

# Cultural Impressions of Employment in the Sex Industry

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## Abstract

The sex industry has always been a controversial global topic. This research paper discusses the ethics of the sex industry from different perspectives around the world. First, we introduce the topic by describing the sex industry and delving into the different outlets available to be a part of the industry. Secondly, we discuss the different views people of different nationalities and mindsets have about the industry through personal interviews to further relate them to the different concepts about the sex industry. Lastly, we discuss a worldwide debate regarding the sex industry and the ethics of it through presenting several articles that tackle many factors in the industry.

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## Introduction

The socially moral and ethical perceptions of society regarding individuals that employ themselves as sex workers locally, internationally, and through advocacy is a topic which has many viewpoints. The act of exchanging goods or money for intimate pleasures with another individual has been seen and joked about as the world's oldest profession. Through time periods the profession of prostitution or the act of sex work perceptions changed whether that be by society, by personal thoughts and viewpoints, by moral and ethical internal conflicts. Through the year of 2019 and entering the year of 2020 sex work seems to have reached an ethical and moral gray area that has reignited the debate of how sex work is perceived.

Sex workers and activist have taken to challenging the varying world perceptions on their profession to make the environment that they work in safer, sustainable, and prosperous while protecting not only themselves but their families and the clients that they take. While countries around the world take different positions on the subject as well as mandating different laws regarding sex work, the questioning of morals and ethics find their match against the broadening opinions of generations brought up in a world where information and opinions are easily shared and research is far more accessible.

Through international research studies surrounding sex workers and the laws that surround the profession from around the world, to activist sites stating statistics to the dangers and the improvements that could be made to protect sex workers and clients while providing those same improvements for the community at large. As well as looking looking at the technically legal practices and businesses still open and running in the United States and in countries around the world and interviews with individuals from varying backgrounds and social viewpoints we will seek to understand the cultural impressions of running such businesses. The research compiled in this paper looks to bring a discussion forth regarding whether public perceptions truly match with private ethics and the implications that variance has regarding sex work.

## Discussion

In 2017 a website made headlines around the world because of one simple transaction. For the price of 2.4 Million Dollars, website Cinderella Escorts sold the virginity of an 18-year-old to a Hong Kong Businessman (Breslin Para.1). The worldwide response to this sale, and other similar transactions on the website, clearly illustrated the divide of opinions regarding the morality of the sex industry and those connected to it. Central to this divide is the debate over the legality of a transaction such as those created by Cinderella Escorts. While highly illegal in some areas of the world, in Germany "it is legal to sell sex in aproved businesses or on a freelance basis and sex workers can enforce relevant contracts" according to the Map of Sex Work Law. Often it becomes easy to confuse legality with morality, which explains the huge

discrepancy in laws worldwide related to this industry. However, according to Amnesty International it is important to decriminalize this industry as “evidence and the real-life experience of sex workers themselves [indicates] that criminalization makes them less safe” (Murphy 5).

Amnesty International points out that many other worldwide organizations agree - that the acts shouldn't be criminalized, but that those who exploit, abuse or traffic workers should be the focus of criminalization. This often results in a set of laws referred to as The Nordic Model - “which criminalizes only the buying and brokering of sex” according to an article written for Boston University, which “offers the advantage of eliminating punishment for sellers, while potentially preventing the expansion of the commercial sex market and limiting the number of people trafficked” (Chedekel Para.3). This model addresses the true ethical issues related to the industry - ensuring that those who are engaged are doing so of their own volition rather than being forced to participate by others. When asked if he considered himself a “pimp” Jan Zakobielski, owner of Cinderella Escorts, maintained that he considers himself a businessman and that the women who sell their virginity or other sex-related acts on the website would be at risk of turning to more dangerous groups and putting themselves at risk without his agency (Breslin Para.12)

In the United States, the sex work industry is composed of many different sub-industries such as escort services, pornography, and classic prostitution (where money or some other form of compensation is exchanged for sexual favors). Sentiments on the debate over the legality and morality of sex work varies to a considerable degree in the United States. Indeed, with the exception of a few rural counties in Nevada, prostitution in its classic form is uniformly illegal throughout the United States. The regulation of sex work is not among the enumerated powers of the federal government; therefore, this power resides solely under state authority.

Of course, many are stringently against the legality of the industry in all forms as they believe sex work to be immoral regardless of the circumstances. On the other side of the spectrum are those that are for the legality of sex work in most or all forms as they believe the industry represents little to no moral concerns. The sentiment of many individuals, if not the majority, fall somewhere in between. Decriminalization stands as a popular viewpoint as the positive results of decriminalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington represent an enticing potentiality on this issue in which many parallels can be drawn. People of all perspectives on sex work acknowledge the enormous sums in tax revenues that legalization or decriminalization would bring. Obviously, the majority of opinions in this country do not fall cleanly onto one side or the other.

