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School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom

Priscilla Alexander
Co-editor of Sex Work

Elizabeth Bernstein
Associate Professor of Sociology and Women’s Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University

Andrew Hunter
Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers

Kamala Kempadoo
Associate Professor in Social Science at York University, Canada

Helen J. Self, Ph.D.
Historian and writer

Nancy M. Wingfield
Associate Professor of History at Northern Illinois University
To the memory of my brother, Jonathan Levi Ditmore,
and my mentor and colleague, Paulo Longo
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Sacred Prostitution, Contemporary
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Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Prostitution is a sensitive and controversial topic, encompassing both sex and money. The Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work is the first major reference on these topics. Although extensive research has been undertaken, there has been no definitive collection of resources and information available in a convenient and useful form. This encyclopedia intended as both a primer of scholarly investigation into the sex industry and as a resource to learn more about its many facets. This encyclopedia encourages further exploration of prostitution and offers guidance on what has been documented and what is ripe for further exploration.

The term “sex work” encompasses prostitution plus other forms such as phone sex, pornography, stripping, and erotic dancing. However, the focus here is on prostitution. Related sex work entries, such as on geisha, stripping, and dance hall girls, are viewed through the lens of prostitution.

The reader will gain insight into why prostitution has persisted, through time and in most cultures, despite nearly ubiquitous censure. The structure of the sex industry in various locales and venues under various legislative and social approaches is illuminated as well. The book is directed at a general audience.

The Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work includes 341 entries on important social, cultural, geographic, and medical topics related to prostitution. This information was collected over three years, with contributions by 179 experts in the field who were asked to write about their specific topics. Contributors came from many fields, including advocacy, history, literature, law, and the social sciences and represent a wide range of views on prostitution. Distinguished contributors include Laura Agustín, Priscilla Alexander, Stephanie Budin, Jo Doezema, Gail Phetersen, Helen Self, and Thomas Steinfatt.

Entry topics range over time from antiquity to the present and address all regions of the world, with an emphasis on the West and the past 250 years. Most entries include cross-references and suggested further readings for more study and research. More than 20 sidebars, the overwhelming majority of which are from primary sources, accompany the entries. The appendix of primary resources includes an additional 20 texts.
How to Use This Book

The Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work is a reference work about prostitution past and present, worldwide and especially, in the United States. With 341 entries on health, cultural issues, migration, boom towns, legislation, technology, notable figures, literature, movies, and more, this two-volume encyclopedia is a foremost resource devoted to this high-interest yet sensitive topic. Most entries conclude with suggestions for further reading on the topic, including books, articles, Web sites, and films.

As prostitution is ubiquitous, the entry list is wide-ranging. Entries are extremely specific, such as the Australian Mace Scandal or any entry devoted to a single person; others describe abstract ideas such as “desire,” as they relate to commercial sex. Entries can discuss extreme acceptance or persecution of prostitution or new approaches to regulation or fads in sexual practices. Every attempt has been made to include such phenomena as devadasi and les grandes horizontales, as well as the emergence of syphilis in Europe, among other notable topics. Some historic eras or locales have been marked by phenomena related to prostitution, such as Ancient Rome or Hong Kong, and they are included. Whether to include entries about specific nations was hotly debated. Ultimately, it was judged that including only selected country entries would create an impression that there was a greater degree of prostitution in some places than others, without accounting for travel, migration, local custom, and attitudes toward overt and covert sexual activity in general and commercial or transactional sexual activity in specific. Therefore, regional entries (e.g., Southeast Asia or Western Europe) endeavor to offer an overview, while local entries (e.g., New York City or Bangkok) and historical entries (e.g., Habsburg Monarchy or Renaissance) offer greater depth in examining these topics.

Entries are organized alphabetically. An Alphabetical List of Entries as well as a Topical List of Entries will help readers to quickly find topics of interest. Items appearing in boldface print within an entry are also entries in and of themselves. Cross-references are also made at the end of the text of an entry with the standard “See also … ” listing. A comprehensive index provides further access.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the editorial staff at Greenwood Press, Wendi Schnaufer, Anne Thompson, and Mariah Gumpert, for their unflagging enthusiasm and attention to detail. Rachel Given-Wilson and Theresa Anast, my research assistants, deserve accolades beyond what I can bestow here. Invaluable advisors to this project were Laura Agustín, Priscilla Alexander, Elizabeth Bernstein, Andrew Hunter, Kamala Kempadoo, Helen Self, and Nancy Wingfield. Additional thanks go to Priscilla Alexander for recommending me for this project. This work would never have been completed without the 179 contributors who wrote for this volume.

