed, simply because they were not present during every shift. When Maria, the owner’s fiancée, came back to the office to work, she immediately held a meeting to announce that the rules would be much stricter from then on, and she started cutting into the phone girls’ tips more and more with additional fines and fees.

At Playmates, the rules were enforced with some discretion. The dispatchers did not hesitate to fine dancers for stealing calls or losing a call to another agency due to tardiness, but they would not fine a dancer for a no-go if it was clear that the
customer really had no intention of paying for entertainment. Kay also made an effort to speak to the entertainers and warn them about the consequences of their actions if they were beginning to break the rules. She spent a lot of time mentoring the dancers who she felt could be good money-makers for her and the company. In addition, when she was taking advantage of the phone girls or the dancers, Kay usually relied on manipulation rather than violence or yelling.

The owner and the dispatchers at Playmates could still be very verbally abusive. There was one incident when I was on the phone with a potential client and Kay started screaming at another phone girl for not picking up a ringing phone fast enough. Not only was it difficult for me to hear what the customer was saying, but he could clearly hear Kay, and she was making our agency seem very unprofessional. With my ear still up to the phone, I turned in her direction and made a shushing gesture by placing my finger in front of my lips. She started yelling even louder, saying, “Don’t shush me! Don’t you ever shush me!” At this point, I was thoroughly embarrassed and I knew that I was going to lose the sale. When the client ended the call by telling me that he would think about it and call me back, I told Kay that I had only tried to silence her because I wanted to book the call, but she was not interested in listening to reason at that point. I insisted that making the sale was more important than anything else, and told her that I would not object to someone else silencing me in the same situation, but she was still angry. I couldn’t bring myself to apologize sincerely, and our relationship deteriorated from that day forward, even though Kay had always liked me before that incident.
Still, the overall atmosphere of the office wasn't as intimidating as the atmosphere at Sweethearts. However, I believe that the employees at Playmates were taken advantage of financially to a greater degree. The agency fee at Playmates was $250, instead of $175 at Sweethearts, so the customers had less money to tip. Also, the system of dividing the tips at Sweethearts allowed the dispatchers an opportunity to take a higher percentage of total earnings out for the owner as well as for themselves.

Playmates was also perceived as a better place to work by the phone girls and entertainers because the agency was busier, so the employees earned more. When I questioned Lainey about her feelings on the secretive compensation policies at Playmates, she replied that she preferred Playmates to Sweethearts anyway, because she would rather take home more money at the end of the day, regardless of what percentage had been returned to the company. I suspect most of the other phone girls felt the same way.

Research Questions

Two of my research questions relate specifically to labor relations. 1) What are the effects of third party control of labor on sex workers and other workers in the outcall setting? 2) How are these effects intensified or mitigated by the specific and complex legal and social position of outcall entertainment in Clark County?

Third Party Control of Labor

Outcall entertainers working for an agency have minimal control over the clients they are sent to entertain. They do not have an opportunity to speak to the clients before arriving at the client's hotel room. Because the industry in Clark County is
controlled by a few large agencies, the women do not have much choice when selecting their employers, either. The top five agencies and most of the medium sized agencies are owned and staffed by people who know each other and share information about potential job applicants. All of the agencies apply the same abusive rules to the dancers and phone girls to a greater or lesser degree.

While independent outcall entertainers are still subject to restrictive laws and police harassment, they are better able to choose their clients and their working conditions to maximize their income and their safety. By designing their own advertisements, they have more control over the image they project and the clients they attract. They can also set their own work hours and are better able to set limits on what hotels and areas of town they will work.

A major benefit of working independently is the ability to speak to the customer before entering his home or hotel room in order to negotiate a price and also to ensure that he sounds sober and relatively sane. When working for themselves, dancers also avoid the possibility of being sent to back-up no-gos or being sent to see a customer who has revealed his full information, but who never specifically requested entertainment.

Of course, the independent entertainers also retain the entire fee they collect when they visit a customer. However, due to the vast amounts of money that the agencies spend on advertising in the yellow pages, on billboards and taxi tops, and also in adult magazines and leaflets, it is very difficult for independent entertainers to compete with the large agencies.
Outcall Entertainment in Clark County

Due to the legal history of outcall entertainment in Clark County, it is difficult to apply for and receive a new outcall promoter's license. Since women who have been convicted of prostitution are not eligible to work in the outcall industry, the agencies are assured a constant stream of inexperienced, young dancers dazzled by the prospect of earning large amounts of cash in a small amount of time.

Also, due to a number of legal battles fought between the county and the large agencies, the agencies themselves cannot be prosecuted for promoting prostitution, even if one of their dancers is arrested for prostitution. The agencies are very careful about having each entertainer sign an agreement indicating that the company is not hiring her as a prostitute, and that she will not commit or solicit an act of prostitution while working for the company.

Social pressure is also a factor. While the agencies are guilty of a number of labor violations, the women who work as dancers and phone girls are often unaware of their legal rights. They are also often unwilling to become involved in a legal battle that will open them to public and police scrutiny.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the working conditions for phone girls and entertainers at large agencies in Clark County. I have also shown that the overall effect of third-party control of sexual labor is negative, and that these effects are intensified by the quasi-legal status of outcall entertainment in Clark County.
In the next chapter, I will explore issues of race, class, and ethnicity, and answer my three remaining research questions: 1) What discourses are used to fetishize, commodify and/or nullify race and ethnicity in the research setting? 2) How do race and class affect subjects' perceived attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to violence, money-making potential, and class mobility? 3) How do race and class affect entertainers' and phone girls' actual money-making potential and class mobility?
CHAPTER 6

RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER

In this chapter, I will explore the interlocking effects of race, class, and gender in the outcall entertainment industry. While all outcall entertainers in Clark County are bound by the same restrictive laws and punitive agency regulations, the effects of supply and demand, as well as agency world mores and informal policies, are worse for women, people of color, and lower class entertainers. I will conclude this chapter by answering my three remaining research questions: discussing how race and ethnicity are commodified, fetishized, and/or nullified through racial discourse; how race and class affect perceptions of attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to violence, money-making potential, and class mobility; and what the effects of these perceptions are.

Race

Racism is a constant undercurrent in the agency world, affecting relations between and among dancers, customers and agency staff. In this section, I will discuss the importance of race in the agency world in three separate ways. The racial composition of dancers and phone girls at each agency reflects two different strategies of managing supply and demand. The economics of race in the outcall industry determine, to a large degree, whether a dancer (particularly a female dancer) will be
able to earn a living in Las Vegas. And the economic and cultural realities of race in Las Vegas (and the United States) determine the ways that race is discussed by customers and agency workers.

