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## **Marketing Sex: US Legal Brothels and Late Capitalist Consumption**

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**Abstract** Recent scholarship has begun to examine the effects late capitalist economic structures and cultural practices have on sexuality. What effect do recent shifts have on various parts of the global sex industry? To answer this question, we examine one local institutional site of consumption, the legalized brothel industry in the US state of Nevada. We argue that the brothel industry in Nevada is beginning to use similar marketing strategies and business forms to other tourist service industries. The brothels are also increasingly selling individualized, interactive touristic experiences. We conclude that it is no longer useful to examine the sex industry as generalized 'other' to mainstream businesses. It is imperative to study local sex industry sites to examine how late capitalist forms of consumption might have an impact on the sale of sex, especially in comparison with expanding global touristic service industries.

**Keywords** consumption, late capitalism, prostitution, sex industry, sex work

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## Marketing Sex: US Legal Brothels and Late Capitalist Consumption

Selling sex is business. In addition to all else it may be, it is also situated in the specific forms of production and consumption at particular locales and time periods. The economic and cultural context in which sex is sold has changed significantly. Since the Second World War, a globally integrated economic system has developed, whose engine has changed from production to consumption, making service the core industrial sector (Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991). These forces have driven the development of new commodities, new forms of labour and new forms of consumption.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, travel and tourism have become the world's largest industries employing 11 per cent of all workers world wide, and producing 10 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (Wonders and Michalowski, 2001: 549). Simultaneously, the non-tourist service

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industry has become increasingly 'touristic' – that is, rather than selling services with specific outcomes, services sell experience, spectacle, fantasy, adventure, escapism and personal interactions (Urry, 2002).

These economic changes have had profound effects on cultural practices, especially intimacy, sex and sexuality. Late capitalist mass consumption has encouraged, according to some studies, a pornographication of culture, more liberal and egalitarian sexual attitudes, and an acceptance of fleeting, temporary relationships (Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 1992; Hawkes, 1996; McNair, 2002). Studies also demonstrate an increasing commodification of intimacy and a heightened sexualization of work (Adkins, 2002; Zelizer, 2005). An important empirical question emerges: In this context, how has the sex industry changed?

In this article, we argue that sex businesses as forms of commerce must be situated in local institutional fields of consumption as they intersect global late capitalist culture and economy. We emphasize that when it comes to understanding consumption, business and culture are inextricably intertwined. We conceptualize an institutional field as 'a set of interconnected economic and cultural institutions centered on the production of commodities for individual demand' (Zukin and Maguire, 2004: 175). We examine how recent changes in the economic infrastructure of mass consumption and the values and attitudes of consumer culture are affecting how the sex industry is organized and sex as a product is marketed, through one site, the legal brothel industry in 10 of the rural counties of Nevada, the only place in the USA where prostitution is legal. We demonstrate the trend toward using similar organizational and marketing strategies to both tourist and touristic service industries, despite the small size of the brothel industry. These strategies include marketing to broad-ranging audiences, using more mainstream business forms, and selling individualized, touristic experiences rather than rationalized sex acts. This new style of organization and marketing may have significant implications for the integration of the sex industries with other businesses, as well as the nature of sex work.

## Shifting sexual services: Tourist and touristic industries

We also choose to situate the sex industry in a larger context of tourism and touristic services (Wonders and Michalowski, 2001). A growing global tourist economy has spurred a growth in sex industry businesses.<sup>2</sup> The more resource-rich and formally organized businesses are increasing capital outlays to take advantage of traditional tourism, others are becoming more touristic. The media have made much of an apparent

growth in size and respectability of the sex industries (*Economist*, 1998). The *Economist* notes 'a handful of well run, imaginative businesses' are increasingly profitable, upscale, and exploiting market niches. Where this kind of growth has occurred, it has been executed in part through the use of the same marketing tactics as businesses in other tourist and touristic industries; for instance, marketing to wider audiences via upscaling, expanding services, market specialization, and expanding markets (Frank, 2002: 25). For example, the seedy, dark, secluded sex shops and strip joints of the past are being replaced by large, glitzy, and upscale adult stores and gentlemen's clubs, many with upscale restaurants. In Antwerp, in Belgium, a new upscale, chic 'super brothel' has opened decorated by superstar architects and designers (Castle, 2006).