Enormous gratitude goes to Veronica Magar and Carol Jenkins, in whose homes much of this work was edited. Boundless moral and technical support came from Melynda Barnhart, Patricia Clough, Patricia Ditmore, Koren Gaines, Angus McIntyre, John Neilson, and Juhu Thukral. Julie Bates, Nel van Beelen, Peter Bloch, Elizabeth Cohen, Will Crutchfield, Judy Dunaway, Cheryl Overs, Andrew Porter, Tracy Quan, Rebecca Schleifer, Andrew Sorfleet, Juhu Thukral, Petra Timmerman, S-C Tsai, Matthew Weingarden, and Nancy Wingfield read draft entries and offered corrections, constructive criticism, and marvelous editing advice. There are many more people who deserve acknowledgment, too many to list here. Although they know who they are, I hope they recognize the depth of my gratitude for their unending input and support.
INTRODUCTION

Prostitutes have long been an object of disgust combined with envy. This encyclopedia adds to the enormous literature on prostitution, a literature built upon the combined human fascinations with sex and money. A frank discussion of either sex or money is rare; open investigation into what may be modern society’s two most covert topics is generally out-of-bounds in polite society. This taboo reinforces itself with the lack of information it imposes on the topic of transactional and commercial sex. Despite the extensive research into commercial sex, there has been no single expansive yet compact resource on the topic. A great deal remains to be explored: I gained an enormous amount of knowledge about prostitution in the course of working on this project, but what became most clear to me during this effort is the vast amount that remains unknown, undocumented, and unspoken. This may be the first book of its kind addressing the sex industry, but it will not be the last.

Terminology

The terms “sex work” and “prostitution” are used nearly interchangeably throughout this encyclopedia. “Sex work” is a phrase created in the last 30 years to refer to sexual commerce of all kinds. Prostitution has varying definitions in different contexts. Some of these are based on the definition of prostitution in law, or what is illegal. Legal definitions change over time and place, leading to great confusion if one relies on one definition from the criminal code or one from the civil code, as they do not travel well. Despite the difficulty of terminology, prostitution as a sexual exchange for money or other valuables is the general definition of prostitution for this work. In that sense, the term “sex work” is appropriate in its inclusivity.

“Sex work” was conceived as a nonstigmatizing term, without the taint of the words “whore” and “prostitute.” The point of the term was to convey the professionalism of the sex worker rather than her lack of worth as seen by much of society. However, many prostitutes do not identify themselves as sex workers and view the term with some contempt. One sex worker, Gary Rosen, wrote, “Derek got me into hustling. I called it sex work because I went to college and
lived in San Francisco, but he just called it hustling” (Sycamore 2000, 35). Others recognize its usefulness and vary it according to the impression they wish to create with other terms, including “prostitute,” “whore,” and “harlot.” In Australia and New Zealand, “sex work” has become the most accepted term. In the Philippines, it is “prostituted woman,” to convey the opinion that no woman would choose to engage in prostitution.

Although prostitution is the focus of these volumes, other jobs in the sex industry are also subject to the problems that prostitution faces, including prostitution charges and harassment. Strippers have been charged with prostitution, and social stigma manifests in surprising ways.

Defining prostitution is made difficult by varying legal definitions and murky presumptions. Although prostitution is at the nexus of sex and money, the general definition of compensated sexual activity may take in far too much: financial situations are haggled before many marriages, and every cultural or religious interpretation of marriage includes sexual activity. Legal definitions offer another pitfall, as they change greatly over time and space. For example, in some places, sadomasochistic play falls under the rubric of prostitution and in others it does not. The motive behind commercial sex for the sex worker is clearly not mere romance or physical gratification, yet physical enjoyment is not excluded for prostitutes. Nor is it required.

The Network of Sex Work Projects uses a definition of sex work recommended by and created with sex workers. This definition is used by many sex workers’ organizations:

Negotiation and performance of sexual services for remuneration

- with or without intervention by a third party (any managers, madams, pimps, business owners, and colleagues making referrals)
- where those services are advertised or generally recognized as available from a specific location
- where the price of services reflects the pressures of supply and demand.

In this definition, “negotiation” implies the rejection of specific clients or acts on an individual basis, which stipulates the right to decline a client or activity. Indiscriminate acceptance by the worker of all proposed transactions is not presumed—such acceptance would indicate the presence of coercion.

History

Prostitution has been euphemized as “the oldest profession.” Anthropologists show that in even the most primitive societies, there is usually one woman who lives outside the village who engages in transactional sex or overt prostitution. Prostitution is well documented in antiquity and is alleged to have financed the production of some of Egypt’s pyramids. The stratification of prostitution in Ancient Greece is widely reported. Courtesans have been linked to high culture as inspiration and producers of opera, ballet, Chinese literature, and French literature. Japanese geisha and hetaerae in ancient Greece were cultural treasures for their extensive training in the arts of music and dance. History documents changes in attitudes toward prostitution, including the tolerant acceptance of prostitution during the Middle Ages and the condemnation of prostitution beginning in the 16th century with the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. Moral panics promote greater attention to prostitution and have been used to restrict female autonomy, as illustrated in Victorian London, with the mob response to both William Stead’s “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” and Jack the Ripper’s violence against
women. In both cases, women and girls were expected to stay close to home rather than society being expected to respond to violence against women.