# Findings

## The American Perspective

Closer scrutiny reveals that public perception in the United States on the question of the sex industries legality does not necessarily mirror private ethics. Indeed, the issue represents a complicated ethical, political, and sociological dichotomy. Sex work is and has always been a major sector of this country's economy. If the simple act of viewing pornography is included under this label then it would be entirely realistic to contend that nearly if not more than half of the country's population has participated in the sex industry in some form. Yet, the topic remains taboo while objective discussion on the issue remains against the norm in the public realm.

### *Personal Interview: American, 46-55, Conservative*

A recent interview of an interesting volunteer is particularly relevant to the aforementioned discussion. This individual has on occasion purchased sexual favors from others in exchange for money. The individual was unable to accurately gauge their frequency in this activity due to the fact they have participated for many years. The participant was first given an initial survey in which personal information was gathered on the individual which gauged their opinion on many generalized topics of ethical discussion within the United States. This served to camouflage the central issue for the purpose of achieving the most honest results. Specific to sex work the volunteer was asked their stances on prostitution, pornography, exotic dancing, and escort services.

The volunteer was a white male aged between 46 and 55 years old. They identified as highly conservative politically, adhering to the Christian faith, and to being of the upper-middle socio-economic class. He also testified that he was single and divorced with three adult children. On all four issues dealing directly with sex work the volunteer stated each category was moral to the highest degree. Upon further questioning at a later date, the test subject revealed that they believed sexual relations before marriage was highly immoral.

### *Personal Interview: American, 56+, Liberal*

Critical to understanding the American Perspective was our in-person interview with Sherry Larkin, a liberal, non-christian residing in the midwest United States. When initially polled she indicated she viewed persons employed in the sex industry as morally neutral. When asked for more detail regarding her impressions, she wouldn't discuss her own experiences within the industry, however did say "In general, I support legalizing prostitution, escorts, and porn that involves consenting adults. I feel any laws regarding those institutions should involve pimps and other individuals who use coercion of adults and minors into participating in them,

and the drugs they use to do so.” This clearly is in line with the more moderate views and practices from the Nordic Model - showing that where legalization is involved, the more liberal approach is to focus on the unethical practices involved in coercion and participation without consent prevalent the industry. Sherry’s inclination to be circumspect regarding impressions is indicative to the interviewer that the topic does still bring up feelings of impropriety in regards to the subject however.

### *Personal Interview: American, 39, Activist and Advocate*

To add to the other end of extreme of American perspective was interviewing and having a chance to discuss with a very committed individual. In the sense of advocating for change regarding the current sociological stance of the majority of Americans. While describing the different changes that they would like to see within legislation and improvements that politicians can impliment while having imediate positive effects on current sex workers within the industry.

While discussing legislation the topic of ethics weaved itself in and out of the conversation as this interview took a more proactive and reactive response to the actual facts and current situations of those impacted by current laws and perceptions. Implications of those laws with those participating in this line of work would put forth a new perspective and turn to a better social awareness.

### International Perspective

The sex industry has become immensley profitable, not just to the individuals involved in the industry but to the government that turns a blind eye to it. Sex tourism is becoming an overt component of the touristic attractiveness in the Philippines. Sex tourism involves a legally marginalized form of comodization (sexual services) within a national industry that embodies a form of entertainment, especially dependent on, but with a dynamic function in, an international industry (tourism) (Hall, 2010).

Most Filipinas work in the Red Light District of Angeles, home to a former U.S military base. According to activists in the area, the sex industry in the Philippines is indirectly aided by legislative loopholes and indifferences from the authority (Redfern, 2019). If you walk on the streets of the district after 8 pm you would see groups of women in front of bars who are usually dressed the same depending on the theme of the night. The women are instructed to entice foreign men by calling out to them and telling them to come join in on the fun.

### *Personal Interview: Filipina, 24, Conservative*

In an interview with a former sex worker from the Philippines who identified as a conservative Roman Catholic, the interviewee explained her reasoning behind going into it in the first place stating “I was a single mother with no high school education living in a very poor province. I am not proud of what I did but I had to provide for my son.” She believes that several women are part of the industry because they find themselves in limbo due to poverty and unemployment in the country. However, she views the main reason women are part of the sex industry in the Philippines is because of the inadequate sex education which has led to a high percentage of single mothers and illegitimate children. Additionally, she mentioned that she supports the sex industry but believes it should be more controlled for human trafficking prevention. The interviewee mentioned working with underaged women who -unlike herself were trafficked into the industry as she stressed on the difference between having the privilege of choosing what to do with your body and being forced into the sex industry from a very young age.

