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Sex Work in a Digital Era

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Abstract

In recent years, scholars have begun to investigate the role of digital technologies, namely the Internet, in facilitating growth in sexual commerce. Recent studies investigate the ways the Internet shapes the experiences of sex workers and how sex workers use the Internet to maximize profits and reduce risk exposure. Overall, scholars strategically frame sex work in a digital era in terms of affordances. In doing so, they can note the positive changes in the work experiences of these workers. However, I argue that this literature is altogether too optimistic, and in focusing primarily on the affordances of Internet-based sex work, these scholars neglect the new dangers that emerge online. In addition, by focusing only on the online practices of escorts, these scholars paint a homogenized portrait of digital sex work and neglect the diversity of labor performed by sex workers. This literature also neglects the diversity among sex workers themselves (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and ability). In order to address these limitations, I make nine specific suggestions for future lines of inquiry.

"More bang for your buck: How new technology is shaking up the oldest business" – The Economist

"Tech-Savvy Prostitutes Trade Pimps for Web Pages" – NBC News

"Looking for a sex worker? Good news! There's an app for that!" – thinkbig.com

The epigraph above includes just three titles of sensationalized articles from popular media outlets about sex work in a digital era. Until recently, those individuals with an interest in the impact of the Internet on sex work have had to rely on highly speculative and less than credible popular media sources. In recent years, scholars have begun to investigate the role of digital technologies, namely the Internet, in facilitating growth in sexual commerce. As a result, a burgeoning body of literature that empirically investigates the ways the Internet shapes sexual commerce and how sex workers use the Internet to maximize profits has emerged. Thus far, this literature has focused on how the Internet provides a new autonomous platform for marketing and selling sexual services that reduce risk exposure. Despite the growth of literature about sex work in a digital era over the past 10 years, we still do not know enough about how the Internet has affected the work experiences, wages, and working conditions of many sex workers. This literature needs to reorient itself in ways that will yield more information about how sex workers use the Internet in their businesses and in ways that reshape sex work.

In this article, I posit that while the initial investigations of sex work in a digital era have been fruitful, many questions have been left unanswered. These questions are enumerated below:

(1) While sex work consists of a wide range of sexual services, the existing literature focuses almost exclusively on how prostitutes and their clients use the Internet. Thus, how do different types of sex workers (not just prostitutes) and their customers use the Internet for branding, marketing, advertising, and selling a wide range of services?

(2) The increased use of the Internet by sex workers has meant that workers now often work in isolated environments. Thus, we still do not know enough about how moving from strolls, brothels, dungeons, and/or exotic dance clubs and into digitally mediated private spaces has affected sex workers. Specifically, how does moving into isolated spaces affect the ability of sex workers to forge and maintain social networks with one another?
(3) How do local contexts shape sex worker migration to the Internet? We need to learn more about how local political, economic, and social circumstances shape workers' decisions to migrate part or all of their businesses online.
(4) Sex work, particularly street-level prostitution, can be a risky business (Sanders 2005). What new dangers exist in an online environment that may not have existed previously, and how have old dangers resurfaced online?
(5) How does the online environment affect the autonomy and privacy of sex workers? For example, how does the online practice of doxing affect sex workers? Doxing is when clients use research and/or hacking to acquire information about sex workers and then share that information with other clients and/or use the information to stalk and/or harm the worker.
(6) Given that law enforcement focuses on visible street-based sex work, if there is a "great migration" of sex workers into Internet-mediated private spaces, how are law enforcement agencies transforming their tactics and policies? Are law enforcement agencies, too, now using the Internet to monitor and surveil sex workers?
(7) The literature primarily focuses on the affordances of the Internet for cis-men and cis-women. What does this development mean for trans* and other queer sex workers?
(8) The racialization of erotic labor is woefully underdeveloped in the overall literature on sex work. How do racialized discourses affect the ways workers market and sell sexual services online?
(9) Drawing from an intersectional perspective, how do sex workers of various races, ethnicities, nationalities, social classes, ages, etc., use the Internet? How do these various categories simultaneously affect accessibility to the Internet and, thus, access to the affordances of online sex work?

These questions must be grappled with further in order for this literature to continue to make contributions to the study of sex work.