Some of these businesses are also adopting mainstream business organizational forms such as corporate structures and diversified holdings. Some legal sex industry businesses are partnering with multinational corporations, such as adult video distribution partnerships with General Motors, America Online/Time Warner, AT&T, Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt and Westin. In the USA, while small private firms still dominate the legal sex industry, there is a trend toward larger national and international corporate chains. Adult businesses are even opening mainstream business enterprises such as the Vivid nightclub at the Venetian, a Las Vegas casino resort, where holographic images of adult film stars are projected onto the dance floor.

This mainstreaming has not occurred in all sectors of the adult sex industry. Just as in the non-sex industry workforce, there is labour market segmentation with primary (higher wages, more stable) and secondary (lower paying, less stable) labour markets. Legal businesses with the most capital are the ones expanding and targeting more upscale customers and profitable markets. Primary labour markets benefit workers who already have the most resources and cultural capital. In the secondary labour markets the pay is likely to be lower and labour conditions worse. There is deep stratification among workers in the global sex industry. The nature of the product sold is evolving, too.

Along with the growth of tourism in mainstream sectors, there has been a trend toward more touristic services. Traditionally, service work has sold emotion as much as a specific service. Research on service-providers such as restaurant servers, airline hostesses, and various salespeople has shown that managers and workers have rationalized the service product by applying assembly line principles. This 'McDonaldization' of services relies on rationalized work processes, centralized work places, controlled environments, interactive scripts, standardized employment contracts and highly predictable production/consumption rituals to increase efficiency and profit and standardize emotional services (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner,

1993; Ritzer and Liska, 1997). However, as the service industry has become more touristic, these rationalized outcome-oriented approaches have given way to decentralized, do-it-yourself workers compelled to sell uniqueness, variety and individuality. In essence, the product in these tourist/touristic leisure services becomes more an individualized, interactive experience with less rationalized and scripted outcomes (Beck, 1992; Holyfield, 1999; Sharpe, 2005).

Research on the sex industry has noted the similarities between selling emotions in sex industry and the traditional service industry (Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Chapkis, 1997; Sanders, 2005). Others are examining strip clubs as they sell touristic, experiential services in late capitalism (Frank, 2002), or noting shifts in how consumers view the prostitution exchange (Bernstein, 2001; Prasad, 1999). We ask to what extent the sale of sex in the brothels has reflected these two trends, more 'Fordist' rationalized processes or more individualized, interactive experiences (Hausbeck and Brents, 2002).

In this article, we will examine these changing structures and practices by looking at sex-industry organization and marketing at one local site of consumption, Nevada's legal brothels. In doing so, we emphasize that local sites may respond to global processes in different ways. We choose the legal brothels in Nevada as our site for several reasons. First, brothels sell sexual contact, sex acts, and sexual release rather than sexualized fantasies or non-contact services. Indeed, to the extent that the sex industry has grown in size and respectability, it has done so where sexualized services or fantasies are sold, such as the adult video industry and erotic dance. Prostitution remains among the most stigmatized segment of the sex industry, and research in this field has frequently conceptualized this business as deviant and fundamentally different from other service industries. Thus, brothels are exceedingly interesting place to examine changes in how sex acts become touristic products. Second, while the informal economy has been dramatically affected by globalization and the growth of late capitalist tourist economies and culture, we choose to focus on legal businesses. Legal businesses are potentially more stable and more embedded in institutionalized business systems than independent prostitutes.

We are feminist sociologists who live in Las Vegas. Our research stems from a larger project on the social organization of Nevada brothels involving nearly 10 years of ethnographies, observations, formal and informal interviews with workers, managers, owners and policymakers, participation in public debates, and analysis of historical and contemporary documents, websites, media stories, and newspaper articles.<sup>3</sup> In this study we first draw on data from the entire Nevada brothel system and then focus on data from two particular sites to examine changes in the institutional field. In particular we look at changes in business forms and marketing strategies.

## Shifting consumption and Nevada brothels

Nevada's sex industry exists within the context of a state whose primary source of income is tourism. Las Vegas draws more than 38 million tourists annually to more than 133,000 hotel rooms (Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, 2006). Las Vegas has been called the 'triumph of postindustrial capitalism' in packaging and selling entertainment, glamour, spectacle, experience, fantasy, adventure (Gottdiener et al., 1999; Rothman, 2002: xix).

The marketing of sexuality has been central to Las Vegas' growth as a global tourist resort. Despite marketing itself implicitly as a place where sexual fantasies may come true, with slogans such as 'what happens here stays here', and unlike many Asian or European resort centers, prostitution itself is not explicitly marketed. Las Vegas' resort industry does not consider itself a sex tourist destination. And as the casinos have become larger, more corporate, and answer to stockholders from around the globe, it has become important to them to look legitimate. In the large resort centers of Las Vegas and Reno, then, where prostitution of any kind is illegal, the resort industry works hard to prevent its visible forms.

