Vice Careers
The changing contours of sex work in New York City

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1990s, changes to law enforcement strategies in New York City pushed many women working in the sex trade off of the streets and into the indoors. Increasing numbers of women began advertising sexual services in bars, over the Internet, and in print media, and conducting their work in their homes, hotels, and brothels. This study uses in-depth interviews and participant observation to examine the impact of this change on the life and work of women working in New York's indoor sex trade. A critical finding is that as women move their work indoors, they begin to conceive of sex work as a profession and a career, rather than just a short-term means of employment. This "professional and careerist orientation" may have significant implications for the length of women's tenure in sex work and ultimately, for their ability to exit the trade completely.

KEYWORDS: sex work, prostitution, career, profession, mobility, ethnography

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the experiences of women who participate in New York City's sex trade—hereafter "sex workers."[1] The paper is motivated by a number of recent shifts in the landscape of sex work. Most importantly, under the mayoral leadership of Rudolph Giuliani, the City of New York heightened its enforcement of the sale of sexual services, focusing primarily on public areas and especially on those parts of the city that were targeted for redevelopment and tourism. In their effort to clean up New York's streets, police and law enforcement personnel effectively drove sex workers off of the streets and into the "indoors" (Weidner 2001; Thukrul et al. 2005). At the same time, the growth of the Internet enabled sex workers to solicit clients from the relative security of their own homes and other spaces not easily detectable by law enforcement surveillance (Scott 2002; Chatterjee 2002; Soothill and Sanders 2005). Taken together, these factors have reorganized the sex work trade in New York. Sex workers and those who provide them services—e.g., legal aid service personnel, health clinic workers, and social workers—have characterized this change as the growth of an "indoor" sex work trade.

In the pages below, we seek to understand whether these 'top-down' policy changes have, in fact, altered sex work and whether "indoor" sex work is a particular form of the trade, distinct in nature and organization from working on the streets. To this end, we recognize that sex work behind closed doors is not historically novel. Women have been conducting prostitution indoors for centuries. Instead, our focus is on the growth of this indoor trade in New York City as a result of public policy changes and the implementation of new law enforcement strategies, with a particular focus on the degree to which this shift indoors has altered the trade and the lives of those engaging in this line of work.

Our perspective is from the vantage point of those working in the trade and our particular substantive focus is on their patterns of employment and income generation. That is, we wish to

understand whether the growth of the 'indoor' market presents sex workers with new or differing conditions of employment. We examine indoor sex workers' own views of their occupation, their perception of life chances, opportunities for entrée, exit, and the overall shifts in their capacities to support themselves and their families. This approach enables us to contribute to existing research on such topics as: the subjection of sex workers to violence (Dalla 2000; Phoenix 1999; Thukral and Ditmore 2003; Raphael and Shapiro 2002; Pyett and Warr 1999), the intersection of prostitution and substance use (Maher 1996; Maher and Curtis 1992; Maher and Daly 1996; Graham and Wish 1994; Dalla 2000; Feucht 1993; Epele 2001; Inciardi et al. 1993), the challenge of policing sexual activity and the relationships of sex workers to the law (Thukral and Ditmore 2003; Thukrul et al. 2005; Sharpe 1998; Raphael and Shapiro 2002; Cohen 1980; Phoenix 1999), and other aspects of the trade, including characteristics of the work itself and women's relationships to housing, money, and family (Sharpe 1998; Raphael and Shapiro 2002; Phoenix 1999; Thukral and Ditmore 2003; Bernstein 2001; Sheehy 1973; Hoigard and Finstad 1992; Freund, Leonard, and Lee 1989; Guidroz 2002; Carpenter 2000; Dalla 2000).

This paper draws on two forms of data. One of the authors (Venkatesh) has been conducting participant-observation on New York City's sex trade since 2002. The bulk of that ethnographic research was anchored in African-American and immigrant communities in Manhattan—specifically, the Lower East Side, Harlem, and East Harlem. The sample of this particular project included women who sold sexual services both indoors and on the street. Some of the quotes and testimonies in this paper are taken from women who were informants for that ethnographic project.

At a later point, in 2003, we decided to expand our focus to women working in each of New York's five boroughs. Our focus was on those women who were working indoors: in strip clubs, brothels, abandoned buildings, dungeons, bars, night clubs, and their own homes. This extended

sample of women was diverse and included immigrants from Europe and Central America, as well as whites, African-Americans, Asians, and Latinos who were permanent residents of the United States. Our research design is not explicitly comparative, so we cannot contrast in any systematic way the experiences of the "indoor" workers in our sample with a comparable "outdoor" counterpart. However, many of the women in our sample worked outdoors at some point in their lives. And, to make comparisons, we draw on a similar field study of New York's outdoor sex work market, completed at roughly the same time (Thukrul and Ditmore 2003).

Our argument is that sex work in New York and other metropolitan areas is undergoing an important shift as more women find themselves moving from the streets to areas indoors. The patterns of earning, exposure to violence and physical abuse, relations with other sex workers, conception of the work, and the overall tenure of participation (including opportunities for exit) have changed for those involved. The women in our sample who have moved indoors come to view sex work less as a means of short-term survival—even if it is originally driven by impoverishment—and more as an open-ended source of income generation. Stated succinctly, the indoor-based women we interviewed have developed a "professional and careerist" orientation to sex work. In the pages that follow, we argue that as women turn indoors to work, they begin to approach sex work in a professional manner, which in turn, seems to ultimately prolong their involvement.

In this twin movement—physically to areas indoors, and cognitively towards a view of their work as a profession and a career – their opportunities to acquire services and exit the trade decrease. We argue that as indoor-based women come to understand their sex work as a profession, the likelihood that they will pursue exit diminishes, resulting in longer tenures as sex workers. In other words, sex work becomes for them a career. Ultimately, these extended tenures reduce their prospects of achieving social and economic stability.[2]

LITERATURE ON SEX WORK "CAREERS"

The definition of career varies according to social science discipline. For economists, a career is the means through which human capital is accrued through experience and education (Becker 1975). According to political scientists, a career is considered a sequence of attempts to gain power, status, and influence in order to maximize one's self-interest (Kaufman 1960). Psychologists tend to define career as either a vocation, in which one's occupation matches one's personality (Holland 1985); a means through which individual development and self-realization is attained (Shepard 1984); or, as one dimension of a greater individual life course (Levinson 1984). For sociologists, "career" has several connotations, including the development of an individual's social role over time and a factor positively contributing to the social order (Van Maanen and Barley 1984). Others have rooted the category in paths of social mobility and have measured it via employment positions held over time—themselves indicators of social status (Blau and Duncan 1967; Featherman and Hauser 1978).

Notwithstanding this variation, Adamson, Doherty, and Viney (1998) argue that there are several shared concepts and notions of careers across disciplines. These include the notion that the organization is a social institution; that the organization (the employer) and the individual (the employee) have differing interests; that the experience of work is marked by a temporal dimension; that, for the individual, the construction of self-concept and self-esteem as they relate to their work is central; and, that any career is affected by external socio-economic, political, and historical processes.

In general, the various definitions of career can largely be understood by either using *organizational- level* analysis, in which the career is considered as a structure or pathway, or *individual-level* analysis, in which the career is a subjective experience (Gunz 1989). According to organizational analysis, career structures are the various positions, salaries, and promotional opportunities that exist

in a given occupational hierarchy, whether it is within one organization or within one profession. Accordingly, a career may be defined by regular and consecutive progress within an organization or a profession, so that through continual work and dedication, such progress will entail greater responsibility and consequently, higher pay. A career route is understood as the ways in which an employee has moved among and through the various positions of a given organization or profession (Evetts 1992; Rosenfeld 1992). This temporal aspect of the career is integral to the organizational understanding of career.

Individual-level analysis considers the career as a subjective experience in which actors develop their own understanding of work based on their work history, ambitions, expectations of work and, the value placed on their labor (Evetts 1992; Woods 1983). In this light, Hughes (1937) writes about people's experiences of "having a career;" Adamson (1997) sees the career as the means through which individuals are constantly achieving self-realization; and, Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) define career by the way in which it provides individuals with material goods as well as direction and meaning in everyday life. In this view, careers are not defined solely by paid work (For example, mothers may be considered to have a career within the home (Hughes 1958).).[3] Some have argued that there is a class dimension to the subjective understanding of career. Thus, research has documented that the service class, in contrast to the working class, is much more likely to perceive themselves as having a career (Anderson et al. 1994; Marshall et al. 1988). This difference is attributed to the "forward looking" perspective of the service class who tend to have a number of work related ambitions, intentions, and goals (Li et al. 2002).