## Review of Literature

### The Worldwide Debate About Sex Work: Morality Meets Reality

This article discusses the differences and overlaps between sex work and sex trafficking. Both are separate issues but are often misconstrued as one. Sex trafficking (of those of all ages) is based on coercion while sex work is exchanged between two consenting adults. The article points out that both sex work and sex trafficking appear to be increasing in occurrence and that people on all sides of the issue agree that a compromise is needed to promote better ways of protecting the vulnerable.

### The Ethics of Prostitution

This article breaks down and objectively discusses and foundations and structure of the sex work industry. It achieves this through discussing four separate arguments central to the question of the morality of sex work: starting assumptions about the nature of sex, the psychological harm argument, the correlation with danger argument, and the objectification argument. The first discussion deliberates the two standpoints of when sex is permissible. The second discussion deliberates whether or not the mere fact sex work is often correlated with psychological problems is enough to show that sex work causes those problems. The third discussion deliberates whether or not the mere fact that sex work is often correlated with higher risks is sufficient to show that it causes those risks. It could be that social and legal prohibition is what makes the activity a high-risk activity. Finally, the fourth discussion deliberates whether or not it is harmful to instrumentalize another person.

## Dennis Hof's Moonlite Bunny Ranch

This is the official website of rural Nevada's "The Bunny Ranch," a legally sanctioned brothel in which advertises their services online. Hof owns a total of seven brothels in Nevada. The website provides information on what girls are available today advertising that it employs certain famous porn stars available for selection. It also provides a "Sex Menu" in which categorizes the sexual favors available for purchase.

## Decriminalizing Prostitution Won't Solve Social, Ethical Problems

This article discusses how simple decriminalization of sex work doesn't necessarily equate to safety and security for those employed in this field. The author of this article has a clear inclination to believe that sex work isn't necessarily ethical, and that the legal issues surrounding sex work aren't the only complication in the industry. We will use this article to show that there are clear opinions in the United States regarding sex work and how those opinions are related to the current legality or illegality of the trade.

## Sex Workers' Rights: Mapping Policy around the World.

This article discusses the importance of the Sex Worker's Right's Worldwide map, and lessons that can be learned from analyzing the data collected on the map. This is relevant to our paper as it points out that the legality of sex work is very complicated and inconsistent worldwide. Additionally, it provides additional support for our use of the Sex Worker's Rights Map. We will use this article to discuss why legality doesn't necessarily equal morality. (Sarah)

## Sex Workers' Rights Are Human Rights

This website discusses at length the reasoning behind why Amnesty International considers it a human right to participate in sex work safely. This is relevant to our paper as it specifically discusses why Amnesty International has chosen this line of thinking, as well as discussing some of the push back they received when deciding they would advocate on the behalf of sex workers throughout the world. We will use it to show both why we feel this is an ethical approach to sex work in the world as well as to show why some cultures are against this industry. (Sarah)

## Sexuality, Poverty and Law Programme

This is the Worldwide map of Sex Worker's Rights. This map collects the various laws and regulations relevant to the sex industry and puts them in an easy to understand format, allowing us to look at the global impact of laws on the perception of the ethics of sex work. We will use this as a reference to what laws exist in these countries. (Sarah)

## Client Power and the Sex Work Transaction: The Influence of Race, Class, and Sex Work Role in the Post-Apartheid Sex Work Industry

This source from Springer Science and Business Media provides an analysis of data compiled from a survey of condom usage and interview regarding the perception of sex workers based upon the sex workers race, class, and surrounding environment. This analysis provides insight on the perspective of sex workers by the population that hires these sex workers. This insight also provides the perspective of self-identified sex work cliental in the regions of South Africa and their perspective and view of sex workers and the act of purchasing such services.

### Dennis Hof Oxford Speech

This video serves as evidence of the owner of the bunny ranch in Nevada addressing a crowd of students and the public at the University of Oxford. The bunny ranch is one of the most well known brothels in the world that is legal in the United States of America. Dennis Hof the late owner of the Bunny Ranch addressed students gathered to talk about the legal markers set in place that act as safety steps for not only sex workers but for those purchasing the services offered by the Bunny Ranch. Hof goes on to describe the logistics of the business and the status of the women working at the ranch as independent contractors while the Bunny Ranch acts as a facilitator for their services while providing a safe venue and space for both client and independent contractor.

### Countries and Their Prostitution Policies

This source from procon.org is a simple outline of the policies surrounding prostitution in countries from around the world. The source provides references to each individual country legal reference regarding prostitution whether legal or illegal. The source itself credits appropriate sources while maintaining simplicity to its list. This list also serves evidence of the cited laws with in this paper and presentation around the world and with specific titles as listed in the country of origin's laws or citations.

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