Yet there are estimates that up to 3500 illegal prostitutes work in Las Vegas' underground economy at any given time (Hausbeck et al., 2006). Illegal independent prostitutes evade casino security and discreetly work the bars and/or advertise via alternative weekly newspapers or the internet. There are highly informal and discreet systems at a few hotels where concierges independently retain lists of preferred upscale prostitutes who can be made quickly available to the wealthiest guests. There are also thriving legal outcall entertainment businesses operating call centers that dispatch nude dancers to hotel rooms for an agency fee, and dancers may provide sexual services illegally for tips. Despite concerted efforts by the resort industry to control public spaces around the resorts and eliminate these outcall businesses, outcall agencies advertise heavily through billboards, stands containing flyers and through individuals leafletting tourists on the sidewalks. Street prostitution is the most heavily surveilled, and police and the resort industry are vigilant in keeping obviously working-class prostitutes away from highly visible resort areas. There are also a few businesses operating legally as Asian massage parlors, where the predominantly Asian women provide 'happy endings' illegally. Thus, sex tourism in the resort zones is an informal industry. While scantily clothed cocktail waitresses, partially nude shows, and sexy nightclubs lure tourists to resorts with the illusion of sexuality, the sale of sex acts is discouraged to the extent that it takes tourists away from time gambling or shopping in the casinos.

Nevada's legal brothel industry has been a key component of Nevada's tourist industry, but its importance has been symbolic. It helps to maintain the illusion of a sexual playground, yet the casino industry works hard to officially distance itself from the brothels both physically and politically. Brothels are a minimum of one hour's drive from any of the major resort areas and cannot market themselves as international sex tourist destinations because it is illegal to advertise. Compared to the money spent on illegal prostitution in Las Vegas and Reno, and compared to legal brothels in Amsterdam's highly concentrated urban red-light district, or even Australia's legal brothels, Nevada's brothel industry is small and geographically dispersed.

At most, 500 women work legally at any time in the entire state. While there are licenses for about 36 brothels, only about 25 to 30 are currently operating. There are 8 to 10 large brothels, housing 15 to 50 workers each, clustered about an hour's drive from Las Vegas and Reno. The rest are along the 850 miles of relatively remote stretches of desert highway linking Las Vegas to Reno, or connecting San Francisco, California, to Salt Lake City, Utah, a route that passes through Nevada. The smallest legal brothels house from 1 to 5 workers, and these tend to be several hours' drive from major resort centers. The midsize brothels are just outside of the smaller towns of Winnemucca, Carlin, Elko, Wells and Ely, with 5 to 12 workers in each. Brothels are legal in only 10 of Nevada's 17 counties.

But all this disguises the brothels' central connection to the tourist economy. Not only are they symbolically important in contributing to the image of a sexual playground that is important to Nevada's tourist economy, it is doubtful that, without the tourist industry, the brothels would have remained legal here while the rest of the USA outlawed prostitution. Prostitution has been a part of the state's economic development since mining and railroads populated the state in the early 1900s. Mining booms and busts kept the population of the state under 80,000 until large federal dam projects around Las Vegas brought workers in the 1930s. By 1940, the state's population began climbing to 110,000 and gambling and quick divorces drove an increase in tourism. During the 1940s, some well-known writers moved to Virginia City, a gold rush town outside of Reno. From there they filled the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *the New Yorker*, *Gourmet* and *Town and Country Life* with articles that created our current myths about the wild and woolly west, and its legendary 'soiled dove' prostitutes (Taylor, 1998). Nevada's small towns drew on these images to bolster sagging mining economies and build profitable tourism.

In the years after the Second World War, the growing urban casino industry distanced itself from prostitution as casinos struggled to gain

legitimacy. Efforts to outlaw brothels by casino owners and local officials in the 1970s met with strong resistance from rural county governments, resulting in a law which technically legalized them outside of Las Vegas (Brents and Hausbeck, 2001; Hausbeck and Brents, 2000). Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, casinos occasionally worked to shut down the rural brothels. As Las Vegas population growth pushed the state's population to nearly 2 million in 2000, the political clout of the urban casino industry has grown. But they have been unable and perhaps increasingly unwilling to close the brothels. Lately, visible players such as the mayor of Las Vegas and the owners of the Hard Rock Casino have publicly expressed desires to open brothels in Las Vegas itself.