Overall, scholars strategically frame sex work in a digital era in terms of affordances. In doing so, they are able to note the positive changes in the work experiences of these workers. However, I argue that this literature is altogether too optimistic, and in focusing primarily on the affordances of Internet-based sex work, these scholars neglect the dangers that emerge online. Overwhelmingly, these scholars have also painted an overly homogenized portrait of digital sex work and neglect the diversity that exists among types of sex work aside from prostitution (e.g., webcamming and pro-dommes) and among sex workers themselves (race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability, etc.). In order to address these limitations, I make nine specific suggestions for future lines of inquiry.

Sex work offline

To date, a wealth of literature exists on sex workers. Copious literature on prostitutes is available, some focusing on voluntary sex work (Bernstein 2007; Wahab 2003; Albert 2001; Nagle 1997; Chapkis 1997; Almodovar 1993; Jenness 1990; Bell 1987; Delacoste and Alexander 1987) and others on forced sex work – colloquially dubbed sex trafficking (Limoncelli 2010; Farley et al. 2003; Farley 2003; Altink 1995). Some accounts examine sex workers globally (Salazar Parreñas, 2011; Agustín 2007; Thorbeck and Pattanaik 2002; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). Historically, the literature focuses far more on female prostitution than on male prostitution although literature on male prostitutes has been emerging more recently (Minichiello et al., 2013; Walby 2012; Logan 2010; Chin Phua and Caras 2008; Bernstein 2007; Koken et al. 2009,

Bimbi, 2007, 2004, 2001; Bimbi 2007; Dennis 2008; Dorias 2005; Rietmeijer 1998; Pleak and Heino, 1990; Lloyd 1976; Van der Pel 1992). Other useful accounts examine sex work such as exotic dance/stripping (Brooks 1997, 2010; Barton 2001, 2002, 2006; Egan 2006; Sloan and Wahab 2004; Wesley 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Frank 2002, 2003; Bell and Lacey 1998; Bruckert 2002; Eaves 2002; Burana 2001; Sweet and Tewksbury 2000a, 2000b; Lewis 2000; Wood 2000; Forsyth and Deshotels 1998; Johnson 1998, 2012; Ronai and Cross 1998; Scott 1996; Thompson and Harred 1992; Lewin 1984). Finally, a sparse number of studies have focused on dominatrices or pro-dommes (Levey and Pinsky 2015; Lindemann, 2010, 2012). While all of this literature has been worthwhile, much of this research was conducted prior to the migration of many sex workers into online environments and thus could not have discussed the role of the Internet in sex work.

Sex work online

While scholars have been interested in studying sex work for a long time, the Internet has reshaped sex work. Therefore, the rise of online sex work has led to new sets of questions for scholarly inquiry. Here, I define *online sex work* as the Internet-mediated exchange of sexual commodities and/or services. Online sex work can relate to the use of the Internet to actually deliver a service. For example, online sex work could refer to a webcam model who performs a masturbation show for a client or a pro-domme who skypes with a client for some set exchange value. However, online sex work can also refer to the use of the Internet to market sexual services that are delivered in physical space. Much of the existing literature focuses on the intricate ways that escorts use the Internet to market services and screen clients whom they meet at "out calls" (e.g., at a hotel) or "in calls" (e.g., at escort's home) (Jonsson and Svedin, 2014; Feldman 2014; Minichiello et al. 2013; Walby 2012; McLean 2012; Logan 2010; Koken et al. 2009; Weitzer 2010, Weitzer, 2005; Cunningham and Kendall, 2011; Ashford 2009; Lee-Gonyea et al., 2009; Castle and Lee 2008; Chin Phua and Caras 2008; Holt and Blevins 2007; Bernstein 2007; Murphy and Venkatesh 2007; Parsons et al. 2007, 2004, 2001; Pruitt 2005; Quinn and Forsyth 2005; Sanders 2010). Therefore, the rise of online sex work has meant that scholars of sex work shift the focus of their research questions to thinking about how the Internet has changed the workplace for sex workers.