*Racial Composition*

The racial composition of workers at the two agencies was completely different. Official agency policies as well as informal management practices determined the racial composition of phone girls and entertainers at each agency. At Sweethearts, the agency owner had an explicit policy against hiring Black phone girls. Although this edict was not universally followed, it resulted in a lower proportion of African American phone girls being hired, compared to the number hired at Playmates, and also compared to the number who applied for the job.

At Sweethearts, the phone girls were primarily Caucasian. During the 3 months I worked at the agency 21 phone girls were on the payroll for varying lengths of time. Of these, 17 were Caucasian, 2 (including myself) were Latina, and 2 were African American. However, I did not work with either of the Black phone girls for more than a few days. One African American phone girl, Olivia, was fired on my second day of training. The other Black phone girl was hired in the last week that I worked at the company. The secretary, who had worked briefly as a phone girl in the month prior to my employment, Kim, was an Asian woman. She was the only remaining member of the office support staff, as the office manager, a White woman, left during my first week on the job and was never replaced. Instead, Kim was given the opportunity to do her job with no corresponding increase in pay.
During the three months I worked at Playmates, there were 11 phone girls who worked for the company. I was the only Latina phone girl, 4 of the phone girls were African American, and the remaining 6 phone girls were Caucasian. All three of the dispatchers were Latina. There was no discussion around the office about the acceptability or unacceptability of hiring Black women as phone girls.

At Sweethearts, over half of the available dancers on the company’s list, which held around 150-200 female and 50 male dancers at any given time, were African American. Approximately 30-35% were Caucasian, 5-10% were Latina, and fewer than 5% were Asian.

Around 85% of the 125-150 dancers who worked for Playmates were Caucasian. Another 10% were Asian, and the remaining 5% was split fairly evenly between African Americans and Latinas.

*The Economics of Race in the Outcall Industry*

While the racial supply of entertainers at Sweethearts and Playmates was quite different, customer demand was much the same at the both agencies. The most popular customer request, by far, was for a blonde, Caucasian female entertainer. Caucasian brunettes and Asian dancers were also very much in demand. Latinas were requested often enough to keep the small percentage of Latina dancers at each agency busy, especially since they were the most racially versatile entertainers, filling in for Caucasian and Asian entertainers with relatively little problem.

However, there was almost no demand for Black outcall entertainers at either agency. At Sweethearts, Black dancers were sent on undesirable calls, or used to back-
up calls that had little chance of going through. When the type of dancer a customer requested was not available, we were instructed to send any dancer who was not in demand. Even if a customer requested a busty, blue-eyed blonde, if the only dancers on call were flat-chested and dark-skinned, we still had to send one of them and then back the call up five times when it didn’t go through.

As the night wore on and the successful dancers earned enough money for the night, they would call off to rest for another busy evening. By around 2 am on a weeknight or 4 am on a Friday or Saturday, the phones would die down and all of the White, Asian, and Latina dancers would be allowed to call off. But a couple of hours later, when a few calls trickled in, we would need dancers to send on those calls.

So the Black dancers, who had spent the majority of the evening being sent to customer after customer who had requested a White or Asian dancer, would be told various lies to keep them on call. We claimed that we had a fresh call at a nice casino and then we sent them to wake up customers who had turned down three or four dancers hours ago when the night was busy and we didn’t have time to back up the call five times. We told them that a customer had just called for a Black dancer, but that he had something to do first; if she stayed on call for another hour, she would get the call.

The African American dancers who signed up in droves at Sweethearts were simply unable to earn a living under these conditions, so they generally quit after a few days or, at most, a week or two. To keep enough dancers available, the company was constantly running help wanted ads for entertainers in the newspaper and on the
radio. These ads attracted a lot of entertainers who were new to the sex industry, new to Las Vegas, or new to outcall agency work. African American women were disproportionately represented in the category of new or unsuccessful entertainers who were recruited at Sweethearts and worked for a period of a few weeks.

While African American entertainers generally quit working for Sweethearts because they were earning very little or no money, many White and Asian dancers who were just starting out in the industry often quit due to their success. Since managers and phone girls at Sweethearts were hard on entertainers, even by industry standards, many of the more experienced and successful entertainers did not consider Sweethearts a good place to work. Once new entertainers learned a little about the industry and made a few contacts, they often moved on to better agencies, including Playmates.

The non-Black dancers who stayed at Sweethearts because they weren't pretty enough, fit enough, or classy enough for an agency like Playmates were able to earn a living as long as they continued to work a full-time schedule. However, this simply wasn't an option for the African American dancers, due to the lack of demand by customers.

Many customers requested a dancer of a particular race or hair color. But others simply stated that they would see any dancer except an African American. Most did not give a specific reason for this prejudice. Some stated that they were not attracted to Black women. Others indicated that they knew of other places that they could pick up Black women without having to pay an agency fee. It is very possible that the high
proportion of Black women in lower-class forms of sex work deters men who want to meet a Black woman from using outcall agencies.

Almost all of the successful entertainers at Playmates, many of whom were earning upwards of $500 on most calls, were White. The two exceptions were mixed race entertainers of Asian and Caucasian descent. The high percentage of White dancers ensured that customers who wanted to see a White entertainer usually had their request fulfilled, regardless of the time of day. Therefore, there was not much work for the few Black dancers who were signed up with the agency. None of these dancers worked full-time for Playmates, and they usually did not call on for regular shifts. Instead, when a call came in, we paged all of the Black dancers on the list and sent the first one who was able to accept the call. Since there was no way of knowing if any Black dancers would be available at any given time, and since none of them relied on Playmates as their primary source of income, it was often hard to fill the few calls that did come in for African American entertainers.

The racial balance between the dancer supply and customer demand at Playmates may have been one of the reasons why there was less turnover among entertainers, compared to Sweethearts. There weren’t many calls for African American entertainers, but there also weren’t many African American entertainers working for the company.

Playmates did not advertise for new entertainers, which may explain why so few Black dancers worked for the company. The company received 2-3 calls per week from entertainers who were seeking employment. Many had been referred to the
company by current or former employees, and the remainder called in after seeing one of the company's ads in the yellow pages. Usually, one or two of these dancers were hired each week. It seems likely that the majority of experienced, successful entertainers do not use the help-wanted ads to secure employment or to change employers. More research on the employment patterns of successful, long-term outcall entertainers is warranted.

The racism in the Clark County outcall entertainment industry ensures that the majority of dancers are friends with other dancers of their own race. Therefore, successful non-Black dancers are more likely to refer other non-Black dancers to companies they have made money at, such as Playmates. On the other hand, African American entertainers would not be likely to recommend Playmates to their friends and family members.