In response to global shifts in the labor market, scholars have recently called for a broader understanding of career, one in which the relationship between individuals, organizations, and society is dynamic and fluid (Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence 1989; Herriot 1992; Kanter 1984; Heckscher and Donnelon 1995; Adamson, Doherty, and Viney 1998). Thus, Adamson, Doherty,

and Viney (1998) argue that analysts should privilege situational aspects of labor in different settings, thereby de-emphasizing the conventional temporal/chronological dimension of career that leads to a primarily organizational view. In this paper, we share their perspective and argue that, notwithstanding the uncertainties of the profession and the lack of conventional mobility structures, sex work can nevertheless be both perceived and understood to be a career by sex workers themselves. Indeed, we suggest that sex work is understood to be a career by women in the indoor trade through both organizational and individual-level analysis.

It is worth taking a moment here to consider in brief the ways in which, both organizationally and individually, sex work may be considered a career. Organizationally, sex work does not conform to the commonly held notion that a career is defined by or entails an organizational or professional hierarchy, with well-defined paths of upward mobility and career advancement. Sex work is diffuse and "disorganized," meaning there is no official organization or union to which sex workers belong. They are largely an independent population, whose organization is limited to those individuals who work for specific establishments. Sex workers are not organized hierarchically. To the extent that they are, women working on the street (with those exchanging sex for drugs) are at the bottom of the hierarchy and those women who earn a substantial profit from their involvement in the trade, which are usually escorts, would be considered at the top. There is little writing on mobility within sex work. Within our own sample, the few women who spoke of prospects for upward mobility considered only seeing regulars, earning greater amounts of money, and being able to have their own website or advertise in certain publications to be an achievement and status symbol. For them, mobility was thought of in monetary terms, rather than as positions or types of work. In other words, women sought to make more money by either expanding or redefining their client base, but not by changing their positions within the industry necessarily.[4] Within establishments there is certainly room for promotion in the traditional sense of the concept. For example, a woman may be

assigned an agency's most elite, highest-paying clientele. However, there does not seem to be this type of hierarchical organization across the various types of sex work. Instead, organizational mobility is more defined along the lines of individual success, which is measured by earnings, status of client base, degree of independence, etc. While sex work as a career can be understood using organizational analysis, it is best understood to be a career by considering it as such through the individual-level analysis lens. Thus, sex workers come to understand sex work as a career not because of the material goods that it can produce, but because of the meaning and significance that it takes on in their lives and how they conceive of their futures. This will be explored in greater depth in subsequent sections of this paper.

In research on sex work, the notion of career has taken a backseat to that of survival. The typical view held is that women who lack alternative viable options enter sex work to find a quick, short-term income source (Whelehan 2001).[5] Women use sex work as an escape from a situation that brings instability and insecurity to their lives. For example, victims of domestic violence who are starting their lives anew and/or who are searching for economic independence intermittently rely on prostitution for earnings (Dalla 2001; Sharpe 1998; Phoenix 1999). Undoubtedly, however, the biggest motivating factor that has been identified in the decision to engage in sex work is economic necessity (Whelehan 2001).[6]

The decision to engage in sex work may be a fairly rational choice by women: namely, given their qualifications and the state of the market, they realize that they are able to earn more money in sex work than other available jobs. As Whelehan (2001) writes, "Female prostitutes in the U.S. and cross-culturally can earn as much or more in the kind of work that they do than for comparably paid work in the straight world given their skills and levels of education" (p. 39). Similarly, there are some women who decide to pursue sex work because they believe the working conditions of vice are better relative to other available employment opportunities (Sharpe 1998). For example, in a British

study of sex workers, Phoenix (1999) found that sex work was attractive because it was a job almost wholly self-regulated, it did not require an interview or job search process, and all earnings could be directly and immediately received.

The points of entrée into sex work closely parallel those of formal employment. Research has pointed to the use of social networks as the primary nexus through which women enter the trade. Studies indicate that women overwhelmingly enter sex work through contact with someone either in the trade or via an individual supporting their entrance (Sharpe 1998).[7] This push towards sex work comes from a variety of individuals, ranging from family members and friends to intimate partners. In one Chicago based study on sex workers, 71% of respondents reported that someone that they knew had suggested selling sexual services. Of those who suggested prostitution, 45% were friends of the respondent, 24% cousins, 19.6% a boyfriend or girlfriend, 14.4% a sister, 7.2% were live-in partners of a parent, and 6.5% were the respondent's mother (Raphael & Shapiro 2002). Not only do networks serve as a point of entrée into the trade, but most of the women involved would never even have considered sex work a viable income generating option had it not been first suggested by these contacts (c.f., Sharpe 1998).

Studies focusing on the employment dimension of sex work have also examined women's expenditures. They find some commonality between the expenditures of women in sex work and those holding legal jobs, noting in particular that in both spheres women use earnings primarily for day-to-day living expenses. For example, in one study, 67.5% of sex worker respondents reported spending most of their sex work income on rent and household bills, and settlement of personal and household-related debts. While a number of women reported spending significant amounts of money on drugs and alcohol, 87.5% of the sample did not prioritize spending money on material goods and considered them to be "extras" (Sharpe 1998).[8]

There has been substantial focus among scholars on the negative aspects of sex work. Most of this research has focused on the adverse consequences of sex work for those working outdoors. High rates of drug abuse and the exchange of sex for drugs has been widely documented (Whelehan 2001; Raphael & Shapiro 2002; Epele 2001; Thukrul and Ditmore 2003). In turn, it has been found that this relationship between drug use and sex work plays a critical role in women's subjection to physical violence and arrest (Graham and Wish 1994; Bourgois and Dunlap 1993; Inciardi 1993; Inciardi et al. 1993). Outdoor women are frequently victims of rape, beatings, and abandonment by boyfriends, clients, police, and pimps, and they are subject to frequent arrest (Dalla 2000; Phoenix 1999; Thukral and Ditmore 2003).[9] Chapkis (2000) argues that it is the physical location, and therefore the degree of public visibility, of where a woman works that determines her risk of arrest. The public organization of outdoor work, and the high degree of visibility to law enforcement officials, the author argues, explains the high rate of arrest among sex workers, specifically, those that work on the street.

Studies have also pointed to the complex, almost self-defeating relationship that many sex workers have with the money that they earn through the trade. From the perspective of these women, money earned through sex work is often viewed differently than that earned in the legal economy. For example, women often view sex work earnings as highly expendable. In the industry-specific parlance, money is referred to as "fast cash," easily made and easily spent, even if for daily expenses (Phoenix 1999). The illegal nature of the earnings makes it difficult for women to open bank accounts, apply for credit cards, get a cell phone account in their name, and apply for housing without employer references. Thus, the fast cash that is made through sex work is spent even faster (Phoenix 1999). The effect of this pattern of quick spending combined with the inability to save money and make investments means that women in the sex trade are rarely able to establish economic stability – one of the reasons that many turned to sex work in the first place.

It is worth noting that research on sex work has disproportionately focused on those who work in outdoor venues, like streets and parks, because these women are not only visible and easier to access, but also because outdoor workers tend to possess personal problems, like addiction and homelessness, that require timely public health and social service intervention (Alexander 1998; Thukral and Ditmore 2003). There have been very few studies of woman working indoors—especially those who work in the middle-income or high-end range of sex work. The few indoor studies that exist are either small case studies or snapshot portraits of high-end workers, such as escorts or call girls that serve an elite, high paying clientele (Heyl 1979; Greenwald 1958; Phoenix 1999; Whelehan 2001). These studies suggest that for those on the street, sex work is a form of survival, while for high-end women, sex work is a potential profession and career (Whelehan 2001).[10] We now turn to the data in our sample to see whether a greater number of sex workers, i.e., more than simply the high-end escorts, also see their work in terms of a career.

SETTING & METHODOLOGY

In the nineteenth century, to make streets safer and uphold norms of middle class respectability, police and political leaders used mass arrests and anti-loitering ordinances, among other techniques, to make prostitution publicly invisible (Hobson 1987). As a consequence, many women in the sex trade moved to the periphery of the city and to slum districts that, until that point, were primarily light industrial or zoned for commercial use or went indoors by finding work in brothels and hotels (Hobson 1987). In both cases, women became increasingly socially marginalized and were left isolated from social services and employment opportunities. Later, in the twentieth century, policing practices moved sex work out of white areas and into black neighborhoods, effectively spurning the growth of "red light districts" (Hobson 1987; Mumford 1997).