Helen J. Self has pointed out how attempts to prevent and/or regulate prostitution have punished some women, usually working class and poor women, for behavior that would be entirely innocent when engaged in by others (2003, 2). Laura Agustín (“A Migrant World of Services,” 2003) describes how prostitute advocacy has been one way wealthy women professionalized social work and made a career out of the reform of “wayward” women. This phenomenon generally took the form of upper-class and middle-class women attempting to change the way poor people lived.

Prostitution continues to fascinate and exists in all societies, even in enforced closed situations such as prison. Covert and overt prostitution is easily found in contemporary urban locations, and all cautions against commercial sex only serve to increase the fascination. Prostitution takes myriad forms and occurs in an enormous variety of venues. Some manifestations of the sex industry are permutations designed not to contravene local laws. Consider, for example, the wide variety of sexual activity for hire legally in Japan, where prostitution is rigidly interpreted as sexual intercourse for money. Enjo kosai, or assisted, compensated dating, can lead to sexual activity, but as it is not an overt arrangement, it is not usually considered prostitution by law enforcement. Another Japanese example is “soapland,” where a woman bathes a man by lathering herself up in order to lather him up with her soapy body. Sexual intercourse is not generally a feature of “soapland,” yet there is no mistake that this is a sexual service.

Other cultural permutations may look like prostitution to some but not to others. It is customary in some parts of Africa for a visitor, and especially a lover, to bring a gift to the host or hostess. In places where soap is prohibitively expensive, soap is a desired and welcome gift. This has led to stories of women selling sex in exchange for soap, which taken out of context, is unfathomable to Westerners. Such gift giving may appear to be “hiding in plain sight.” The most overt forms of prostitution may be on the street or indoors, particularly in the windows seen in parts of Western Europe, such as Amsterdam. Women, usually scantily dressed, stand in the window of a ground-floor or second-story room. The room is small and has a bed and a washroom. When a customer arrives, the woman closes the curtains. New Zealand has decriminalized prostitution, and no form of consensual commercial sex is restricted. This means that street prostitution is unhindered as is prostitution in more discreet venues. Prostitution is prohibited throughout the United States, with the exception of some rural counties in Nevada. Regulations in Nevada favor large businesses over independent, one-woman brothels. The Mustang Ranch closed in 1999, but in its heyday it housed 300 registered prostitutes. Licensed prostitution in Nevada is the only legal prostitution in the United States, but the restrictive conditions can be difficult. This is one reason that most of Nevada’s prostitutes operate against the law in the major cities of Las Vegas and Reno. Sex workers in Argentina have organized a union to which they pay dues, called AMMAR. AMMAR has suffered for its strong stance against corruption and violence: Sandra Cabrera, its most outspoken member against police brutality and corruption, was murdered on January 28, 2004.

Sex Work as Labor

Why do women, men, and transgenders sell sex? Sex sells. The prevailing presumption that women who sell sex have no other option does not bear scrutiny. Kingsley Davis (1937) has clearly described that, although economic want is a motivating factor for sex workers, it is not the
sole factor. Not all poor and destitute women sell sex. Whereas the need for money is a strong push, it is not the only push into prostitution. Indeed, most needy people do not engage in sexual commerce. Poverty is not the only root but economics is a strong root: most people I have interviewed say that money is the reason they remain in the sex industry. However, they also stay for the autonomy and flexibility it offers, and some people do prefer it to other work for more than merely economic or purely practical reasons. Many prostitutes supplement an income of a more mainstream source with part-time prostitution. Income from prostitution may provide money for a more comfortable existence than a person might otherwise be able to enjoy. Others turn to prostitution to support expensive habits, whether they are luxury items or drugs. In some cases, as in many other professions, prostitutes take up the occupations of their parents. However, economic constraints certainly contribute to prostitution, and money remains the most common reason given when asked why people sell sex (Thukral, Ditmore, and Murphy 2005).

As money is the most motivating factor, but not enough to encourage all poor women to become prostitutes, it is important to examine working conditions and available opportunities. Consider that when the two “occupations” of respectable women were domestic work and marriage, most women in prisons and Magdalen Homes for prostitution had been domestic servants. Domestic service offered harsh labor with low wages and was frequently accompanied by sexual harassment, seduction, and rape. To date, domestic servitude is a staple of contemporary cases of trafficking in persons. Drudgery could well motivate a person to accept faster money for what may not actually be more distasteful service. Considering the conditions of available options, it becomes easier to grasp why some women would engage in sexual transactions on a professional and overt level or an amateur and unspoken level, as with “charity girls.”