Of the dancers working for outcall agencies in Clark County, new entertainers were more likely to be Black and successful entertainers were more likely to be White. Previous research has indicated that racism against African American sex workers is particularly bad in Las Vegas (Chapkis, 1997). However, more research is needed to determine whether this is the sole reason for the lack of opportunity for Black outcall entertainers in Clark County.

Many of the successful, long-term entertainers at both agencies had worked in various parts of California and Nevada, and the general consensus among the more experienced phone girls and dispatchers was that there were a large number of entertainers who traveled the California-Nevada sex work circuit and who rarely or
never used outcall agencies to find customers. It may be possible that successful
African American entertainers were more likely to use their circuit contacts either to
work as semi-independent outcall entertainers with no ties to the major agencies, or
to bypass the outcall system entirely and work in other areas of the Las Vegas sex
industry.

Asian entertainers may also have been more likely to use non-agency contacts to
procure sex industry employment. Cultural differences may have made it easier for
Asian immigrants, in particular, to work for Asian-owned businesses. At Sweethearts,
I hired two Asian immigrant women who were both older, but very beautiful. Both
said they had previous experience working for agencies, and I felt that they had the
potential to make money with the company.

However, I ran in to trouble explaining the agency rules to them. All new
entertainers were required to sign a page explaining that they understood that
prostitution was illegal, and that they were being hired to dance nude for the agency’s
customers. When hiring new dancers, it was the phone girl’s responsibility to read the
form to each new hire and make sure that she understood what she was signing.

When I explained this clause to the two Asian women, the more outspoken of the
two stated, “I don’t dance.” I told her that it was up to her to develop her own
routines and entertainment; she simply had to understand that she prostitution was
illegal in Clark County and that she was not being hired as a prostitute. When she told
me that she and her friend were prostitutes and not dancers, I had to tell them that
they could not work for the company.
Race as a Fetishized Commodity

Mainly, race and ethnicity were seen as fetishes or special requests by customers. This understanding was reproduced in the advertisements that described an agency’s entertainers as “Blue-eyed Blondes” or “Oriental Dolls” alongside ads for “Schoolgirls” and “Student Nurses”.

Phone girls were responsible for sending the most appropriate entertainer to a call based on the criteria given by the customer, as well as other factors, such as who was close to the strip, who was trustworthy, etc. So, if a customer requested a blonde, by which he invariably meant a Caucasian blonde, and one was available, then she was dispatched. If not, the phone girls had to try to size up the customer’s racialized perceptions of beauty and decide which of the available entertainers might best please his aesthetic sensibilities. Most of the customers who requested blondes were fairly adamant, as they often had fetishized images of cheerleaders and showgirls dancing in their heads.

Another common request that always caused problems was for Asian entertainers. The following exchange occurred at Sweethearts between Nick, the night manager, who was Latino, and Melissa, a White phone girl:

Nick: Cocoa is going as an Asian, so call her back and tell her she’s half Asian today.
Mel: Does she look Asian?
Nick: Just tell her, “You’re half Asian, your grandpa’s from China or whatever...” Let her know so that she can tell the customer.”
Mel: (on the phone, speaking to Black dancer) Cocoa, I forgot to tell you, you need to tell him you’re half Asian, part Asian, OK? Tell him your grandpa was from...Asia.
It was always difficult to attract and retain Asian entertainers at Sweethearts. Neither agency had a large number of Asian entertainers, but since Playmates had less turn-over, there were several reliable Asian entertainers at that agency.

*Race as a Predictor of Behavior*

Race was also seen as a reliable way to determine how a phone girl, dancer or customer would act. Phone girls, dispatchers and managers at both agencies perceived African Americans as lower class and significantly more prone to dishonesty and violence.

For example, one African American phone girl, Olivia, was fired on my second day of training at Sweethearts. When I came in to work on that day, two of the White phone girls were discussing their coworker’s termination. One of the women remarked that Victor, the owner, had a policy of not hiring Black phone girls “because they steal.” She stated that she was not surprised that Olivia had been fired, and she assumed that Victor would tell the managers not to hire any more Black phone girls. The assertion that African American phone girls and dancers steal was repeated frequently at Sweethearts and never challenged by anyone other than myself.

While all entertainers were pushed to accept all types of calls, such as hotel calls, local calls, two-guy calls, and bachelor parties, regardless of their comfort level, it was considered acceptable at both agencies for dancers of any race to refuse to see Black customers. One day in my third week at Sweethearts, I had a call for a female dancer to entertain a Black male customer at the Luxor. The customer sounded sincere and

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38 See chapter 5 for more on racial discrimination and other illegal labor practices.
well-educated, and he was staying at a respectable hotel, but I could not find an
entertainer to take the call. I was getting frustrated, and I questioned Ashley, a senior
phone girl, about the reasoning behind this policy. I knew that the office was under
video surveillance, but I had not realized before that the owner and his fiancée often
listened to what was going on at the office, so I was startled to hear Maria’s voice
come over a loudspeaker on one of the desks. She said, “Tell the new girl that some
dancers just don’t want to entertain Black customers.” When I asked why, she stated
that there were three good reasons for entertainers not to see African American
customers. 1) Most Black men don’t have much money and that even those who do
are cheap with their money and don’t spend that much. 2) They often don’t want to
pay at all or else they pay the dancer, but after she has finished entertaining they
demand the money back and won’t let the girl leave until she gives back the money.
3) Many Black “customers” are really pimps trying to recruit girls. She concluded by
reiterating the policy that any girl who didn’t want to entertain for Black customers
didn’t have to, and that I should just keep calling around until I found someone who
would.

Playmates had the same policy of allowing dancers to refuse a customer if he was
African American. Kay, the head dispatcher, told me that many of the dancers would
simply refuse if they were asked to entertain Black customers, either because of their
own racism, or conversely, because they had Black men at home who did not allow
them to entertain Black customers. When I pressed her to explain the reasoning
behind this last statement, she stated that many Black men told the dancers that it
would be a sign of disrespect to them if the dancers entertained other Black men. She did say that while the men in question might feel somewhat disrespected, their intent was really to keep the entertainers away from Black pimps posing as customers. However, Kay had a very good relationship with many of these men, so she did not want to rock the boat by allowing the entertainers to break their rules.