Today, changes in police tactics and policy reforms have resulted in similar patterns of movement and relocation in the urban sex trade. In several cities, sex workers have moved both indoors and to the edges of the city (Weidner 2001; Sharpe 1998).[11] The context for our ethnographic study is New York City. In the mid-1990s, under the administration of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) launched a major attack on petty, visible crimes, such as prostitution and street vending. The Department raised the number of "beat" cops on the street and, since that time, police have made thousands of arrests for minor, victimless crimes.[12] Strip clubs were virtually eradicated from the Times Square area—a historic commercial sex district—and outdoor sex workers largely ceased roaming the streets of many areas of Manhattan once inundated with sex workers (Weidner 2001).

In addition, the NYPD was restructured so that each police precinct could respond to all problems "in-house," meaning each precinct could use its own personnel to address quality of life issues within its jurisdiction. Before such decentralization, precincts had to rely on specialized divisions, such as the Public Morals Division, to combat precinct-specific problems, such as prostitution. Such specialization had only served to prolong the time it took for the NYPD to respond to problems like prostitution. Finally, the process by which low-level offenders were dealt with changed in such a way that resulted in prolonged detainment before arraignment for a greater number of low-level offenders, including prostitutes. By only issuing Desk Appearance Tickets (DATs) to those who had government-issued photo identification or to those who had not committed previous misdemeanors, the NYPD was able to detain all low-level offenders who would have previously been issued DATs and been released before arraignment. This often meant a more involved, drawn-out arrest process for those arrested for prostitution (Weidner 2001).

As a result of these initiatives, the NYPD celebrated lower rates of public criminality—e.g., robbery, harassment— and increased public safety. However, the crackdown did little to end

prostitution-related offenses. Instead, one of the primary consequences of the policy was to push women almost completely off the streets into the invisibility of the indoors (Weidner 2001; Thukrul et al. 2005). Thus, women seeking to escape detection from this increased police presence moved to night clubs, escort services, the Internet, and newspaper advertisements as a means of solicitation, while their sexual transactions took place in their homes, brothels, gang houses, night clubs, customers' residences, and hotels.[13] Twenty-three percent of the women in our study specifically relocated their work from the streets and into the indoors because of this increased police activity and the heightened risk of arrest. While this percentage may seem low, it reflects only those respondents who were working on the street in the first place; it does not reflect those women who consciously chose to work indoors or enter the trade indoors, circumventing any involvement on the street, because of their fear of police detection and their knowledge of the greater threat of arrest. In other words, changes to law enforcement strategies have not only pushed women off of the streets and into the indoors, but it seems it has made indoor work a point of entrée for a *greater* number of women entering the industry than it did previously (Thukral et al. 2005). Indeed, one study estimates that indoor sex workers now comprise a staggering 85% of all sex workers.[14]

Given this notable shift, it is reasonable to ask if change in the physical location of this work has altered the structure of this economic activity and the experiences of those performing the labor. It is this line of inquiry that guides the present study on the lives and work of indoor sex workers in New York City. We define "indoor sex work" as the exchange of a sexual act for some material good, an exchange that begins and ends "indoors" (Thukral et al. 2005; Weidner 2001).[15] In contrast to working on the streets, solicitation by indoor sex workers is done in venues such as bars, clubs, brothels, through personal references, over the Internet, or via print advertisements. The sex act itself is also carried out in such indoor venues as hotels, brothels, or the residence of the sex worker or her client. The indoor sex trade is comprised of many women, including escorts, call girls, those

employed at brothels and dungeons, and individuals working independently in clubs or from their homes.[16] Some women work only in one venue or as one type of sex worker, others work in multiple venues and as more than one type of sex worker (i.e. they may work in a brothel and independently), and, at the very least, over the course of their tenure as a sex worker, most have worked in more than one type of venue and as more than one type of sex worker.[17]

For over one year, we employed ethnographic techniques and in-depth surveys with nearly 100 female indoor sex workers working in the New York metropolitan area. Our focus was on employment and family contexts—e.g., life at work, in the household— and participation in local institutions, including relationships with the police, the courts, financial institutions, and the communities in which they live.[18] We also interviewed social service providers who work with sex workers in an effort to determine the effects of the shift indoors on the prospects for receipt of services and exit from the trade.

The women in our sample are demographically diverse and work in many different indoor venues. They range from home-based white ethnics who use the Internet and newspaper to advertise their services, to Asian and Latina immigrants who solicit their customers in nightclubs. The data include high-end escorts who work privately by appointment on the Upper East Side as well as Black and Latina women working for gangs in various crack houses throughout Harlem. For some, sex work was their only source of income, while for others; sex work supplemented other entrepreneurial pursuits. For those at the low-end of sex work, money made through the trade was barely enough to ensure their survival and that of their families while for those at the high-end, sex work often afforded women the ability to live a life of relative luxury. Women in the sample also differed with respect to their experience with the trade. Those interviewed ranged from women who had been engaged in sex work for only a few months to those who had worked in various sectors of

the trade (i.e., as escorts, independents, on the street, etc…) for over a decade to those who had recently left the work in pursuit of alternative employment.

While our sample certainly included women at the very high-end and very low-end of sex work, the majority of the women fell somewhere in between, in the category that Heyl (1979) describes as "mid-range" indoor workers. In other words, these women were engaged in sex work because of limited, alternative options, but they were not desperately poor nor were they earning lucrative income in the work. Capturing the experiences of these mid-income sex workers makes this study distinctive, as most research focuses on either the low or high-income women. Our sample is also distinct in its attentiveness to women who work independently in the indoor trade. Work done on women working indoors has largely focused on those who work for agencies (Miller 1986; Perkins 1991).[19]

In the following sections, we outline and discuss the ways in which the organization and character of vice in New York City has changed as a result of the movement of sex workers indoors. In addition, we examine how these specific changes in the organizational aspects of the trade have contributed to the development of a professional and careerist orientation to the work. We argue that there is no selection bias for the development of a careerist orientation among indoor workers. Over the course of the study there was no evidence that engaging in indoor versus outdoor work was any easier or more difficult than the other. As mentioned, sex workers, both those on the street and indoors, largely enter the trade through personal contacts. If this contact works on the street, the woman will likely enter the trade on the street; if this contact works for an establishment or works independently, than the worker will most likely either begin working for the same establishment or, independently, use the same means of solicitation as her contact. If a bias towards the development of a careerist orientation were to exist among this population, than it would most likely be a class bias. For example, women coming from higher socio-economic and more stable

backgrounds may be more likely to have a contact working indoors than on the street; those women who may be homeless, addicts, or living in extremely unstable conditions have disproportionately street-based contacts. We do not believe, however, that any such bias significantly influences our findings. An overwhelming number of our respondents expressed turning to indoor work as a short-terms means of income generation; few desired making sex work a career for themselves. We argue that it is only over the course of their involvement in the trade that a professional and career orientation develops, and that prior intentions surrounding their entrance do not shape any subsequent plans to make sex work a career. We conclude this paper with an examination of the significance of this career orientation on the lives of women in the work.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROFESSIONAL & CAREERIST ORIENTATION OF INDOOR SEX WORK

Physical Danger & the Risk of Arrest

As New York City's sex workers moved indoors, our data has identified a correlate shift in their relationship to sex work. This transformation begins with a change in women's perception of their likelihood of suffering violence and risk of arrest. Specifically, the women perceive themselves to be at less risk of encountering either violence or arrest while working indoors. However, they are in no way immune to such dangers. Twenty seven percent of our respondents reported having been robbed by a client at least once, 48% were forced by a John to do something that they did not want to do, and 43% said they were threatened or beat up for being a sex worker. Importantly, these rates are relatively low in comparison to those of street workers. We draw on the correlate "Revolving Door" (Thukral and Ditmore 2003) study, which finds that 80% of outdoor workers experienced either violence or threats in the course of their work; and, 60% reported being forced by a client to do something against their will.

When asked to describe a time when she had been forced to do something she did not want to do, one woman in our indoor-based sample responded, "He had me fuck his son, a little kid. It was disgusting but he gave me $500." Similarly painful, one woman recounted her experience with being threatened and beaten up for being a sex worker:

> I got beat up twice, both times by a cop. Both of them wanted me to suck their dicks for free, right in the car. I said no, because I really don't like being in the cop cars. But, they said I had to and pulled their dicks out and just grabbed my head and pushed me down there. The first time I bit the guy on his dick. He just screamed and started beating me with his stick. I passed out. I don't know for how long. I was just laying there and when I woke up it was almost morning.