The Internet is an important technological development for sex workers. However, the use of the Internet to schedule appointments, screen clients, and/or market services, etc., is only one new method in a long history of technology used by sex workers. Lee-Gonyea et al. (2009) note that "the telephone, and then the pager, permitted the streetwalker to take their business indoors. These two technological advances turned the streetwalker into the call girl" (325). So just like these previous communication technologies, scholars note that the Internet has changed the workplace for sex workers. The services offered in traditional sexual commerce have not necessarily changed; however, the ways those services are delivered, performed, branded, marketed, and sold have clearly changed. The Internet has afforded sex workers new modes of operating their businesses. Walby (2012) writes

> …today most sex work begins online or is mediated through internet communication, a configuration that creates a different sort of workspace. The internet makes possible work that is no longer tied to a particular locale, spreading work out across conventional boundaries and borders (168).

This new ostensibly borderless workplace creates a new set of opportunities for increased earning potential. For example, male online sexual commerce in the United States alone is estimated to generate over $1 billion a year (Minichiello et al. 2013). The Internet has helped to create new opportunities for sex workers and to craft a labor environment that is more appealing to workers

across social classes (Walby 2012; Bimbi 2007; Bernstein 2007). Thus, the prostitution market has expanded overall in ways other than a simple migration of street-level prostitutes to the Internet (Cunnigham and Kendall 2011). Given the improved working conditions of online sex work, erotic labor may now appeal to people who previously were unwilling to perform sex work.

To be clear, a "great migration" of sex workers online has not necessarily occurred. The increase of online sex work is not just a reflection of a unilateral move of existing prostitutes from the streets to online environments. Instead, online sex work reflects an expansion of the market of sexual commerce. The Internet has created additional spaces for the sale of sexual goods and services. In addition, sex workers often use the Internet in multiple ways; workers may move between jobs in physical spaces and online spaces. For example, an escort may use the Internet to screen clients and book appointments. That same escort may also perform on a webcam site and use that cam page to sell pornographic videos. The ways sex workers use the Internet are complex and not adequately documented.

Overall, scholars have framed the impact of the Internet on the erotic marketplace as positive. The literature that documents the affordances of the Internet for sex workers tends to come from four seemingly different trajectories: cultural studies, criminology, psychology and health studies, and the sociology of sexuality. Interestingly, while the theoretical underpinnings of these fields, their methodologies, etc., may differ, their work ends up sharing one common theme – it all highlights the ability of the Internet to safeguard sex workers and their clients.

Online sex work has increased because of the numerous benefits that occur when all or some part of the erotic labor is performed in an online environment, including promoting physical safety, fostering better wages, assisting workers with advertising, screening clients, and reputation building (Jonsson et al. 2014; Feldman 2014; Minichiello et al. 2013; Walby 2012; Cunnigham and Kendall 2011; Lee-Gonyea et al., 2009; Weitzer 2010, 2005; Ashford 2009; Castle and Lee 2008; Sneft 2008; Chin Phua and Caras 2008; Holt and Blevins 2007; Bernstein 2007; Murphy and Venkatesh 2007; Parsons et al. 2007, Parsons, 2004, Parsons et al., 2001; Pruitt 2005; Quinn and Forsyth 2005; Sanders 2010). The Internet is an interactive mechanism that is low-cost and efficient (Chin Phua and Caras 2008). The Internet also helps reduce negative interactions with police (Minichiello et al. 2013; Cunningham and Kendall 2011; Holt and Blevins 2007; Bernstein 2007) and may help promote collective action among sex workers (Feldman 2014). Scott Cunningham and Todd Kendall (2011) argue

> In most large cities, prostitution services have long been available through street "strolls", call operations, and as secondary products of some legal businesses, such as massage parlors. Nevertheless, the Internet has exponentially increased the ability of sex workers to: (a) reach large numbers of potential clients with informative advertising, (b) build reputations for high-quality service, and (c) arrange discreet assignations in which screening methods can be used to reduce the risk of discovery by police and others (5).

Thus far, the existing literature paints a positive picture of the Internet's role in the lives of modern sex workers. In what follows, I detail the affordances of sex work in online environments as they are documented in the existing literature. Then, I analyze the shortcomings of this literature and pinpoint new directions for future lines of inquiry.