Class

At Sweethearts, the standard agency fee was $175 cash or $225 credit and at Playmates the usual fee was $250, but the price could be lowered to $100 at either agency if the customer was unwilling to book at a higher price, or if he had been quoted a lower price by a competing agency. When the entertainer arrived at the hotel room, she collected the exact amount that was quoted to him over the phone. That amount was the agency fee, which was non-refundable once the customer paid it, and went entirely to the agency. After collecting the agency fee, the dancer negotiated with the customer for her tip. The dancers then tipped the phone girls 20% of the tip they earned from the customer.

Operationalizing Class

The entertainers and the phone girls only made money if the dancer met the customer’s expectations of beauty and class, and if the customer was willing and able to afford a tip that was acceptable to the dancer. Otherwise, the customer and the dancer would not be able to agree on a tip and the call would either be a no-go (if the customer did not even pay the agency fee) or a base call (if he paid the agency fee, but
did not tip and the dancer did not stay and entertain him). Therefore, it was important to match up the class of the entertainer with the class of the customer.

Phone girls guessed customers' economic class partly by the hotel he was staying in, but also by asking him about his line of work, listening to his style of speech, and sometimes asking him directly how much money he was looking to spend on entertainment.

Phone girls operationalized dancers' class based on entertainers' manner of dress, speech, personal grooming, and use or avoidance of hard drugs. Specifically, phone girls often commented that certain dancers were too "tacky" "sleazy" "strung-out" or "dirty". Phone girls noticed when an entertainer wore outfits that were too "scandalous" "slutty" or "obvious" for nice casinos. In other cases entertainers wore items that were clearly too casual. Sometimes this was related to the age and upbringing of the dancers.

Kay: (Watching security camera) Is that Gina? I hope she didn't go to the Monte Carlo in that sweatshirt.
Lainey: She is so nasty. I mean, she looks dirty!
Kay: She's just young and stupid. But she's got a pretty face and a lot of the guys want eighteen year olds. I'll talk to her, take her under my wing. She just needs to be straightened out and she could be a moneymaker.

Specifically, a few of the more experienced dispatchers and phone girls recognized that many of the entertainers were young women who had never been exposed to middle class values. Even the men who managed the dancers' private lives and profited from their labor did not know how to maximize their potential by teaching them to appeal to better classes of customers.
Me: Why don't some of these guys make sure their girls go out looking decent? They make sure their girls work; they call to check up on them. Why not tell them they have to wear something nicer? They want to make money, right?

Kay: Most of the men don't know any better than the dancers do. Especially the ones that are small time, but even the ones that aren't, they grew up on the same streets as the girls, got into this by accident, they're just dumb n*****s. Girl goes out, brings back money, he doesn't have any ambition for her to better herself and he wouldn't know what to teach her if he did.

Entertainers could be divided into lower street class, street class, working class, and middle class, while their customers could be divided into working class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class. Phone girls very consciously divided dancers into these groups, though they would use their own categories like sleazy, good-enough-for (as in “she's good enough for a guy at the Stardust”), and classy. For this reason, and because customers simply weren't going to pay as much for lower class service/product, class very much affected how much money entertainers could make. Non-White dancers who were lower class were doubly disadvantaged.

However, phone girls also had negative perceptions of higher class entertainers. The successful entertainers would refuse to go on calls at lower class hotels and motels, or hotels that were not on the Las Vegas Strip. They would also refuse to stay and entertain the customers unless the tip was very high. The phone girls resented these behaviors and complained about the high class entertainers for these reasons.

“Sleazy” dancers. The lowest of the street class dancers, especially those who were seriously addicted to drugs, would come in noticeably high, with dirty/greasy hair, several missing acrylic nails, outfits and shoes that were more appropriate for strip clubs than for public (neon colored spandex dresses and pantsuits with cutouts that
showed a lot of skin, high-heeled shoes with clear plastic platforms), and visible track marks on arms and legs. They also had problems with accepting calls and then never making it to the hotel, or calling on and never answering pages. This group was a minority at Sweethearts. I did not encounter any dancers who fit into this category at Playmates.

"Good-enough" dancers. Most of the street class entertainers had culturally acceptable levels of personal hygiene, although their choice of styles was clearly affected by their class background. Many had tacky, inexpensive hair weaves or extensions, hair dye jobs that were overdue for a touchup, and extra long acrylic nails in bright non-standard colors and patterns. Often these girls would wear clothing that was somewhat inappropriate. They preferred to wear trendy clothing (low-cut jeans and club wear tops – never lingerie) and it was difficult to convince them to upgrade their wardrobes as an investment in their careers. One night at Playmates, a gentleman at the Las Vegas Hilton requested an entertainer come to his room wearing a garter belt. It was late and all of our top girls had already called off. We had nine girls left on call and none of them owned a garter belt. However, the biggest surprise to me was when I spoke to Roxie, a 19 year old street class entertainer who had been working for the agency for about a year. She asked me what a garter belt was and had no idea what I was talking about when I described one to her.

Another sign that a dancer fit into this category was excessive use of slang and non-standard English. While most of the dancers and phone girls were working class and therefore used very casual English, there was a marked difference in the Ebonics-
style speech that the street level dancers used, regardless of their race. Some of these dancers would also come in high, but their drug use was not severe enough to hinder their work performance on a regular basis. They usually answered their pages when they were on call, and if they accepted a call, they made it to the hotel room. Most of the entertainers at Sweethearts and about half of the entertainers at Playmates were in this group.

"Classy" dancers. There was more of a continuum between working class and middle class dancers rather than two separate groups. Working and middle class dancers used speech patterns ranging from casual to standard, wore clothing that was sexy but appropriate, from cute but cheap stuff to the more expensive such as designer dresses or pantsuits (depending more on the girl's current level of success than her class background), and more conservative styles of hair, nails, etc. They tended to have well-kept acrylic nails, ranging from the long and bright to shorter nails in red or French manicure. Hair was generally kept freshly cut and colored, nicely washed and styled. Drugs and alcohol were not a significant problem for these two groups, though occasionally a girl would start having personal problems concurrent with substance abuse. This would become apparent when they started missing calls and pages. This was also the only time girls from these class backgrounds would start letting their grooming go, stop taking care of their hair, etc. Most of the girls who from this group who signed up at Sweethearts would become top girls very quickly, since so few of the girls there were this classy. Then they would
realize that there were better agencies to work for and move on within a few weeks.
About half of the entertainers at Playmates were in this group.

*The Economics of Beauty in the Outcall Industry*

Tips varied widely, from $50 to thousands of dollars, although most tips were in the $100-$500 range. The more attractive an entertainer was, the higher she would set her minimum tip. Most of ‘classy’ dancers would not stay and entertain a customer for less than $300 in addition to the agency fee. The amount of the tip also depended on the customer’s wealth, both parties’ negotiation skills, and many other factors, such as the mood the customer was in, whether he had been drinking, and whether he had been winning at the tables.