While working indoors may be statistically safer than working on the street, the conditions of indoor work do possess their own hazards. Unlike outdoor women, where fear of violence can bring women together, women who work alone, particularly inside their own home, may not be within an earshot of other people and, therefore, cannot always help one another if something goes wrong. Women repeatedly say that even in places like hotels and public housing, where there is greater pedestrian traffic inside buildings, shouts and cries do not necessarily lead to help. Women working in establishments such as strip clubs, brothels, and escort agencies often have managers or administrators who attend to safety issues, but they may also be susceptible to physical beatings or robbery from these very individuals.

A surprisingly large percentage (27%) of women in the sample said they relied on "instincts" as their only safety precaution when deciding to accept clients, which suggests that women working indoors may have a false sense of security. Indeed, some women stated that indoor work translated into a safe working environment and that violence was something only experienced by street

workers. However, a number of the women did describe taking specific safety precautions in order to adjust to indoor work. Some accept clients cautiously and take pains to screen them. For example, upon receiving a call from a potential John, one woman asks for the client's name, home address, home phone, business name, title, business phone number and/or a business web page. She attempts to verify this information by calling 411. Another worker, Caridad, said she refuses to give away her apartment number, and instead meets all clients outside of her apartment building. Before letting them in, she embraces them so as to feel for a weapon. Maggie, a 35-year old who works primarily in brothels, says she will give her friends the personal information of a client. This friend is then asked to call her apartment fifteen minutes after the client is scheduled to leave. If there is no answer, the friend has been instructed to call the police and ask them to come to Maggie's apartment. Women who work in establishments rely on managers and owners to find ways to screen clients—e.g., running background checks on potential clients, accepting only "well-established" Johns, requiring that their girls call the agency both before and after working with a client. Lastly, a number of women report taking physical training classes, such as kickboxing, or instruction in the use of weapons, such as mace or knives, although this was rare in the sample.

Just as working indoors does not make women invisible to violence, working inside does not entirely shelter women from the risk of arrest either. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the sample had experienced some type of sex work-related run-in with the police and 45% had been specifically arrested for sex work.[20] It is important to note, however, that the rates of arrest among this population are significantly lower than those for outdoors workers: 93% of the outdoor women interviewed for the correlate "Revolving Door" (Thukral and Ditmore 2003) study had been arrested for prostitution at least once during the course of their tenure in the outdoor trade. Additionally, the majority of the arrest-related experiences of indoor workers have nothing to do with performing sex work *indoors*. Instead, many of the indoor women were arrested while in public

spaces, often while committing some type of misdemeanor in public, such as buying or selling drugs or selling sex on the street. Beyond the use of undercover police as potential clients of women soliciting over the Internet, in print media, and in clubs and other establishments, the NYPD has yet to develop a specific, more comprehensive law enforcement strategy for dealing with the indoor sex trade.

Despite the fact that women are not completely invisible to violence and the police, their belief that they are much safer working indoors than on the street contributes to their perception that indoor work carries a degree of security that outdoor work does not, both in terms of tenure and personal safety. In their view, sex work does not pose risks or dangers that threaten their life, and is thus a seemingly safe vehicle for income generation.

Addiction to "The Life" & the Formation of a Sex Work Identity

Women also perceive certain advantages to sex work, which further contributes to their perception that indoor sex work may be a stable form of work over the long run. In numerous studies of the sex trade, women report valuing the flexible schedule and decent work conditions that some kinds of sex work afford. Those who work independently are able to choose what days of the week and hours of the day they wish to work. These women often express appreciation for the power and freedom that they have over their clients, and the independence and autonomy that comes from sex work (Castillo et al. 1999; Phoenix 1999; Whelehan 2001). Indoor and outdoor sex workers (not working for a manager or pimp) say they have similar control over their clients.[21] They can decide what clients to see, how much to charge for their services, and where, when, and how often particular sexual behavior will occur. This high degree of work-related autonomy and the flexible nature of sex work, in this view, often means that women perceive themselves as able to

pursue other interests, whether it be education, artistic endeavors, or other entrepreneurial pursuits (Whelehan 2001).

While the above feelings about the work process do not appear to differ greatly for indoor and outdoor workers, we do find that the indoor-based women we interviewed express a surprisingly high degree of enjoyment for the work itself (see also Phoenix 1999; Castillo et al. 1999). The indoor sex workers in our sample often see themselves as providing healing, acceptance, and psychological comfort to troubled clients (see also Phoenix 1999). They describe themselves as therapists and nurses when talking about their work. As Natalie, a 22-year old woman who solicits clients through print media and works out of her home explains, "By doing this work you can help people, people pay to spend time with you. Some people like to have intellectual conversations. I think if I had met these people outside of this work context, we would have been friends." Similar sentiments were expressed by another woman who states, "I help my customers and I enjoy making others happy. A lot of the time I just talk to my customers who have different troubles. I'm nice to them, gentle, and they like it. People need this kind of treatment." In fact, some women have told us that they help save the marriages of their Johns —rather than destroy them.[22] When describing the merits of their work, many women in the sample made direct comparisons and distinctions between indoor and outdoor work. According to them, the type of woman who engages in outdoor work is different than the type working indoors. Such discussions were framed around an "us" versus "them" perspective, with many women in our sample either feeling sympathy or shame for those working on the street. Some women went so far as to claim that outdoor workers and those who exchanged sex for drugs gave the profession of prostitution a bad name.

If one compares our indoor sample with the outdoor workers participating in the "Revolving Door" study (Thukral and Ditmore 2003), one finds that the outdoor sex workers expressed sentiments of personal attachment only rarely. Immediate survival and the need for drugs were

significantly more salient. For the indoor women in our sample, although many express a desire to exit, their psychological and financial attachment to the work mitigates their desire to leave sex work immediately. Responding to why she stays in the trade, Laura said, "I find it more meaningful and easier to deal with than restaurant work. I like working one on one with people. When it goes well, I feel like I'm giving someone something that is needed and appreciated and that makes me feel special."

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the indoor women in our sample report sex work as being the best job they have ever had. This certainly contradicts conventional wisdom, although it is probably not so surprising when we realize that women's employment histories show difficulties finding meaningful, well-paying legitimate work.[23] This is most evident when the women in our sample drew comparisons between sex work and jobs in the formal economy. As one woman stated, "I can't go back to regular low-paying work, I just can't. Doing sex work I can make good money, I don't answer to anyone, I choose my own hours, pay little tax, and I am my own boss. Besides, I'm good at it. I can form good bonds with my clients – and I enjoy the work." Thus, we find that women working indoors construct their identity around sex work in a way that emphasizes the positive and advantageous aspects of the work. Of course, these assessments are made in terms of both their perceptions of other employment opportunities, which are disproportionately menial, and by comparing the risks and dangers of outdoor work to the relative advantages provided by working indoors.

Numerous women spoke of sex work as an "addiction." Allison, who has worked as an escort and who currently works independently soliciting clients in bars and clubs, says, "It's addicting. The work, it definitely, it becomes a lifestyle." Most of the women in our sample told us that their past work lacked self-efficacy and that they could not control basic aspects of employment, for example, their hours, ability to speak freely with their superior, and capacity to

obtain affirmation from the job. Indoor sex work, in their view, permits them to have a degree of agency over their present situation as well as their future paths. Not surprisingly, then, as women like Elizabeth and Natalie develop this kind of identity with respect to indoor sex work—both in terms of the personal benefits the work affords and those they can provide to clients - they report being less likely to consider exit from the trade.

In this way, while sex work helps meet financial obligations, working indoors appears to become more than just a means of making money. What the narratives of the women in our sample hint at is *that indoor-based women view indoor work as a profession and a career*. The work begins to shape their identity in ways other than feelings of shame and stigmatization. They begin to define the work not only in terms of the exchange of sex for money, but in terms of other components, such as the relatively autonomous character of the employment relationship, the free time that the work affords; and because of this flexibility, their ability to cultivate other interests, their ability to "be good at what [they] do," and so on. Moreover, as the life histories of our sample suggest below, the longer women stay in the trade, the more salient their identities as "sex workers" become and in turn, the more likely sex work actually takes on the structure of a profession and a career.

For many of these women, sex work so closely parallels the professional dimension of legal work, and becomes understood as a career that a significant number of women in the sample report being unable to see themselves as doing any other type of (legitimate) work or living any other type of lifestyle besides that of the "indoor sex worker." As Tanya reflected, "Sometimes you feel like you can't do nothing else." Such sentiments serve to make women in the trade less likely to consider alternative career paths, thereby making exit from the indoor sex trade a less viable option in their own professional life course. Moreover, as we show below, their attachments to the perceived advantageous dimensions of indoor work can lead to them becoming entrapped in what we refer to as a "cycle of sex work."

CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROFESSIONAL & CAREERIST ORIENTATION

The organization of indoor sex work affects the ability of women to formulate social relationships that help them to exit the trade. The professional and careerist orientation that results from working indoors shapes the future aspirations of indoor sex workers, their feelings towards formal work, and their rates of return to sex work if they do in fact exit the trade. Indeed, what our findings suggest is that this professional and careerist orientation and the organization of indoor work lead to a self-reinforcing cycle that ensures longer tenure in the trade, making indoor sex work more of a career, in terms of time actually spent in the trade, than it may have been intended to be.

Social Networks of Indoor Sex Workers

Numerous studies have documented the effects of sex work—conducted either inside or outdoors— on women's relationships to family members, friends, and other women in the trade (Whelehan 2001; Chapkis 2000; Phoenix 1999; Castillo et al. 1999; Epele 2001; Hubbard 1998; Carpenter 2000; Dalla 2000 and 2001). Existing scholarship has determined that sex work has the potential to be an extremely socially isolating line of work. Regardless of whether one works on the street or not, engagement in the sex trade is often something that women do not disclose to their friends and family, primarily because of its illegality, but also because of the stigma associated with prostitution and related trades. Studies have repeatedly pointed to the consequences of secrecy in terms of compromising the ability of women to sustain meaningful social relationships with friends and family, thereby promoting their isolation from those outside their home (Whelehan 2001). Even within the trade itself, research has shown sex work to be highly stratified, characterized both by a system of rigid social distinctions and by the self-imposition of regulations that serve to limit social connectedness within the trade (Sheehy 1973; Hoigard and Finstad 1992; Bensen and Mathews

1995). Conversely, however, research has also documented the ways in which sex work has the potential to offer women an accepting, non-judgmental community, where similarity of experience leads to communication, peer group formation, and information dissemination (Phoenix 1999; Chapkis 2000; Maher 1996; Castillo et al. 1999).

While these general observations appear to hold for all types of sex work, it is possible to identify distinctive qualities of maintaining and building social relations for indoor workers as compared with those in outdoor venues. For example, for outdoor workers, studies suggest that sex work can easily become the primary arena where women develop social networks (Phoenix 1999; Maher 1996; Castillo et al. 1999).[24] However, Chapkis' (2000) observation that most sex workers do not discuss their work with friends or family, and so the industry becomes a "closed circuit," in which colleagues and co-workers become the source of one's social network, does not always hold for indoor workers. Due to the privacy of the sheltered spaces in which they work and the organization of most indoor work, indoor sex workers may experience greater levels of isolation both from other sex workers and the wider world. Thus, they may not easily develop social relations while at work. Particularly for independents soliciting clients in bars and clubs or over the Internet—i.e., not in establishments like brothels and dungeons, there is little opportunity to interact with co-workers. While these women may be freed from an angry or capricious superior, they may also suffer isolation from each other. In fact, we find that many indoor workers in our sample are solely in contact with their clients, especially if they work out of the home. Frequently unable to establish networks with other women in the trade, and not having disclosed their work with individuals outside of the trade, indoor sex workers can become social isolates. They are unable to draw on the kinds of communicative and interactive exchanges that have proven invaluable for other women in the sex trade (Chapkis 2000).

Our study thus finds a high degree of social isolation for women working indoors. Only a few women in our sample reported being able to share material goods, information about the police or bad clients, or news about sympathetic doctors and helpful organizations with others in the trade. One indoor worker, Janelle stated, "I have one friend in the trade. She brings her kids to my place when she has to work. We buy each other things, share clothes and rubbers, everything. It feels really nice to have somebody else who knows what you do and knows what you have to do everyday to make it." However, women did not often express such sentiments. Moreover, whereas a shared fear of violence and arrest serves to bring women on the street together (Thukrul and Ditmore 2003; Sharpe 1998; Castillo et al. 1999), the relative safety of the indoors does not facilitate the use of sex work networks as potential instruments of personal defense. Therefore, we find that women in our sample who work indoors frequently report not needing to establish relationships with others in the trade in order to safeguard their personal safety—this is true even among those who work in less stable and loosely regulated indoor spaces like crack dens (where prostitution can be found) and brothels.

The women working indoors in our sample repeatedly spoke, both explicitly and implicitly, about the isolating effects of maintaining secrecy about their work and they did so by pointing to the difficulty of meeting people, both inside and outside the trade, who could potentially become friends. Indeed, this theme of social isolation and its effects was great for many of our respondents who either spoke about it at length, without being asked specifically about such sentiments, or who spoke about it in the context of lacking relationships with people that could help, or provide advice and guidance, during particular times of insecurity. Rarely disclosing their work to others and consciously avoiding the formation of relationships with neighbors and others in their community, the independent, indoor sex workers in the sample, in particular, had no social outlets or sources of support to which they could turn when they needed help, companionship, and counsel. As Nancy

describes: "It's not like I can just go meet up with my co-workers at happy hour and talk about my day, complain about work or my boss. I have no one. No one knows what I do except for my clients. I can't talk to them about my work. Sometimes I think I'm going crazy. I feel so alone and don't know if it's just me or if others feel this way too." For women like Nancy, such isolation creates constant struggles with both loneliness and anxiety.

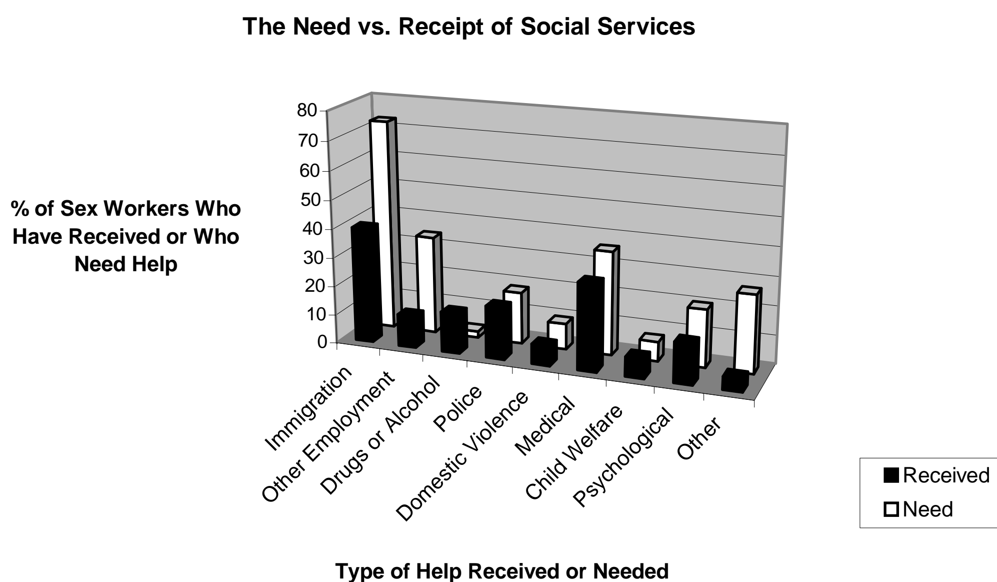
Receipt of Social Services

While the inability to formulate relationships with other women working in the trade was a significant theme in the narratives of the women in our sample, the effects of this social isolation seem to be much more far reaching than simply the existence of a lack of social relations among this population. Our research suggests that the social isolation experienced by indoor-based women impacts their ability to access and receive necessary social services.

In general, little is known about the relationship between sex workers and social service agencies, including their receipt of those services proven to help women facilitate exit from the trade (Dalla 2000). What is known is almost exclusively based on research of outdoor workers and, in these studies, drug treatment and medical-related services appear as the most frequent type of social services administered to sex workers—although it is difficult to ascertain what services sex workers themselves prioritize.[25] The most common mode of service delivery to sex workers is initiated by social service agencies, typically through outreach vans in which case workers seek out women on the street (Outreach to homeless shelters and battered women's shelters appears useful for locating sex workers as well (Raphael and Shapiro 2002).). Research has shown that women rarely seek help on their own volition (Raphael and Shapiro 2002; Thukrul and Ditmore 2003). It is important to note that almost all of these outreach strategies target women on the street or those working in public venues, with very little done to target indoor workers.

Women in our sample spoke at length about their need for services, especially medical and psychological services, as well as their need for help finding other employment.[26] Among our sample, only 16% had health insurance, with another 23% receiving Medicaid. Despite the consistent need for various types of help, as the graph below illustrates, many of the women in the sample have not received the type of help they would like. Moreover, the very problems that women prioritized in their ranking of needs— e.g., assistance with immigration matters, finding legitimate employment, and obtaining psychological counseling— are the very issues that are being left unattended by service providers and outreach workers in general. Finally, as Graph 1 illustrates, organizations tended to approach indoor workers with services for conditions and problems that were more germane for street/outdoor worker—e.g., drug and alcohol addiction.