The affordances of sex work in a digital era

Currently, the literature on sex work in a digital era focuses on the affordances of using the Internet to advertise, solicit, and perform erotic labor. Taken together, this literature demonstrates that the Internet has reshaped both the business practices and experiences of workers and clients in ways that are beneficial to both the worker and customer. Here, I outline the five primary benefits of online sex work that are highlighted in the existing literature.

First, the use of the Internet by sex workers decreases their risk of bodily harm and physical violence. Holt and Blevins (2007) analyze posts by male consumers, colloquially called "Johns," in various online forums. Johns engage in information sharing online (reviews of prostitutes, their services, pricing, safety of area, etc.); this information sharing helps to facilitate prostitution offline but benefits both worker and client by minimizing risk exposure, specifically by reducing victimization. Importantly, sex work, particularly when facilitated by the Internet, is not merely about sexual commerce – these encounters are both physical and affectual. As Walby (2012) notes

> …the labor process of male-for-male Internet escorting differs greatly from the ill-treatment common among on-street sex trade and even bar hustling: Internet escorts deal with a clientele that more or less represents the transnational capitalist class, a clientele that often seeks comradery and temporary companionship (169).

Thus, erotic labor that is in some part facilitated by Internet-mediated exchanges provides better conditions of labor for escorts. Importantly, Walby's (2012) work emphasizes the companionship and intimacy between male escorts and their clients. His data demonstrate that "few male-for-male Internet escorts report violence at work" (169). These new Internet-mediated interactions may be characterized by less violence and provide an opportunity for more "touching" encounters with clients.

Second, online sex work has led to better wages because the Internet allows prostitutes to more effectively recruit high-end desirable clientele (Cunningham and Kendall 2011; Bernstein 2007). Bernstein (2007) writes

> …the internet has indeed reshaped predominant patterns of sexual commerce in ways that some sex workers have been able to benefit from. For many indoor sex workers, it has become easier to work without third party management, to conduct one's business with minimal interference from the criminal justice system, and to reap greater profits by honing one's sales pitch to a more elite and specialized audience (93).

The Internet facilitates escorting by opening new venues for "solicitation"; for example, sex workers can and do use non-sexual websites or chat rooms to meet customers (e.g., Jonsson and Svedin, 2014).

Third, the Internet is a propitious method of advertising, screening, and recruiting, which all assist in creating better wages and facilitating this new world of online sex work (Pruitt 2005). In addition, Johns often use the Internet to create online reviews of prostitutes, which help with reputation; prostitutes' regular customers can post "testimonials" that will help their business (Cunningham and Kendall 2011; Castle and Lee 2008; Bernstein 2007; Holt and Blevins 2007). Castle and Lee (2008) study escort services that are advertised on websites. This descriptive study demonstrates that sex workers use the Internet to advertise, schedule appointments online, and screen customers prior to scheduling. The online process of screening and scheduling fosters anonymity and safeguards workers.

Fourth, the use of the Internet by prostitutes reduces negative relations with law enforcement (Cunningham and Kendall 2011; Holt and Blevins 2007; Bernstein 2007; Weitzer 2005). Law enforcement targets street prostitution because the public visibility of outdoor sex workers makes for easier arrests, and less money is spent on covert operations that might be associated with arresting indoor workers (Weitzer 2005). In the male-for-male market, street-based sex workers represent 85 to 90 percent of arrests, yet they make up only 10–15 percent of the market (Minichiello et al. 2013: 270). Moreover, if fewer sex workers are arrested, less money is

spent on court-related costs such as fines, loss of wages, and lawyers' fees. Less frequent arrests also may help to elevate the reputation and status of a particular prostitute – as customers do not want to be arrested either (Holt and Blevins 2007).

Fifth, recent literature suggests that the Internet also has political benefits for sex workers. Sociologists of social movements have investigated the ways activists use the Internet in collective action (DiMaggio et al. 2001; Reed 2005). However, few studies review how sex workers use the web in activism. Valerie Feldman (2014) posits that sex-worker-created blogs such as BnG (Bound, Not Gagged) demonstrate enormous political potential for activists. They provide a forum for interaction and discussion among sex workers:

> BnG provides a safe space for sex workers to come out, a foundational step for further collective action. In the face of very real and sometimes violent legal and social sanctions faced by sex workers, the Internet's anonymity allows sex workers to "come out" online and speak *as* sex workers on issues of interest to them in rational deliberation with political and moral opponents, the general non-sex worker public, and each other, while still safeguarding their offline identities (248).