At Playmates, we had one entertainer, Amy, who was overweight and not particularly attractive. She would regularly stay and entertain customers for as little as $50, considered scandalously low by Las Vegas standards, especially since she was expected to tip out $10 of that money to the phone girl who had arranged the call. I was personally able to convince Amy to stay and entertain for $30 on a few occasions, with the provision that she would not be expected to tip me for the call.

On the other end of the scale, I arranged a call, also through Playmates, for a gentleman to see two entertainers in his suite at the Bellagio. The quality of the hotel is one hint to help determine the amount of the tip, but I had other indicators that allowed me to believe this would be a good call. The customer did not call the agency directly — a guest services employee from the hotel made the call on his behalf. I selected Nina and Maya, a pair of roommates who were considered money-makers
due to their excellent two-girl shows. I cleared my selection with the dispatcher on
duty; however, our logic was flawed. The dancers were unwilling to provide the
gentleman with the type of entertainment he desired and he sent them away with
$2000 apiece, in addition to the $500 service fee, stating that he would have spent
more if they could have come to a satisfactory agreement.

Although that $4500 call was the largest call I have personally booked during this
research period, I was aware of some select clients spending well in excess of that
amount. A handful of very wealthy clients at Playmates, and a couple at Sweethearts
were regular clients, most of who visited from southern California on a regular basis.
These men would rent hotel suites for the week and see multiple entertainers for
several hours each day, paying regular agency rates of $150-$250 per hour plus
hundreds or even thousands per hour in tips to the top girls that the agencies sent
them. In addition, all of the successful entertainers had stories, which may have been
exaggerated, but which I believe were generally true or rooted in truth, of clients who
had purchased expensive clothing, jewelry, and even cars for them.

Of course, the majority of calls were not this lucrative. Some calls simply didn’t go
through because the customers didn’t realize that they would be required to tip the
dancers in addition to the agency fee, or they didn’t realize the range of tip that would
be required. Other calls went through, but only as “base” calls. These were calls
where the agency fee was paid but the dancer was not given any additional tip.
Customers were told that dancers would get totally nude for the agency fee, and many
would do a quick strip to encourage the customer to start tipping, but other dancers
would complete all of their negotiations with their clothes on. Dancers often stated that they did not feel like the customers should get a free show. If pressured by the phone girls to do a quick strip on a base call, some entertainers would simply move their clothing and lingerie around to give the customer a peek at their breasts and genitals, rather than actually take any clothing off. These customers would sometimes call and harass the phone girls for hours after the entertainers had left, demanding a refund on their agency fee. Although the entertainers (and by extension, the phone girls) hadn’t made any money, the customers had paid out an agency fee of at least $100.

Unfortunately for many of the dancers, it takes money to make money in the outcall entertainment industry. Most customers had a preference for dancers of a certain race, hair color, or body type, but they also wanted the dancer to be very attractive. The dancers who were most often perceived as beautiful were those who had money to spend on their looks. Dancers enhanced their appearance with cosmetics, clothing, skin treatments, hair extensions, hair color and highlights, nail extensions, other salon services, and cosmetic surgery.

*Class Mobility*

Working class and middle class women were generally able to make a lot of money in a short period of time. While it was often difficult for them to save money, most drove late-model cars and many stated that they had saved enough money to buy a house or a condo. This is in direct contrast to the street class entertainers, who were unable to move up the socioeconomic ladder at all. There were two main
reasons for this. One, they had more difficulty making money because they were unable to fit in with higher classes of customers. The role of mentors, such as a dispatchers or managers, taking a girl in hand and helping her become a moneymaker in part by aspiring to a different class status was critical to a girl’s success in this area. Kay, the head dispatcher at Playmates, performed this function for many entertainers, but she usually selected young women who were working or middle class.

Second, it was a lot harder for the street class entertainers to save any money they made. Many lived in overpriced weekly apartments, and often had young children to support. Some also supported their own drug habits or the habits of their boyfriends. Some worked for pimps who took all of their earnings away. Also, street culture does not value saving, so many spent their money frivolously on cheap clothes, shoes, and other consumer products.

Gender

The outcall industry in Las Vegas is a mixed-gender industry. However, women are disproportionately represented as workers. Phone girls are always female. Approximately ten percent of the entertainers at each agency were male or transgender and the remaining ninety percent were female. Therefore, general comments made about dancers by agency workers usually referred to a universal female subject.
Agency customers were over 95% male. The two most common types of calls were a solo\(^39\) male seeking one-on-one entertainment from a female entertainer and a group of males seeking a female entertainer for a bachelor party. About 65% of calls fit into the first category and another 20% into the latter. The owners of both of the agencies I worked for were male.

At both agencies, and throughout the sex industry, women are not referred to, and do not refer to themselves as, women. Phone girls were not receptionists or appointment setters, only "phone girls" or "PGs". Entertainers were referred to by agency owners, staff, and even other entertainers as "girls," or, quite often, "bitches." While this word choice did not necessarily indicate a conscious lack of respect on the part of the speaker, it certainly reflects an acceptance of the gender hierarchy present in the outcall industry.\(^40\)

**Differential Treatment of Male and Female Entertainers**

At Sweethearts, phone girls were told that entertainers are not trustworthy. The training manual stated that we should assume that all entertainers are stealing calls. This policy applied to all female entertainers, regardless of how long they had been working for the company. Female entertainers and phone girls were also treated as fair game for male managers to seduce. Female entertainers were also disrespected as

\(^{39}\) By solo, I mean that the gentleman was alone in his hotel room at the time he requested entertainment. The majority of sex industry customers are married (cite!), and that seemed to be the case here. Many customers stated that they were married but that their wives were at home in another city. A surprising number indicated that they were sharing a room with a wife or girlfriend who was shopping, gambling or sightseeing while the call was taking place. Several times during my fieldwork, the female partner of a customer walked in to the hotel room in the middle of the entertainment.

\(^{40}\) After several years of working in the sex industry, I usually refer to women who work in the industry as girls, and male customers as gentlemen. Despite my feminist sensibilities, to do otherwise simply sounds unnatural.
sex workers through the use of name calling, both to their faces and behind their
backs. One manager in particular, Nick, slept around with many of the dancers and
then disparaged them as “sluts” and “skank hos”. While many of the female
entertainers at Sweethearts were insulted and put down for their sexual availability or
lack of class, the higher class female entertainers were not exempt from this type of
treatment. If a dancer would stay and entertain a customer for a low tip, she was
“cheap” and if she held out for high tips each time and caused calls to no-go because
she couldn’t come to an agreement with the customers she was a “stuck-up bitch”.