GRAPH 1.



Our findings suggest that there are two primary reasons why the indoor-based women in our sample are not receiving the assistance and services that they both need and want. One is common to all sex workers, namely stigma. The shame and low self-esteem that women in the trade often feel is heightened when they come into contact with mainstream institutions and organizations. This

serves to deter them from both seeking and accepting services (see also Thukral et al. 2005; Thukral and Ditmore 2003). A second reason is specific to the social organization of indoor sex work. Women who work inside are not only sheltered from easy detection by law enforcement, but they are also hidden from the majority of service providers who rely on outreach vans and canvassing of public areas. Only 10% of the indoor workers in our study who received help have received help from a social service agency in this manner. And, just as the women in our sample reported a lack of connection with service providers, staff at numerous service provider agencies interviewed for this study made similar statements regarding the challenge of finding indoor sex workers. Whereas they displayed confidence in their capacity to work in public areas, nearly all of these agencies were at a loss as to useful techniques for the indoor variant.[27]

By contrast, of those in our study who have actually received help (keeping in mind that this number is small), 35% had learned about the help through a friend or a colleague, 22% had learned about the help through referrals by other organizations to which they were already connected, 17% had learned about the help through either a print or Internet media source, and another 26% had learned about the help through word on the street. These means of obtaining actual support can pose a specific problem for indoor workers. If, as discussed above, indoor workers are less likely to have social contacts both in the trade and out, and if social relations have proven to be critical to connecting women in the trade to services, then the lack of contact indoor workers have with other sex workers means they are less likely to connect with necessary services through their peers. Moreover, the probability that they will be put in touch with other service organizations through referrals is also very low, given their overall lack of contact with any one social service agency. The importance of being connected to at least one agency was made clear by Emily, a social worker at a non-profit outreach organization in frequent contact with the city's sex work population: "We provide case management, counseling, and…I mean it's…the project itself is small, but it's located

in a large agency and all the clients have access to all the services of the larger agency in addition, which for us is employment, housing, a refugee program, counseling, case management, referrals, outreach, and education."

Exit from the Trade

Very little research has been done on the means of exit from the sex trade (Weidner 2001). The few studies that exist have primarily focused on women working on the street (Miller 1986; Dalla 2000; Robins and Rutter 1990). This research suggests that the process of exit seems to be rather lengthy (Robins and Rutter 1990; Sommers et al 1994). For outdoor workers, studies have identified three primary means of exit. The first is incarceration, a proven vehicle for enabling outdoor workers to acquire treatment for substance dependency as well as job skills training. Intervention programs directly targeting sex workers have also proven an effective means through which exit has been made possible—e.g., "Sex Industry Survivor's Anonymous," "Paul and Lisa," and "You Are Never Alone."[28] Lastly, exit has been found to be successful when driven by individual motivation. Research has documented the fear of contracting AIDS, subjection to violence, and risk of arrest as all significant sources of motivation that have successfully compelled outdoor workers to leave the trade (Dalla 2000).

Because our study is composed of women currently participating in indoor sex work, except for a small handful of respondents who have been in and out of the trade at various times in their life, we do not have substantial data on means of exit for this population. Provisionally, our data both suggests that the means of exit for indoor workers, in contrast to their outdoor counterparts, may have some differences worth noting (Dalla 2000) and that the indoor workers' identification of sex work as a profession and a career shapes their desire for exit as well as their overall exit strategies.

When asked about their plans for the future, and their desire to exit the trade, responses from the indoor women in our sample differed from the typical responses outdoor workers make. For example, a few women in our indoor sample strongly imagined their futures to be rooted in continued engagement in sex work. And, although the majority of women in the study made investments in their work, those who did not express any intention of ever leaving the trade were often those that had made the most investments, in terms of time and money, in their work, and had consciously developed their involvement in the sex trade into a profession and a career . Ebony, for example, is an independent escort who is planning to relocate to California where she believes she can maximize her potential as a sex worker. She feels that there is greater opportunity to earn money in the sex trade in California. She anticipates making $5,000 a week there by seeing only five clients, money which she hopes will support family planning and retirement. For Ebony, making such money by seeing so few clients demarcates her attainment of success in the trade, and thus her achievement of upward mobility within the industry. Ebony hopes to marry and have children, desires which she does not view as antithetical to sex work.

In this manner, many women in the sample have built their personal identities around sex work, which can then hinder their exit. The women in our indoor-based sample who have tried to leave sex work for formal work have found it difficult to do so. Here, one must consider that the indoor women in the sample contemplating exit report being willing to leave *only if* they can find legitimate work with adequate wages, autonomy, etc. This is one sign of the impact of the professional and careerist orientation. When asked about the prospects of exit, one woman said, "I want to start my own business but I need money. That's why I'm doing this work. But the longer you stay, the more trapped you get. Really, what I mean is the longer you stay, the more pronounced leaving is. Getting out [of sex work] is always a step down before it is a step up." Many women stated similarly that available, legitimate employment was usually a "step down," offering fewer

wages, flexibility, and job satisfaction. In discussing her experience with exit, Rachel alluded to exit as a "step down." She was forced to give up her apartment downtown and move back in with her parents in Queens. Leaving the trade was difficult because it meant letting go of certain luxuries that she had been able to afford because of sex work, such as the ability to treat her friends to dinner, travel, and buy expensive clothes. If this transition to the "straight world" post-exit is so challenging, complete exit from the trade may be difficult to achieve. And, conversely, returning may in fact become an attractive option, especially when the socially legitimate work experiences of these women do not prove satisfactory.

For these women and others in the sample, work in legitimate jobs was not much different than indoor sex work in terms of both organization and emotional reward. Moreover, they had more autonomy and could often make more money performing sex work. Thus, staying in sex work (as opposed to taking up legitimate employment) is not surprisingly understood by them to be a rational choice. The overwhelming majority of women in our sample did, in fact, express a desire to eventually leave the trade, either for the sake of their children or for long-term personal security reasons. Yet, few behaved in ways that would allow them to do so—for example, by saving money or establishing relationships with people with ties to legal jobs. In this way, as women think about and understand sex work as a profession and a career, their investments in that trade distract them from any effort to exit. They become, in essence, entrapped by the short-term safety and security that the work provides, which is not much different than individuals in the formal economy who stay in jobs that provide no opportunity for upward mobility but remain because of the good pay and benefits that the work provides.

Women frequently drew parallels between indoor sex work and legal work in a way that tempered exit. Many of them said legal work could be considered a form of "prostitution." As Nancy reflected:

> I look at what other people do, the jobs that they have, and all I can think about is what little money they make working these jobs. I think people are forced to take these legal jobs. But really, I think they are just another form of prostitution. In fact, if you ask me, the housewife is really the biggest form of prostitution. You don't have to be out there to be a sex worker, you know. And you know, it's hard to get out when the money is so easy. I tried to start over completely after jail but it was hard. The money and way of making it means, it means that sex work is not hard to leave but it's, it's very easy to stay in.

Brenda, who works in a brothel, also noted similarities between indoor work and legal work: "Completely, it's the service industry. It's all the same bullshit. It's all the same."

Perceiving "straight" work to be a "type" of prostitution, many of the women in the sample reasoned that indoor sex work was the most rational employment option available. A number of them could not see themselves in socially legitimate jobs at all because of the perceived degrading and restricting environments that formal work often entails. As Harriet said: "In high school and the stuff I did in minimum wage service industry work--this is where I can draw the most comparisons, and this is where I can see why sex work is so much more preferable. The things I like least about clients you can see in bosses who don't respect you in the service sector. At least in sex work, you're there for only an hour and you're being paid as much as you'd make in a week at McDonalds."

One of the women in our sample who managed to leave the trade had been out of the indoor industry for two years. Her exit was motivated by her spirituality and emotional inability to carry on in the work. Another woman, Nancy, had begun her tenure on the streets of a Brooklyn community home to many Eastern European immigrants. Arrested on the street, Nancy was remanded to a treatment program for her heroin addiction. Upon release from treatment, Nancy resumed her sex work, only this time indoors. For Nancy, the shift indoors was itself a type of exit

from the trade. By moving indoors, she no longer feared arrest or bodily harm when she sold sexual services. Indoor work was a professional move of sorts for her, only made possible through her incarceration and treatment.