Activists use blogs to blacklist media agents who misrepresent sex workers – particularly those who reproduce stereotypes of sex workers as drug addicts, street prostitutes, and victims of violent pimps and venomous sex traffickers. In fact, the function of these public blogs is to help transform the public image of sex workers. While Feldman notes that these attempts are not always successful, sex workers can use online forums to network and fight stigma.

This new literature on online sex work raises new questions about sex work in a modern era. However, this literature needs to shift its focus and address many underdeveloped areas of inquiry. In the final sections below, I outline nine ways in which scholarly inquiries can better address how the Internet is shaping the workplace experiences and lives of sex workers. These suggestions are not listed in a prioritized order – as all these issues should be taken up in future studies.

Sex work ≠ prostitution

Increasingly, the literature examined here conflates the term "sex work" with prostitution. Harcourt and Donovan (2005) demonstrate that there are at least 25 different types of sex work, yet, most studies focus on the Internet and prostitution (specifically escorts) at the expense of other sex work such as webcam models, pornographers (e.g., Nash 2014), dominatrices (e.g., Levey and Pinsky 2015), and exotic dancers (e.g., Egan 2006). How are these other sex workers using the Internet? The term "sex worker" needs to be deployed with more precision within this literature. Its current narrow use does not adequately reflect the diversity of labor performed within the realm of digital sexual commerce.

The rise of individualized erotic labor

Future lines of inquiry must further explore the impact of what I am calling the rise of *individualized erotic labor*, the increased likelihood that sex work will be performed, managed, marketed, etc., in an isolated environment. The Internet has expanded the ability of sellers and buyers to connect with one another (Weitzer 2010); however, we also need to ask how individualized erotic labor affects social networks among sex workers. The present literature has begun to take up this question but contains contradictory findings regarding social networks. While some initial investigations suggest that sex work in online environments decreases solidarity among sex workers (Walby 2012; McLean 2012; Murphy and Venkatesh 2006), other studies suggest that sex workers do use the Internet to create relationships with other sex workers and do participate in activism (Feldman 2014). For example, McLean (2012) studies male escorts in

Melbourne, Australia. He posits that the rise of online sex work has led to a decrease in social networks. Moreover, he also argues that communities of sex workers become fragmented and, at times, hostile. He notes, "it is the element of competition exacerbated by the ability of workers to view and critique the profiles of other workers that *is* unique to this medium" (McLean 2012: 80). In other words, the Internet now allows sex workers to actually see their competition via online profiles; therefore, they compare themselves with other workers in a new way. As McLean (2012) argues, the Internet opens up potential for greater competition and, thus, may fuel dissociative behavior.

Context matters

In order to avoid the trap of techno-determinism, future studies should explore how local contexts shape the migration of many sex workers into online environments. Milieu will likely affect the reasons why and how people use the Internet in erotic labor. Murphy and Venkatesh (2006) investigate the ways legal policies in New York City shape the migration of many women from the streets into their homes, hotels, brothels, and massage parlors. Their work makes an important intervention; they highlight the policies introduced under the Rudolph Giuliani administration in New York City that intensified law enforcement presence, harassment of sex workers (among others, e.g., drug users and homeless), and arrests; these policies were used to clean up areas such as 42nd street in order to bolster tourism and implement a number of revitalization programs. This local political context was a significant catalyst for sex workers in New York City to migrate indoors. Drawing from their line of reasoning, highlighting that the creation of the Internet alone cannot explain the growth in online sexual commerce is important. Again, local political, economic, and social conditions play a role in why individuals choose online sex work and how they perform it. In addition, the Internet is a global communication technology, yet much of this literature focuses on North American escorts' use of the Internet. How do the political climates, specifically changes in legal policies in countries throughout the world, affect how sex workers globally use the Internet? Future lines of inquiry should strive to avoid the trap of techno-determinism that is present in some of this new literature on sex work in online environments by conducting case studies in places throughout the world.