The practice of distrusting all entertainers did not apply to a few heterosexual
male entertainers who had been with the company for over six months. When these
entertainers came in to the office the managers often made a point of commenting
that they were “good guys”. Male entertainers who entertained for women only were
treated with respect and there was no overt stigma attached to being a male sex
worker. On the other hand, male entertainers who entertained for other males were
treated very poorly. The managers would make jokes about them when they left the
office, calling them “fags” or “homos”. However, there was one male entertainer at
Sweethearts who avoided this stigmatization through the way he managed his sexual
and ethnic identity. Tommy was an older Italian gentleman in his forties who was
good friends with the agency owner and the managers. He entertained for men only,
but he projected a stereotypical macho Italian image that allowed him to fit in with
the men who worked in the office. They were always quick to make excuses for his
sexuality, stating that he was a “respectable guy” who was married, owned his own
home and had children. The fact that he had been working for a long time, but did not accept a large number of calls seemed to suggest that he enjoyed entertaining men and worked more to fulfill his own sexual needs than to earn money. Yet his heterosexual respectability remained intact.

In general, there was less overt disrespect of entertainers and phone girls at Playmates. Specifically, misogynistic and homophobic attitudes were more prevalent at Sweethearts, where the owner and both managers were all heterosexual males with macho attitudes. At Playmates, all of the dispatchers were female, and there was less verbal abuse of female and gay male dancers. Phone girls and dispatchers would joke about the lack of class some of the entertainers manifested, but the main difference was that gratuitous comments and rude remarks were kept behind the dancers' backs. Verbal confrontations between dancers and phone girls or dispatchers were mostly restricted to disputes over money. The office staff would yell at the dancers when they lost or stole a call, and the dancers would complain to the office staff when they were not getting enough calls or when they were sent on bogus calls.

*The Economics of Gender in the Outcall Industry*

Although sexual labor is provided by male, female, and transgendered individuals, sex work is conceptualized as female/reproductive labor and devalued as such (Bell 1994). Recognizing and valuing women's work in the sex industry as labor is key to the project of re-valuing "women's work" i.e., work that has traditionally been classified as feminine. Historically and in the present era, women have worked harder

At both agencies I worked for, it was very common for customers to try to haggle with the phone girl or the entertainer to bring down the price of the service. Many customers would ask the price before asking any other information, and would call around to try to find the service with the lowest price. They acted as if there was no connection between the amount they paid for the agency fee and the tip, and the quality of service they would receive. In our culture, women’s sexual labor is not valued as waged labor. (Chapkis 1997). I believe that this is the reason why even men who are willing to pay for that labor expect to pay as little as possible.

While the majority of workers in the Las Vegas outcall industry are female, the major players are all male. The entertainers take the majority of the risks, from the possibility of arrest to the simple economic drain of driving from call to call with no guarantee of earning any money, but the agency owners reap the largest rewards. The outcall industry creates hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues for the agency owners, who are guaranteed a profit on each call, regardless of whether their workers earn a dime.

Research Questions

My three remaining research questions deal with race, and the intersection of class and gender disadvantage with race. 1) What discourses are used to fetishize, commodify, and/or nullify race and ethnicity in the research setting? 2) How do race and class affect subjects’ perceived attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to
violence, money-making potential, and class mobility? 3) How do race and class affect entertainers’ and phone girls’ actual money-making potential and class mobility?

Racial Discourse

Racial discourse was used to fetishize race in the agency setting by assigning a specific sexualized meaning to women of different races and ethnicities and then commodifying that meaning by offering it for a price. Asian women were portrayed in agency ads as exotic, submissive creatures. Caucasian blondes represented unattainable, all-American cover girls and cheerleaders, while brunettes represented the ‘girl next door’. Black women were seen as sexually adventurous, but also low class and very sexually accessible, which diminished their attraction in the high-priced outcall industry.

Perceptions of Race and Class

Most Black dancers as well as street class dancers were perceived as unattractive and lazy. For these reasons, they were judged as lacking in moneymaking potential. Black women were also perceived as being less reliable and honest than women of other races. Phone girls would often complain that Black dancers did not answer their pages, or that they were more likely to steal calls than other dancers. However, there was never any acknowledgment that the Black dancers had been treated more poorly than the other dancers. Since Black entertainers did not have a real chance to make money at either agency, they had less incentive to answer their pages, and more incentive to steal calls, but this was never discussed. Black customers were also
perceived as being dishonest and potentially violent, and were discriminated against on a regular basis.

Effects of Race and Class

Race was the number one factor in determining whether an entertainer (especially a female entertainer) would be successful at an outcall agency. There were no successful Black female entertainers at either agency I studied. Regardless of race, it was also almost impossible for street class dancers to become money-makers and move up the class ladder. Non-Black working and middle class dancers were much more able to relate to their customers and meet their customers racist and classist standards of beauty.

Summary

In this chapter, I have shown that women, people of color, and street class entertainers are multiply disadvantaged in the Las Vegas outcall industry. In spite of the restrictive laws and punitive agency regulations that all Clark County outcall entertainers must abide by, White working class or middle class entertainers are able to use sex work to move up the socioeconomic ladder. The negative effects of gender and sexuality are related more to the treatment that women and homosexual males face from agency staff and society in general, whereas non-White entertainers and street class entertainers are affected economically by the racist and classist attitudes of customers and agency staff, as well as structural constraints in American society.
In the next chapter, I will review the findings of this study and present policy proposals to make sex work a more equitable and pleasant profession for all outcall entertainers and other agency workers in Clark County.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I will present my conclusions and policy recommendations, which include investigating labor violations at outcall agencies and enforcing existing labor laws, decriminalizing prostitution in Clark County, and calling for social change to reduce the racism, classism, sexism and whore stigma (Pheterson 1996) experienced by outcall agency workers. I will also suggest areas where further research is warranted.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer five research questions: 1) What are the effects of third party control of labor on sex workers and other workers in the outcall setting? 2) How are these effects intensified or mitigated by the specific and complex legal and social position of outcall entertainment in Clark County? 3) What discourses are used to fetishize, commodify and/or nullify race and ethnicity in the research setting? 4) How do race and class affect subjects’ perceived attractiveness, honesty, reliability, propensity to violence, money-making potential, and class mobility? 5) How do race and class affect entertainers’ and phone girls’ actual money-making potential and class mobility?
Third Party Control of Labor

Dancers who work for outcall agencies have very little control over what clients they are sent to entertain. When a dancer signs up to work for an agency, she is allowed to set limits on the types of clients she will or will not see, such as Black clients, couples, women, local clients, hotel clients, clients who want to role-play as dominants or submissives, multiple clients in the same room, bachelor parties, and clients who are at a location outside of the Las Vegas metropolitan area. However, dancers are eventually pressured to entertain every type of client, with the exception of Black clients.