It is important to note the ways in which the social networks of indoor workers can limit their exit. Importantly, the ties that indoor-based women make to the formal economy are almost exclusively their relationships to their Johns. Their clientele appear to be diverse— ranging from policemen, to high power stockbrokers, to construction workers—and, conceivably, such men could connect them to legitimate work opportunities. However, this occurs rarely; few women report trying to persuade their Johns to help them find jobs. Thus, despite the similarities between sex work and legal work, much of the social capital accrued in the sex trade cannot be transferred to the "straight world." This could ultimately stunt women's motivations and abilities to exit.

Summarily, what the narratives of the women in our sample thus suggest is that the professional and careerist dimensions of the indoor sex trade not only make exit difficult, but make return seemingly inevitable. While sometimes abstractly desiring exit, few indoor women in our sample found *actual* reward in any attempt to find formal work. Indeed, their experiences with legal work were often so unsatisfying that they framed their return to sex work as a rational, career decision in their professional life course.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the recent transformation of the vice industry in New York City and the consequences therein for those who work in the trade. As a result of policing strategies and public policies developed during the Giuliani administration, hundreds of sex workers were pushed off of busy streets and into indoor venues. Our data suggests many have shifted their orientation towards indoor sex work, and in doing so, have ended up viewing their work in a way

suggestive of a profession and a career. We have argued that this orientation is partly an outcome of the structural changes to the organization of sex work. Specifically, as women move indoors, they perceive themselves to be at less risk of arrest and physical violence—whether by Johns or their managers. They also have decreased social contact with other sex workers, which may reduce the likelihood that they will connect with needed social services, as has been documented among those who work on the street. And, they grow to identify with sex work positively, particularly with the flexibility to set one's own hours and the steady income that the work often entails. In calculating the risks and rewards of staying in the trade, women conceive of their work as a profession in which to make significant personal investments—of time, energy, and one's identity. As a consequence for many, their exit becomes deferred or, at the least, many of the women remain working indoors longer than they had envisioned. We suggest that this kind of personal identification has occurred for all types of indoor sex workers, even for those making meager incomes.[29]

There are notable limitations to this study. Our paper is really a case study of New York City—although there are many other metropolitan areas that have experienced similar dynamics in terms of changes to law enforcement and subsequent transformations of the sex trade. While we hope that the general framework set forth in this paper could be tested in other places, we do not directly claim that the professional and careerist orientation is emerging among the indoor sex worker community in other cities. In addition, our project was not organized as a comparative research design wherein one could test the differences between indoor and outdoor workers. Finally, it is difficult to gauge whether women's perception of longer tenures in the indoor sex trade actually has manifested—we do not have a longitudinal research design or, for example, a set of organizational records against which to cross check their own personal statements (regarding wages, arrest, hours worked, etc.) Nevertheless, we feel that the basic findings are sound—in part because

of a comparative study on street-based workers that was conducted at the same time—and that they provide a basis for further investigation.

The longer tenures of women who work indoors combined with their view of indoor sex work as a profession and a career has some important implications. For a public policy and advocacy community, intervening in indoor sex work is more difficult. As more women take up this kind of work, it will be difficult to find them, provide them with social and human services, and provide them opportunities to exit or to seek help for problems they encounter in the course of their work. In addition, these women often say that they would leave indoor work only if they were presented with a socially legitimate job with greater financial remuneration and equal degrees of autonomy. Low-income women do not readily find this kind of work.

While women may be safer indoors than working on the street, indoor sex work is nonetheless dangerous. In addition, the longer that these women stay in the trade, the more isolated they are from institutions such as banks, credit organizations, and the like, which can help them develop long-term stability for themselves and their families. Indeed, very few of the women interviewed had found legal means of investing and saving their money. Barring a few women who had checking and savings accounts, only a handful of the women in our sample had found a formal means of saving their money. Some developed creative strategies to save. For example, some women had bank accounts set up for them in the name of a friend; one woman had an offshore bank account. However, though these women had found a way to save their money, they still remained without formal relationships with important, capital-building institutions. In addition, as they stay in the trade for longer periods of time, they experience losses in traditional forms of social and human capital. Over time, they find themselves less "marketable" when they do seek legal employment. This continued disconnect with the legitimate labor market means that ultimately, indoor sex work

does not provide any means of escaping temporary instability, but rather sustains and potentially exacerbates this state.

There exists little understanding of the organization of indoor sex work and of the women and men who work in the trade themselves. Further research should seek to expand upon this current study by examining how women working indoors exit the trade, their actual rates of return to the trade after exit, and the impact of indoor sex work on work experiences in the formal economy. In addition, longitudinal studies of women in the indoor trade would be useful to gather further information about the intricate processes at work that contribute to the development of women's professional and careerist orientations.

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[1] According to the literature, sex workers are those who engage in sexual acts for monetary gain. Such acts can include everything from stripping and dancing, to S&M, to sexual intercourse. The term prostitution specifically refers to the exchange of intercourse for some material good (Thukral et al. 2005). For our purposes, sex worker is the term used to denote anyone who exchanges sexual intercourse (including oral sex) for money or some other material good. Indoor sex workers are those women in our sample who engage in sex work indoors, versus outdoor workers who conduct their work on the street. In our consideration of the indoor sex trade, our sample of sex workers include a variety of "types" of indoor workers, including escorts, independents who work from their homes, or in bars or clubs, women who work in establishments, such as brothels, crack dens, dungeons, or massage parlors, and women who have been trafficked. Each of these types of indoor sex workers conduct the same act – sexual intercourse – but their working conditions, their client base, the specific place in which they conduct their work, their rate, etc… all differ, depending on the specific type of sex work in which they are engaged. So, while the term sex worker denotes women who exchange sex for material goods, the condition under which this exchange is conducted varies greatly.

While we use the term "indoor sex worker" to identify the women in our sample, our respondents referred to themselves and their line of work in a variety of ways, depending upon the context in which they were talking about themselves and their work. For example, when women spoke about how their work was perceived by the public, when they spoke negatively about the work itself and their involvement in it, or when they were making fun of their involvement in the trade, they described themselves as "whores" and "prostitutes." They would also use such terms as a

vehicle of empowerment, when describing the pride that they have for their work. The usage of these terms in this spirit was most frequent among high-end sex workers in the study or among those women who have affiliations to sex work organizations, such as "Prostitutes of New York" (PONY). At other points of the interview, women spoke about themselves as being providers of emotional and psychological services. Throughout the course of any given interview, women shifted from speaking about themselves as service providers, to being sex workers with rights, to being whores. What this indicates is a complexity in how women in the trade see themselves and their work. They often times feel ambiguous about the trade and its merits and they frequently struggle with reconciling how they see themselves and their work with both the stigma and criminalization associated with the trade and with how they are perceived by others in the "straight" world. While we did not find any correlation between how women identify and whether or not they perceive their work in professional and careerist terms, one can see that the ambiguity with which women identify with the trade is the same ambiguity that can be found in the tension between women's abstract desire to exit the industry and their simultaneous development of professional and careerist orientations to their sex work, at the expense of developing capital that would enable exit (all of which will be discussed later in the paper).

[2] Research has documented sex workers' difficulty establishing economic stability due to their patterns of quick spending and the challenges that they face in saving money and making investments (Phoenix 1999). We extend this argument by suggesting that if the tenures of indoor workers are even longer than those of women on the streets, then this extended length of time that they are detached from forming relationships to people and institutions that may offer economic stability means greater long-term socio-economic instability.

[3] In addition one may think of criminals and deviants (Becker 1963), psychiatric patients (Goffman 1961), and prisoners (Cohen and Taylor 1972) as all having careers.

[4] It should be noted that although there are no formal channels of promotion or upward mobility in the sex trade, this does not mean that there is not movement among women between different types of sex work.

[5] Sex work refers to the performance of a sexual act for exchange. Sexual acts include practices ranging from intercourse to stripping to dominatrix work (Thukral et al. 2005). For our purposes, the term sex work will include all sexual acts, but will be used to primarily discuss the sale of sexual intercourse.

[6] Some researchers have drawn parallels between sex work and legitimate low-wage work alternatives. For example, there are many similarities between sex work and formal employment in regards to why women enter the sex trade, their means of entering, and the way in which they spend the money that they earn. Much of the literature on sex work has

sought to understand the reasons for which women turn to sex work, and not other work, both legal and illegal, as an income generating strategy (Dalla 2001; Sharpe 1998; Phoenix 1999).

[7] In her study on sex workers, Sharpe (1998) argues that family and friends play two different roles in the process of encouraging someone to engage in the work. These contacts either encourage women to turn to sex work or they play a mentorship role by providing advice and moral and practical support as the women begin their work. According to Sharpe, friends often use peer pressure tactics to push women into sex work by convincing them that prostitution affords a relatively "easy" lifestyle and is therefore a desirable line of work to enter.