There is still danger on the Internet

This existing literature offers only a glimpse into potential areas of danger of sex work in online environments. While online environments may be safer than outdoor or street-based sex work, online sex workers still have to grapple with violence and harassment. While the Internet affords escorts the ability to screen customers, or to market to higher end clientele, violence can still happen. Also, an online environment does not protect sex workers in many different areas of the market from verbal harassment. For example, preliminary research on webcams models suggests that this particular cohort of sex workers faces regular dangers, which include harassment, both virtual and offline. Thus, questions are still left unanswered in this literature about danger. For example, can customers track sex workers via IP addresses and then stalk or harm them? Will individual workers' ability to use technology affect their ability to protect themselves? These questions and others about the risks of online sex work need further attention in the literature.

Privacy and the Internet

The literature highlights autonomy and privacy as benefits of online sex work. In fact, the literature posits that the privacy found in online sex work explains its allure, particularly for those

who have struggled with the stigma associated with street-level prostitution. However, the case of webcam models, for example, complicates these affordances. Camgirls, for example, face regular quagmires related to privacy on the Internet such as capping and doxing. Capping is the unwanted filming and sharing of their erotic performances. Customers may only use these recordings for personal use, but these "capped" videos are also posted on pornographic websites and can be sold without the performer's consent or the ability to negotiate compensation for further distribution of the recording. Doxing is when clients use research and/or hacking to acquire information about camgirls and then share that information with other clients and/or use the information to stalk them. The examples provided here of capping and doxing clearly complicate the perceived benefits of privacy and also require further investigation by scholars.

Law enforcement and the future of vice squads

The literature also emphasizes a decrease in harassment of workers by law enforcement officers. For now, police departments may still focus primarily on visible street-based sex work, which means online sex workers may have less frequent interactions with police. However, if this trend continues, and more sex work moves online, early evidence suggests that police departments will create operations to target online sex workers (Ashford 2009). Additional lines of inquiry, particularly in criminology, should focus on how law enforcement agencies are transforming their tactics and policies to keep up with the shift to online sex work or how law enforcement agencies are using the Internet (i.e., surveillance of chat rooms) to monitor sex workers (Holt and Blevins 2007). Holt and Blevins (2007) suggest the forums that Johns use to discuss prostitutes' services can provide knowledge of human trafficking sites such as massage parlors and strip clubs. While for now prostitutes who use the Internet report fewer frequent negative interactions with law enforcement, as law enforcement policies change, the harassment once experienced on the street may continue online.

Gender is not binary

This literature primarily focuses on the affordances of the Internet for cis-men and cis-women working in sexual commerce and does not explore in any meaningful way what this development means for trans* and other queer sex workers. To read the existing literature on online sex work, one would think only two types of workers – male and female – exist. In Western society, sex shares a mimetic relation with gender – this binary construction of sex and gender is discursively produced, and thus socially, culturally, and historically constructed, while serving the interests of heteronormative and patriarchal social systems and marginalizing those whose identities do not neatly fit within these rigidly defined boxes (Butler 1990). The literature on online sex work, too, has been restricted by society's binary logic of gender.

While literature on trans* identified sex workers is available, this literature does not effectively, as of yet, grapple with how the benefits of the Internet might also affect the lives, experiences, and outcomes of trans* sex workers. Furthermore, much of the literature that does exist focuses on HIV and deploys pathologizing language, and it presents trans* workers as "vectors of disease" (e.g., Infante et al. 2009; Pisani et al. 2004; Harcourt et al. 2001). In fact, this literature views trans* sex workers solely as medicalized bodies, and we actually learn very little about their workplace experiences and how, like other sex workers, their work might both exploit and empower them. Specifically, according to the World Health Organization (2013), "transgender sex workers face high levels of violence, stigma, discrimination and other human-rights violations" (4). In light of this information, how might the Internet assist trans* workers in warding off and fighting against violence, stigma, discrimination, and harassment? In what specific ways have trans* identified sex workers incorporated the Internet into their businesses?