## Brothel business practices: Rationalized past to touristic present

How has this relation to tourism and touristic services affected the brothels themselves as institutional sites of consumption? To understand recent changes in the brothels we must first understand past organizational and marketing trends. Rural brothels historically had two major customer bases, the temporary and mobile male labour force (from the mining, construction and ranching industries) and male tourists, and they have primarily marketed themselves to the former. Since it is illegal for brothels to advertise, the primary mechanism for learning about the brothels, especially prior to the internet, has been word of mouth and independently published book-length guides to the brothels. These methods have worked well for local temporary workers, and for regular customers.

Most brothels have provided sexual gratification in McDonaldized contexts where the provision of sex acts is highly rationalized through line-ups (where women literally form a line to allow a customer to choose among all women at once), timers (to mark the beginning and end of a timed 'party'), and often a 'get it in, get off and get out' mindset among workers (Hausbeck and Brents, 2002). Brothels rationalize the negotiation process and closely monitor monetary exchanges (Brents and Hausbeck, 2005). Despite the existence of bars in many brothels, most owners discourage men from hanging out without purchasing sex. Some smaller rural brothels market themselves as a sexual home away from home for nomadic working men, a marketing strategy that is not directed at tourists or is itself touristic. The few services offered in addition to sex acts include what they call the 'comforts of home' (free coffee, a shower, living-room-like atmosphere, and other homey amenities). These are designed mostly to get men in the door, and those who partake in these services without purchasing sex are typically frowned upon (Hausbeck and

Brents, 2000). Those brothels that do market to tourists market their 'old west' experience, with western-sounding names like The Old Bridge Ranch, Kit Kat Guest Ranch, Donna's Ranch, or the Stardust Ranch.

Most of the brothels, especially those located inside the city limits of small towns, are so non-distinct that they are hardly recognizable as brothels. Low key, under-the-radar marketing is part owner choice, and part legal necessity. While the rural economy became dependent on the licensing fees, taxes, work-card fees, and secondary income, the towns have only come to accept and normalize the brothels by also embracing the notion that the sexuality is hidden and not to be encountered as one goes about daily business. Many brothel owners live in fear that any increased visibility could motivate a community backlash, or inspire local politicians to legislate them out of existence.

In the past several years, however, some larger brothels located close to tourist cities have shifted notably in marketing strategies. They are trying to appeal to broader audiences, using more mainstream business forms and selling individualized touristic experiences instead of McDonaldised standardization. They are relying on the internet and other forms of creative marketing to get around advertising restrictions. Several of the larger brothels have invested in renovating their facilities, moving away from western or homey interiors to more upscale, stylish, and even elegant aesthetics. The Sagebrush Ranch near Reno, for example, recently added a mahogany bar with granite countertops and red overhead lights. Themed fantasy rooms are increasingly commonplace, and even the smaller brothels are adding hot tub rooms, dungeon rooms, bachelor party rooms and other specialty spaces. Several brothels are expanding their services by adding souvenir shops, larger bars, restaurants, coffee shops and small strip clubs. While most brothels remain oriented to male customers, some are welcoming couples.

While these changes are happening in many brothels, we want to focus on two that best exemplify the shift toward touristic brothel marketing: the Resort at Sheri's Ranch, owned by Resort Entertainment Company, a corporation, and the Moonlite Bunny Ranch, owned by individual entrepreneur Dennis Hof.

## The Resort at Sheri's Ranch

Sheri's Ranch began around 1982 as a small trailer home with a few wings later added for more rooms. In January 2001, Sheri's was purchased by new corporate owners who immediately began a \$7 million renovation, expanded the services offered, integrated it with a hotel, and altered marketing strategies to attract more and different customers. The name was changed to The Resort and Spa at Sheri's Ranch, and the atmosphere

became more elegant. They built free-standing fantasy bungalows with themes such as a Roman bacchanal, the Middle Ages, an African safari and the 1960s, and they provided new amenities for workers including a pool, a gym, facial room, full beauty salon and computer room. According to a newspaper article, the main goal in redoing Sheri's was to 'draw the mainstream attention that the Nevada brothel industry has always avoided . . . [the new owner] wants the brothels to be seen as just another business in the community' (Abowitz, 2001). Sheri's has accomplished this in several ways. First, their doors are always unlocked, and one opens directly to a new \$500,000 sports bar. They serve free popcorn, a full menu of food, and drinks in front of big screen TVs. On the wall are traditional bar memorabilia, as well as the kind of photos of t-shirted busty women that are found in college bars. Cozy booths line the walls.