In addition, dancers are not allowed to speak to their clients before they arrive at the client’s location. The client’s name and room number are not disclosed to the entertainer until she is inside the casino of the hotel where he is staying. At that time, she is instructed not to call the client, but rather to proceed directly to his hotel room.

When she arrives at his room, she may find that he no longer wants to see an entertainer. He may have already turned away up to four other entertainers that evening. Or, he may have called for an entirely different type of entertainer. She may be a tall, voluptuous redhead, when he requested a slender, petite Asian. There is also a chance that he will be intoxicated or violent.

Even if the customer is sober and polite, the fact that the first $175 to $250 of his money goes to pay the agency fee makes it difficult for the entertainer to negotiate a fair price for her services. She may be able to convince him to spend an equal or greater amount on her tip, or, if he is not willing to spend that much money, she may...
reluctantly stay and entertain him for less money than she would prefer. Or, they simply may not be able to come to an agreement, and she will have spent about an hour of her time traveling to his location, negotiating with him, and then returning to the office to sign a no-go slip. In addition, she has wasted money on gasoline or cab fare.

The type of ads used to promote outcall agencies also have an effect on the clients they attract. Many of the ads portray stereotypical images of women: cheerleaders, nurses, geishas, and Barbies. Most of the ads promote Caucasian blondes, while a significant minority represent Caucasian brunettes and Asian women. All of the photos are of slender, yet busty women. Black women, Latinas, larger women, and older women are not represented in agency ads.

Phone girls are also put at a disadvantage by outcall agency policies designed to maximize profits for the owners and minimize phone girls' tips. Phone girls are subject to extreme role conflict. While the owners reap the benefits of unfair policies that cheat dancers and customers, phone girls must bear the brunt of these groups' anger. Phone girls spend many hours every week being yelled at by irate dancers and customers who have been fined, cheated, or otherwise angered by agency policies.

In addition to the economic effects of third-party control of sexual labor, agency workers are subjected to abusive treatment by their supervisors, constant surveillance due to a complete lack of trust by their employers, and a combative workplace environment.
Outcall Entertainment in Clark County

Because the Clark County outcall entertainment industry is dominated by five large agencies and a handful of medium-sized agencies, dancers do not have very many options when choosing an employer. All of the major agencies enforce the same unfair (and often illegal) policies and procedures.

The negative effects of third party control of sexual labor are also intensified by the quasi-legal status of outcall entertainment in Clark County. Women who enter the outcall industry may not be knowledgeable about the local laws regarding outcall entertainment, prostitution, and workers' rights. Outcall agency owners are very knowledgeable about legal issues surrounding outcall entertainment in Clark County, however, and they take advantage of dancers' ignorance. Agency management is very careful about having each entertainer sign an agreement indicating that the company is not hiring her as a prostitute, and that she will not commit or solicit an act of prostitution while working for the company. Due to a number of legal battles fought between the county and the large agencies, the agencies themselves cannot be prosecuted for promoting prostitution, even if one of their dancers is arrested for prostitution, as long as this precaution is taken.

Since women who have been convicted of prostitution are not eligible to work in the outcall industry, the agencies are assured a constant stream of inexperienced, young dancers dazzled by the prospect of earning large amounts of cash in a small amount of time. While the agencies are guilty of a number of labor violations, the women who work as dancers and phone girls are often unaware of their legal rights.
They are also often unwilling to become involved in a legal battle that will open them to public and police scrutiny.

In addition, because the established agencies spend so much money saturating the market, it is very difficult for independent outcall entertainers or newer, smaller agencies to compete with agency advertising budgets. Independent entertainers advertise online and in trade publications, but the most effective and expensive forms of advertising – yellow page ads, proprietary flyers and cards, and outdoor ads – are prohibitively expensive, and are de facto reserved for the large agencies.

**Racial Discourse**

Stereotypical racial discourse is used in agency advertisements to assign a specific sexualized meaning to women of different races and ethnicities and then commodify that meaning by offering it for a price. Asian women epitomized passive femininity, Caucasian blondes signify unattainable ‘All-American’ beauties, and Caucasian brunettes symbolize the ‘girl-next-door’. Furthermore, through their absence in agency advertising and their prevalence in street and bar prostitution, Black women are equated with sexual availability and are devalued in the agency setting. This view of race and ethnicity as simply reflecting supply and demand is reinforced in the way that office personnel assign calls to specific entertainers. If a customer request cannot be fulfilled honestly, phone girls are expected to send a dancer of the incorrect ethnicity and have her portray herself as something she is not.
Perceptions of Race and Class

Regardless of their status as workers or customers, African Americans are perceived as untrustworthy by non-Black agency personnel. Black phone girls and dancers were considered more likely to steal from the agency than workers of other races. Black customers were seen as potentially violent and less likely to spend money on entertainment.

In addition, Black dancers were judged unfavorably based on Eurocentric standards of beauty. Due to their perceived unattractiveness and laziness, they were not considered to have very much money-making potential. This was also true of street class dancers.

Effects of Race and Class

Due to the combination of agency discrimination against Black dancers, combined with low customer demand for Black outcall entertainers, race is the primary basis for determining whether a dancer, particularly a female dancer, will be successful at an outcall agency. There were no successful Black female entertainers at either agency I studied.

Entertainers could be divided into lower street class, street class, working class, and middle class, while their customers could be divided into working class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class. Phone girls very consciously divided dancers into these groups, though they would use their own categories like sleazy, good-enough-for (as in “she’s good enough for a guy at the Stardust”), and classy.
Regardless of race, there was very little class mobility among the street class entertainers. Non-Black working and middle class dancers were much more able to relate to their customers, who were predominantly White and middle class, and meet their customers racist and classist standards of beauty. They were also more likely to catch the eye of a dispatcher, manager, or more experienced entertainer, who would teach them the skills they need to become successful outcall entertainers.

Women, people of color, and street class entertainers are multiply disadvantaged in the Las Vegas outcall industry. In spite of the restrictive laws and punitive agency regulations that all Clark County outcall entertainers must abide by, White working class or middle class entertainers are able to use sex work to move up the socioeconomic ladder. The negative effects of gender and sexuality are related more to the treatment that women and homosexual males face from agency staff and society in general, whereas non-White entertainers and street class entertainers are affected economically by the racist and classist attitudes of customers and agency staff, as well as structural constraints in American society.