[8] For those women in the trade who work for either an establishment or, a manager or pimp of some sort, a substantial amount of the money earned is given as a "cut" to these brokers, thereby undercutting the full potential earnings of the women and consequentially, their autonomy within the trade (Raphael and Shapiro 2002).

[9] Although outdoor women are arrested quite often, they are frequently released without being subject to fines or sentencing. This creates what researchers call "the revolving door" of arrests among prostitutes (Thukral and Ditmore 2003).

[10] Whelehan (2001) best describes this difference in her description of the "survival" versus the "career" prostitute, a typology that is based on the differential financial motivations of women entering the trade. The survival sex worker uses sex work for survival purposes, which may include securing food, clothing and shelter for the household, or to fund one's education or entrepreneurial pursuits. Generally, the survival prostitute does not enter the trade through a formal venue or through contact with someone already engaged in the work. Often, she is conflicted about her involvement in the work. Her experience in the trade is for the short-term and is terminated either by her decision to become a career prostitute, when she has secured the finances originally sought, or when a more profitable alternative arises. In contrast, the career prostitute is engaged in sex work as a result of a rational decision not only to participate in the trade, but to make the work a long-term profession. Career prostitutes tend to come from semi-skilled to white-collar professional backgrounds. They are attracted to sex work because of the freedom and independence that the work affords; many of these women use sex work to finance other pursuits such as small businesses or educational paths. Many of the women who intend to be career prostitutes see the work as a "calling." As such, they aim to be good at what they do and take pride in their work.

[11] Such movement indoors as a result of greater regulations and surveillance of sex workers stands in contrast to law enforcement tactics being employed in other countries where, in many cities, the state has come to embrace and regulate

prostitution in an effort to profit from the trade as it has developed into an industry that largely caters to tourists. For example, in Amsterdam, state regulations have promoted and stabilized the trade, rather than make those involved subject to increased rates of arrest. In Amsterdam, one of the effects of this has been to deepen the stratification between those sex workers working indoors and for an establishment, and those who have recently migrated to the city or are working outdoors and addicted to drugs (Wonders and Michalowski 2001). Interestingly then, though state approaches to the trade in cities like Amsterdam and New York City differ so greatly, the effect of such polices are similar in that they have heightened the bifurcation of the trade between those working indoors and those on the street.

[12] In 1993 there were a total of 261,329 arrests in New York City. After the implementation of Giuliani's "quality of life" campaign in 1994, arrest rates soared so greatly that by 1996 the total number of arrests in the city had reached 345,041 (Weidner 2001).

[13] The contribution of the Internet worked independently of Giuliani's policies to shift prostitution indoors.

[14] Prostitution is often thought of as a street-based phenomenon. We may attribute this belief to the fact that while street-based sex work accounts for only 15% of all prostitution, 85-90% of the women arrested for prostitution work on the street, and are therefore often the recipients of considerable public attention and the primary focus of social concern (Alexander 1998; Whelehan 2001).

[15] For our purposes, the term "sex act" refers to sexual intercourse, including oral sex.

[16] A brothel is an indoor location, often a house, in which women sell and commit the sexual act for sale within the house. Brothels are usually directed by either a house manager or madam. Women who work in brothels frequently have to give a cut of their earnings to the house. A dungeon is an indoor location in which dominatrix work takes place. Here too, there is a house manager who receives a cut from employees (Thukral et al. 2005).

[17] One can divide women who work indoors into two categories based upon prestige and economic conditions (Heyl 1979). The first is comprised of women who work in hotels, brothels, bars, or massage parlors and who charge middle-range prices. The second is comprised of women who charge high prices and work as call girls and escorts, primarily serving a business clientele. Women in the indoor trade may work in markedly different venues, with very different organizational structures, and may make varying amounts of money doing sex work. Nonetheless, researchers have found it useful to put these women into one category because despite their heterogeneity, their work is affected by its indoor nature and because the organization and characteristics of their work are markedly different from those who work on the street (Thukral et al. 2005; Weidner 2001).

[18] Women in the sample were found through various outreach activities in nightclubs notorious for prostitution, through a legal advocate of women in the trade, through a woman who works with "Prostitutes of New York" (PONY), a local sex work organization, through a number of Johns already known to the researchers, and through referrals by women in the sample.

[19] There are several limitations to our dataset. The sample of sex workers is small and is based in only one city, so it is not possible to test claims about shifts in the urban vice industry across urban America. In addition, while many of the women in the sample have experience working both indoors and on the street, because we were not able to observe, firsthand, the outdoor experiences of these women, our findings are limited to the extent to which they are based on women's reporting of their past perceptions of working on the street.

[20] Sex-work related run-in with the police refers to anytime a woman working in the trade has been stopped, questioned, threatened, harassed, arrested, or falsely arrested by the police in connection to their work in the trade (Thukral et al. 2005).

[21] Exceptions are those sex workers who work in an establishment or for some type of manager.

[22] Whelehan (2001) argues that such sentiments are probably most common among those career indoor workers that work as escorts or call girls—although other types of indoor workers will also exhibit these sentiments. She posits that this distinction between indoor and outdoor girls is rooted in the different setting, time involved, and motivations of the client and sex worker that exist for these two types of women working in the trade. It can be argued that in an attempt to understand their work, rectify their feelings of guilt and shame, and legitimate their involvement in the trade, many women develop a discourse which they use to justify the merits of their work (see Phoenix 1999). Ultimately, engaging in this emotional labor serves to legitimate their work and make it, in their eyes, an honorable professional. It is in this way that sex workers, both indoor and outdoor workers, often come to see themselves and their work as a contribution to society, rather than as a vice for which they should be ashamed.

[23] Only 27% of the sample reported sex work as being the worst job they had ever had. In comparison, when asked what the best job they have ever had is, none of the outdoor workers interviewed for the report "Revolving Door" (Thukral and Ditmore 2003) mentioned sex work.

[24] There has not been systematic research on the strength or longevity of the networks that are formed. An exception is Sharpe's (1998) study, in which it was found that these relationships tended to be temporary and superficial. The social ties women formed in the trade were based on convenience; specifically, the convenience of the location where

individuals worked, but did not extend beyond these physical spaces. Thus, street based workers only associated with other street based workers, escorts of a particular agency only formed relationships with women working in the same agency, and so on. The experience of working in the trade was not salient enough to produce an "occupational solidarity" that could transcend these distinctions, Sharpe argues.

[25] In the course of receiving treatment and other services, women do achieve greater stability in their personal lives, which seems to open up possibilities for exit from sex work. Rarely, however, are these services in direct response to their involvement in sex work. Instead, most of the services women receive, such as medical treatment or help with homelessness, are the types of services received by the general population. Such services, while helpful, do not directly address women's work in the trade (Raphael and Shapiro 2002).

[26] One of the most surprising findings of the study was the great need among the women in our sample for psychological help. In our initial round of interviews, we did not ask women if they had received or if they needed this type of help. Instead, a number of women expressed the need for counseling on their own – so much so that we eventually included a question about the need for counseling in the survey protocol. The need for psychological services seemed to be largely related to women's feelings of social isolation within the trade.

[27] Mercedes, a service provider from a non-profit organization in New York City whose mission it is to help recently arrived immigrants, described some of the adjustments that her organization makes in order to deal with the relative inaccessibility of indoor workers. "We do a lot of outreach to agency-based groups. We provide training [to help people identify indoor sex workers and determine how to service them]. A lot of times we go on people's midday lunch break or whatever. We go to a lot of defense attorneys and court-related intermediaries now, in hopes that they will come across women and make referrals to a program. And also, you know, small ethnic groups inside communities who are more likely to know what's going on inside the communities and make referrals…We do a lot of trainings with legal service providers, healthcare workers, and community-based organizations. We've also done outreach at homeless shelters, but most of the clients that have been referred to us have been referred through social service agencies, other attorneys and law enforcement, rather than from the outreach we have been doing."

[28] Sex Industry Survivor's Anonymous is a national organization whose mission is to provide support groups for women and men who are currently working in the sex industry but who would like to get out, or for those who have already left the trade but need support during the recovery process. Paul and Lisa is a program based in New York that provides

transitional living services to those exiting the trade. You Are Never Alone, based in Baltimore, provides peer support, group counseling, crisis intervention, referrals, legal housing, and employment services to outdoor workers seeking exit.

[29] It should be noted that while no particular type of sex worker developed a careerist orientation more than another, because the development of this perspective is largely based on the perception of being able to profit, personally and financially, from sex work, those women who actually make more money in the industry, regardless of the type of work that they do, may be *more* likely to think about sex work as a profession and a career.

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