Second, the business welcomes anyone of any gender. Unlike other brothels, where two women entering may be a novel and unusual event, here senior citizens, families and groups of friends eating and drinking, with no pressure to consume any of the services sold by the attached brothel, are commonplace. Sheri's also markets itself to swingers, organizations of couples who exchange partners for sex, receiving recommendations at various swingers' websites.

Third, Sheri's is marketing to mainstream audiences in other ways. They offer brothel tours to groups as diverse as Elderhostel and the Red Hat Society (organizations for retired citizens), university classes, and Asian tourists on outings from Las Vegas.

Fourth, the corporation is opening mainstream businesses in and near the brothel, as well as two strip clubs in Las Vegas. Sheri's added a separate 10-room, non-brothel resort hotel with a heated pool and waterfall, volleyball court, spa and a golf course. The non-brothel resort hotel markets itself to semi-adventurous couples who want to spend the night 'at a brothel' without necessarily purchasing any sexual services. Inside the brothel, the décor in a hot tub party room was provided by Budweiser, a large US beer producer, allowing them to claim 'sponsorship' of the room. Budweiser has helped sponsor other brothel parties and public concerts.

Fifth, the nature of the sales interaction is less McDonaldized. Working women will line up when a customer wants to purchase sex, but a customer can bypass the line-up; managers say up to 50 per cent of business is through interactions with customers by women working the bar. The setting encourages a more open, 'party' atmosphere and a more individualized, less rationalized interaction. Unlike most brothels in Nevada, workers negotiate with customers a price for activities rather than charging for time spent – a significant shift in the nature of the product sold in Nevada brothels, allowing for a much more individualized and less rationalized interaction than before.

## The Moonlite Bunny Ranch

Up until the mid 1990s, the Moonlite Bunny Ranch was a mid-sized brothel with fewer than a dozen or so women working, located just outside of Reno and Carson City, the state capital. In the last few years, the owner, Dennis Hof, began getting adult video stars to work at his brothel, and now he markets the Moonlite Bunny Ranch as a sexualized fantasy land where you can sleep with your dream porn star. With renovations, additions, and several new business practices, it has become a large, modern, luxury brothel.

The Moonlite Bunny Ranch is not only embracing more mainstream business organization but is also more explicitly touristic in selling personalized, interactive experience and spectacle in its marketing and workplace organization. First, to the great consternation of the rest of the industry, Hof has a flamboyant and visible media style. He and several of the working women have appeared regularly on Howard Stern, various TV talk shows, a number of radio shows, and Hof has an ongoing series, *Cathouse*, on the popular cable channel HBO. He works hard to be very high profile and sees himself as bringing a message to the public that legalized prostitution is good and here to stay. Hof told us, 'I'm single-handedly trying to sanitize this vice', he said, 'I'm on a mission'. And as he told one reporter, 'A high-profile approach brings higher-quality girls and better-quality customers' (Tanner, 2006).

Second, Hof explicitly markets his brothel as a sexualized touristic destination, or, in his words, a 'singles bar, except the odds are real good'. Hof markets voyeuristic transgression by making sure to tell interviewers that 'Everybody comes here – every rock star, athlete and a few politicians that you'd love to know about but I can't tell you' (Cosby, 2005). Hof argues that he is able to get more money from customers by approaching the 'product' customers are buying as more of an experience rather than a sex act, maintaining that the customer 'doesn't want to go to the room unless he feels close to you, or feels like you're friends, or there's some inner personal action going on there, okay?'

Third, like Sheri's, Hof still has women line up for customers entering the brothel but also encourages client-worker interactions in the bar area, and non-McDonaldized, personalized exchanges. As Violet from the Moonlite Bunny Ranch says,

part of my day is spent working the bar and just kinda hanging out talking to people. I don't get picked out of a line up a whole lot, so I have to work the bar if I want to make any money. And a lot of people will just go with me because they like my personality.

Fourth, his choice to employ porn stars is also designed to develop the fantasy experience. Customers are likely to spend \$5000 to \$10000 to

have an experience with, for example, the most photographed *Playboy* Playmate in the world. 'I know a guy that drove half way across the United States to lose his virginity to [adult film star] Sunset Thomas because she was his favorite.' Hof explains,

I don't want that mentality of 'come in, get it up, get off, get the fuck out'. Moonlight has a mentality that the girls believe they're worth the money . . . When you can look somebody in the eye with conviction and say, 'great, you know, I understand oral sex, I am the best at it, and it's gonna be five hundred [dollars]', perception is reality. If you can build a perception that you're the best sexual partner in the world, and the experience that I'm gonna have with you is gonna be the ultimate experience, well, then it is.