Policy Recommendations

By labeling sex workers as victims of patriarchy and focusing on sex work as a site of inevitable abuse, feminists have ignored real issues of exploitation that can be solved through the enforcement of existing labor laws and the repeal of repressive prostitution laws. While the feminist agenda has certainly expanded to include a more comprehensive vision of social change in the last 30 years, feminists who oppose the sex industry need to realize that sex work does not exist in a vacuum. Sex industry
workers need feminists, activists and researchers to help them gain workers' rights and human rights and to help eliminate the racism, classism, and sexism in their lives instead of trying to eliminate their livelihood.

*Enforcement of Labor Laws*

Labor violations at outcall entertainment agencies are rampant. In order to improve the working conditions of phone girls at outcall entertainment agencies, existing labor laws need to be enforced. Dancers can legitimately be considered independent contractors and are not eligible for many of the protections offered to employees under Nevada state law.

At some outcall agencies, phone girls are labeled as independent contractors, and do not receive salaries, benefits, or unemployment compensation. Yet they are treated as employees in every other sense. At agencies where phone girls are paid an hourly wage, unpaid overtime is common. Phone girls are only paid for 40 hours of work per week, but they are often expected to work 50 hours or more. Outcall agencies require phone girls to turn over a portion of their tips to the company. Phone girls and entertainers are also routinely fined for any infraction of agency policies. Racism is widespread at Las Vegas area outcall agencies, and employment discrimination against African Americans is common.

These problems cannot be solved without the governmental intervention. As long as legislators and law enforcement agencies in Clark County concentrate on eradicating prostitution in outcall entertainment, without any effort to protect
workers’ rights, women and men who work in the industry will be subjected to unfair and illegal treatment by agency management.

The Metropolitan Police Department has 30 vice officers and two investigative specialists who set up stings every weekend to arrest outcall entertainers who illegally offer their services as prostitutes. They arrest approximately 150 outcall entertainers on prostitution charges every year. In addition, they arrest almost 3,000 street and bar prostitutes annually. Every outcall agency, every strip club, and every bar or street that illegal prostitutes are known to frequent are targeted by the vice department. Most stings are not precipitated by any citizen complaints.\(^1\) Last year the vice department made 3,506 total arrests, based on only 121 citizen complaints. To carry out their investigations, the vice department was given a budget of $4,040,214 last year. This year, that budget is being increased to $4,672,210.\(^2\)

In contrast, the Nevada labor commissioner’s has only six staff members to investigate all complaints of labor violations in all industries in the state of Nevada. An additional nine staff members provide support services. At this time, the department does not have enough personnel to investigate businesses unless a specific complaint has been made. Last year, the office investigated 3,939 complaints of labor violations with a budget of only $1,158,571.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) All arrest data for the Metro vice department was gathered during a telephone interview with Jackie Anderson, Metro Vice.

\(^2\) Budget information for the Metro vice department was gathered during a telephone interview with Janelle Craft, from the LVMPD budget department.

\(^3\) E-mail communication with Carrie Foley, assistant to the labor commissioner. Additional information found on the Nevada State Budget and Planning Division’s website (http://budget.state.nv.us) and the Nevada Labor Commissioner’s website (http://www.LaborCommissioner.com).
Decriminalization of Prostitution

While many feminists believe that prostitution is inherently demeaning to women and other sex workers, and cannot be considered legitimate work, empirical studies of the industry indicate otherwise. Sex workers, including prostitutes, have had positive and negative experiences in all areas of the sex industry. According to Chapkis (1997) there are four factors that can affect a woman’s experience in the sex industry: third party control of labor, socioeconomic status, cultural attitudes about sex work, and position within social hierarchies such as race and age. My data supports these findings.

By decriminalizing prostitution and lifting restrictions on other areas of the sex industry that are intended to deter workers from engaging in prostitution, Clark County officials will be able to focus on the workers’ rights issues outlined above, as well as customer violence and police brutality against sex workers, which are less common problems in the outcall industry, but still a serious concern for street prostitutes and other sex industry workers.

Outcall entertainers will also be able to choose whether or not to engage in prostitution, and advertise appropriately. Those who do not wish to offer sex for money will not be pressured by customers or agency owners to do so. Those who do choose to engage in prostitution will be able to work without the threat of arrest and conviction. Prostitutes who want to leave the trade will not automatically be burdened with a criminal record that makes it difficult to secure employment in other industries.
In addition, reducing the legal risks for outcall agency owners will increase the attraction of owning these already profitable companies. Attracting ethical businesspeople and investors to own and operate outcall agencies can only decrease the power that the major outcall agencies currently hold over workers. With more competition, outcall agencies will be forced to provide better working conditions in order to attract and retain employees.

*Social Change*

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to the main problems facing sex workers today: sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and “whore stigma” (Pheterson 1996). Like the rest of society, sex workers are mistreated due to their gender, race, class and sexuality. In addition, sex workers face discrimination and abuse based on their profession.

As noted by Chapkis (1997:106), “reforms directed at the sex trade itself will only partially address the problems sex workers face. The far greater challenge lies in tackling structural inequalities reflected in the industry but rooted in society at large.”

As in all occupations, especially low-prestige occupations that require few formal qualifications and little education, many sex workers stay in the sex industry due to economic pressures. Sex workers and customers alike would benefit from an industry where all of the participants had freely chosen their profession. However, until we have a truly egalitarian society with an equal distribution of wealth, sex industry workers will not have the ability to freely choose their line of work.
Further Research on the Outcall Entertainment Industry

My final recommendation is to call for further research on outcall entertainment in Clark County. Due to the preliminary nature of this research, many avenues of inquiry were left unexplored. More research is needed on the career longevity of outcall entertainers and phone girls, the role of mentoring in the careers of successful outcall entertainers, the prevalence of current or former entertainers in other areas of the sex industry, the emotional labor performed by agency employees, customer fantasies and satisfaction levels, independent outcall entertainers, smaller outcall entertainment agencies, the California-Nevada sex work circuit, and the recruitment and promotion of successful Black entertainers.

In addition, more research on the outcall entertainment industry in other markets would shed light on which aspects of agency operations are commonplace in the industry and which are specific to Clark County. Comparative studies which contrast the conditions of outcall entertainment in Clark County to other areas, and longitudinal studies which track the changes in the lived experience of outcall entertainers due to changing laws and social conditions in Clark County would be particularly illuminative.
REFERENCES


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