The racialization of erotic labor

Current literature is sparse on the racialization of erotic labor (Jones 2015; Nash 2014; Logan 2010; Brooks 2010, Brooks, 1997; Koken et al. 2009; Miller-Young 2008). Race remains an underdeveloped unit of analysis in studies of sex work (Minichiello et al. 2013). Thus far, we do not know enough about how race affects online sex work. In an online environment, sex workers use photographs and linguistic cues to transmit racial and ethnic information to clients. Chin Phua and Caras (2008) study how race and ethnicity shape the construction of male sex workers branding on the Internet. They write, "…using ethnic brands for marketing sex work [online] suggests that rent boys are cognizant of ethnic and racial preferences or fetishes and use them to advantage" (252). These authors frame ethnic branding as a strategic maneuver that allows workers to make more profits. By enacting racial stereotypes such as the hypersexual Latin lover or the passive Asian male, they cater to consumer desire for consumption of the erotic "other," and in doing so, they make more money. However, to what degree does workers' conscious participation in ethnic branding help to perpetuate existing racist discourses?

Also, in what ways do existing racist discourses disadvantage sex workers online? Does the racial disparity in wages found across labor markets occur in online sex work? Koken et al. (2009) find among escorts that "while white women's fees ranged up to $1000 an hour, no woman of color in the sample charged more than $500" (220). Racism and discrimination in erotic labor mean that bodies of color often have lower exchange values (Jones 2015). Therefore, how do race and ethnicity affect earning potential online? I suspect that future research will show that the affordances of online sex work are not evenly felt and are racialized (particularly with respect to wages).

Intersectionality

Given the importance of intersectionality in contemporary studies of gender, future research must be more attentive to how these Internet affordances are complicated for workers whose lives are simultaneously affected by other social markers of identity such as race, ethnicity, age, ability, nationality, and class position. For example, Logan (2010) examines the ways in which male escorts use racialized notions of hegemonic masculinity to set prices. Logan's use of an intersectional perspective is instructive; in line with theories of hegemonic masculinity, he finds that escorts who advertise that they are muscular and who conform to hypermasculine gendered stereotypes of a "top" are seen as more desirable. Moreover, he writes

> I found that black men are at the extremes – they have the highest premiums for top behavior and the largest penalties for bottom behaviors. This is consistent with intersectionality theory in that gay communities prize black men who conform to racial stereotypes of sexual behavior and penalize those that don't (697–8).

Escorts who exploit racialized hegemonic masculinity set their prices higher and, in turn, earn higher wages. While pricing in the world of escorting is far more complex than Logan notes (see Walby 2012 for critique of Logan), future scholars must consider how race, gender, class, etc., can simultaneously shape the ways sex workers use the Internet to brand, market, and price their services.

Conclusion

In my discussion, I focus on the problematic developments in the literature on sex work in a digital era. I consider the contemporary ways that scholars have attempted to better understand the ways the Internet has reshaped sex work, specifically with respect to wages, working conditions, and everyday work experiences. This literature, however, has narrowly focused on the

affordances of Internet-facilitated prostitution, and in doing so, it leaves many questions unanswered. By highlighting this neglect in the current literature, I argue that researchers need to address nine specific areas: the diversity and complexity of sex work online; the rise of individualized erotic labor; how local contexts shape migration into online sex work; issues related to danger and privacy; the reactions by law enforcement to online sex work; the racialization of erotic labor; and further use of intersectional analysis to study the experiences of people who sell sex online. Crucially, if these areas are addressed, the findings can assist the many NGOs and sex workers advocacy groups who seek to provide resources and aid to sex workers who want assistance. For example, knowing more about the dangers that online sex workers face can help sex workers better protect themselves. Finally, addressing these areas could also have an impact on legal policies regarding sex work.

Short Biography

Angela Jones is an assistant professor of Sociology at Farmingdale State College, State University of New York. She is the director of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Jones obtained her PhD from the New School for Social Research. Her research interests include Black protest, gender, and sexuality. She is currently conducting research on adult webcam performers. Jones is the author of three books: *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (Palgrave, 2013), *The Modern African American Political Thought Reader: From David Walker to Barack Obama* (Routledge, 2012), and *African American Civil Rights: Early Activism and the Niagara Movement* (Praeger, 2011). She is also the author of numerous scholarly articles, which have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Note

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