Fifth, Hof tells us that he has expanded his relationships with the casino industry in Reno as casinos need to distance themselves from illegal prostitution,

The casino business is kind of between a rock and hard place. They're not privately owned anymore. They're all corporate entities. They have stock holders to answer to. They can't supply prostitution, but they love to send the guys to me because it solves both things. It gets the guy laid, and it keeps the casino from having any problems.

Finally, Hof like Sheri's owners, also hopes to appeal to women who want to buy sex.

Women are a new market. It's a new emerging market, if you will, and women are just now to the point where they, they consider spending money for something like that . . . It's interesting to watch, so, uh, we don't flaunt it, but we do it. And I like that because I think it is good business.

## Conclusions

In this article we examined the effects of shifting economic structures and cultural practices on the institutional field of consumption at one local site, the legal brothel industry in Nevada, where it is clear that we are seeing shifts in the organization and marketing of the sex industry. The largest of Nevada's brothels with the capital to do so are beginning to adopt marketing strategies that are more like mainstream businesses. They are up-scaling, expanding services, clientele and markets and using business forms similar to mainstream businesses, including corporate forms and diversification, as they try to integrate into the tourist economy. The nature of the product sold involves less of a McDonaldised rationalization of outcome-oriented sexual gratification than in the past, and is aimed more at providing individualized, interactive, touristic experiences. The two brothels analyzed have different approaches to this mainstreaming. The corporate Resort at Sheri's Ranch is seeking to normalize their

business as a destination resort that also offers sexual fantasy, in a low key, less spectacular way. The independent owned and managed Moonlite Bunny Ranch markets itself as selling high quality, individualized, fantasy-based sexual experience to an upscale audience that already embraces sexualized tourist culture.

This study has indicated that the changes affecting other late capitalist tourist industries are appearing at the ground level in this local institutional site of sexual consumption. While changes are not monolithic and uniform, there are identifiable trends. What some researchers have documented in other parts of the global sex industry, we are witnessing in Nevada brothels. There is a slow but noticeable convergence between some legal brothels and mainstream tourist and touristic businesses.

This is likely to make significant impacts on the industry. As some adult sex businesses become structurally integrated with 'legitimate' businesses, their economic and political power are likely to increase. Las Vegas' gaming industry went through a similar mainstreaming process as they went from control by organized crime to corporate structures (Moehring, 2000). While the legal brothels are still highly stigmatized businesses, this kind of mainstreaming has already made it harder for local governments to close or increase sanctions against profitable businesses. Working conditions are also likely to improve somewhat, at least approximating other service industry jobs, in sectors that become more structurally similar to mainstream businesses. This is largely because these more upscale, touristic businesses are increasingly competing with mainstream service industries for skilled workers.

It is no longer useful to posit the sex industries as an 'other' to late capitalist industry. Research on the sex industries can tell us much about the effects of the economic infrastructure of mass consumption and the values and attitudes of consumer culture. Employing a framework grounded in economic and cultural shifts promises to add much to analyses of sex work. It historicizes our understandings, situates changes in the economic contexts and the cultural meaning of sex in which sex work occurs, and invites examination of the social construction and material conditions of gender, sex and sexuality. More research needs to be done in examining the institutional field of the consumption of sex at local sites, how the industry is organized and sex as a product defined, marketed and consumed at specific locales. Only within these broader contexts of economic and cultural, political and legal change can we effectively assess the potentially empowering, exploitative, humane or inhumane elements of labour in late capitalist tourist and service industries, including sex work.

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## Notes

1. In this article we use the term late capitalism to refer to general economic and cultural trends, based on the works of Agger (1989), Bell (1976), Jameson (1991), Lash and Urry (1994) and Mandel (1975).
2. This growth in the sex industry includes legal and illegal enterprises, formal and informal. The sex industry includes all businesses that sell explicit sexual fantasies, sexual products, sexual services and/or sexual contact, for profit. It includes prostitution, pornography, strip dancing, phone sex, internet sex, adult video industries and a host of other sexual services.
3. We conducted research in 13 Nevada brothels, interviewing prostitutes, management and owners between 1996 and 2002. Much of our information on changes in the brothels comes from further interviews conducted between 2002 and 2006.

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