Prostitution, for sex workers, is an occupation that sex workers’ rights activists wish to see recognized as labor. However, the carnal nature of prostitution and the emotional response to the idea of prostitution set it apart from other work. For example, similarly physically intimate occupations, such as dentistry and medicine and even made-to-measure tailoring, or perhaps the removal of body hair, are not about physical pleasure delivered bodily. Other work to satisfy bodily appetites, such as food preparation, is not as physically close as sex work. Professions similarly ostracized as sex work deal with the dead or the disgusting, such as undertakers, sanitation workers, tanners, and slaughterhouse workers. Certain sexual activities, including sexual commerce, may disgust some, but many have deemed prostitution preferable to these and other professions.

When a prostitute is asked whether he or she enjoys their work, they may respond with the old adage, “there are two wrong answers: yes and no.” Sexuality is more complex, and it is a misconception that prostitutes hate their clients. In fact, prostitutes need their clients. Clients may be difficult, and there are always things that people would prefer not to deal with, but this can be said of most other work and is even true of personal interactions with lovers and romantic (as opposed to commercial) partners. Perhaps better questions to ask would be what, if any, other paid or unpaid work does the individual prostitute in question do; what would improve the conditions of sexual commerce; would he or she wish to change occupations; and if so, to what?

Prostitutes have been pathologized in many ways, for assumed events before they began sexual exchanges, for entering the sex industry, for the interpreted effects of the sex industry, and for men’s desires. Perhaps the most common question of this sort is whether prostitutes are more or less sensual or sexual than others. Some sex workers may be, and many may not. Prostitution and commercial sex are more widespread than either nymphomania or frigidity,
and assumptions that prostitutes are sexually deviant in these ways are not useful. Rather than seeking a pathology behind a person’s involvement in commercial sex, it may be better to view the question as one of opportunity.

Repercussions and Ramifications

Social opprobrium has enormous consequence for prostitutes, suspected sex workers, and their families and loved ones. Women suspected of loose morals have been detained and physically examined, even subjected to “instrumental rape.” They have been institutionalized in Magdalen Homes and asylums, or lock hospitals, reform schools, and prisons. The widespread lack of occupational safety measures and even the recognition of sexual labor encourages workplace abuses to continue rather than change. Sex workers who register with authorities in places where prostitution is regulated may lose the right to privacy regarding their medical records and history. The ramifications of social stigma faced by sex workers are in some ways codified by local laws and social strictures. Entries addressing legal approaches such as regulation and prohibition highlight the ways this is effected.

The worst abuses in any workplace approach conditions of slavery; the sex industry is no exception and trafficking into the sex industry is rightly the subject of outrage, leading to moral panics, public outcry, and legislation. All have mixed results of raising awareness, often without promoting accurate information, but not always with the desired outcome of effectively combating such abuses. In the worst-case scenarios, the remedies enacted exacerbate trafficking by forcing migrants under further scrutiny and restriction.

Further repercussions include ostracization. Why are prostitutes seen as adjacent to society rather than part of it? Prostitutes are generally only deviant in overtly exchanging sex for valuables and not in their living conditions or aspirations. The stigmatization of sex work affects many more people than just sex workers. In India, numerous programs for sex workers take great pains to enroll the children of sex workers in school because they face greater difficulty finding spouses when their parents are associated with the red light areas. Romantic and paying partners of sex workers are discredited because of their relationships with prostitutes. Perhaps the most vilified and invisible man in American society is the “john,” or paying client, of a sex professional. Society shuns known prostitutes and is often vindictive. Laws against prostitution lead not only to punishment of prostitutes with fines and imprisonment, but also with the near total lack of legal recourse when crimes are committed against prostitutes, no matter how violent. Even murders of prostitutes have gone uninvestigated for years, with dire consequences as numbers rise. Consider the case of various serial killers who preyed upon prostitutes with impunity as they seemed to anticipate that no one would investigate these crimes, sometimes even labeled “no human involved” (Fairstein 1993). Still more devastating is the realization that had police taken seriously information offered by the spouses of two women killed by the Green River Killer, Gary Ridgway, in the United States, these two women might have lived. Further, the women later murdered by Ridgway, who confessed to killing 48 women, many of them teenagers, may also have lived. This was not and need not be the case. There are instances on record from 19th-century New York of prostitutes seeking financial reimbursement in the case of damage to property (Cohen, P.C. 1998). Legal remonstrations against prostitutes themselves are used almost exclusively against women and transgender women. Far fewer male prostitutes face difficulties from law enforcement than women. Fewer still face the moral instruction and impositions of reformers.