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# A Heated Debate: Theoretical Perspectives of Sexual Exploitation and Sex Work

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*The theoretical and often political frameworks of sexual exploitation and sex work among women are widely and enthusiastically debated among academic and legal scholars alike. The majority of theoretical literature in this area focuses on the macro perspective, while the micro-level perspective regarding causation remains sparse. This article provides a comprehensive overview of the philosophical, legal, and political perspectives pertaining to sexual exploitation of women and girls and addresses the subsequent controversies in the field.*

Key words: *sexual exploitation, sex work, women, girls*

Theoretical explanations of sexual exploitation and sex work are rich and diverse at the societal level yet sparse and underdeveloped at the individual level. The contentious theoretical and moral debates among macro-level perspectives not only influence other macro systems (e.g., law) but even determine whether a woman may ever choose to exchange sex for financial compensation. Academic and legal scholars alike weave contrasting theoretical perspectives into language choices of their publications and lectures, i.e., the use of sex work as compared to sexual exploitation. Conversely, micro-level theories attempt to explain the process of victimization or entry into, as well as the exit out of, sexual exploitation and sex work but are not empirically well supported. Keeping this in mind, the purpose of this article is to review the philosophical, legal, and political perspectives pertaining to sexual exploitation of women and girls as well as to address the subsequent controversies in the field.

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## Macro Theories of Causation at Structural Level

The bulk of theoretical progress and academic writing is grounded in macro theories to explain the causation of sexual exploitation and sex work at the structural level. Some theories, such as feminism, may appear all encompassing by general name and yet hold stark divisions that greatly impact the understanding of sexual exploitation and the view of what some refer to as its victims. The debates among neo-abolitionist perspectives are continuously active and rarely come to consensus. Influenced by this debate, structural theories lend themselves to divisive legal perspectives, such as criminal treatment of those who purchase or sell sex, as well as those who exploit or facilitate others into performing sex acts for money. Structural theories also explain the financial aspects of sexual exploitation within a larger political context, further politicizing and polarizing working frameworks. Thus, a review of these perspectives is imperative to understanding the national context and debate of sexual exploitation and sex work.

### *Feminist Theories*

Most of the theoretical frameworks regarding violence against women are derived from feminist theories. Feminist theory is a broad, transdisciplinary perspective that strives to understand roles, experiences, and values of individuals on the basis of gender (Miriam, 2005). Feminism is most commonly applied to intimate partner violence, framing an abusive relationship between intimate partners as a gender-based crime supporting the institutionalized oppression of women globally (Nichols, 2013; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). With regard to sexual exploitation, the feminist frame questions whether prostitution or any exchange of sex for something of financial value is or can be voluntary (Wilson & Butler, 2014). Feminist theory and its subsequent contrasting divisions also significantly impact service delivery, as direct service providers disagree in the interpretation of the statistical overrepresentation of women and girls seen in practice (Oakley et al., 2013; Wasco, 2003) and research (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009; Farley, Cotton, Lynne, Zumbeck, & Spiwak, 2008; Sullivan, 2003).

With regard to sexual exploitation or sex work, scholars

and advocates are generally divided into two opposing theoretical camps. One group, usually referred to as neo-abolitionists, condemns all forms of voluntary and involuntary prostitution as a form of oppression against women. Neo-abolitionists, including radical and Marxist feminists, postulate that prostitution is never entirely consensual and cannot be regarded as such (Tiefenbrun, 2002). The other group, including many sex positivists, argues that a woman has a right to choose prostitution and other forms of sex work as a form of employment or even as a career.

*Neo-abolitionist perspectives: Radical & Marxist feminism.*

Radical and Marxist feminism serve as the roots of current day, neo-abolitionist perspectives with regard to sexual exploitation of women and girls. Radical feminism is rooted in its understanding of social organization and structure as inherently patriarchal, as sexism exists to maintain male privilege and patriarchal social order (Loue, 2001). Radical feminists and patriarchal theorists frame issues of violence against women in a long line of institutional and structural sexism and paternalistic views. Dobash and Dobash (1979) first identified the tenets of this theory, which stipulates that violence against women is a systemic form of men's domination and social control of women. Thus, assaults occur primarily because of institutionalized male privilege, as men believe it is their right to enact violence against women.

The patriarchal organization of both government and society has provided a social context for the widespread sexist acceptance of hierarchy, thereby excluding women from the public sector, higher education, structural labor forces, and religious institutions (Loue, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This also contributed to a male centered perspective, in which women had no place in holding highly respected jobs in the community and were consequently confined to the home. Argued from this model of oppression, the central tenet of sexual commerce rests in male domination and the structural inequalities between men and women. Sexual commerce provides a patriarchal right of access to women's bodies, thus perpetuating women's subordination to men (Farley, 2005). Radical feminists dispute the use of pornography, as they claim it causes harm and violence against women. For example,

Gloria Steinem and presidents of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Planned Parenthood sent a letter to President Clinton protesting the administration's refusal to define all types of prostitution as "sexual exploitation" (Stolz, 2005). Because radical feminists generally view all commercial sex acts as patriarchal and oppressive, advocates should be inclined to ban all forms of sex work and sex industry from existence (Weitzer, 2007).

Like radical feminism, Marxist feminism is another neo-abolitionist stance that generally views all forms of sexual commerce as a form of violence against women. Although Marxism had very little to do with women, Marxist feminists have argued that sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism, that which is most one's own and yet is taken away (MacKinnon, 1989). Marxist feminism posits women's oppression on the economic dependence on men in a male-centric society (Bryson, 1992) and argues that capitalism continues to be the overarching oppressor of women. As long as capitalism exists, women will live in a patriarchal state and economically depend on men in a society structured around social class.

In this model, economic exploitation includes many forms, primarily prostitution and pornography, and therefore must be viewed as oppressions of sex and class. Women's sexuality and sexual energy is appropriated by the men who buy or control the sexual services exchange (i.e., pimps) just as any worker's energy is appropriated to the capitalists for their profits, leading to alienation of one's bodily capacities and very bodily being (Miriam, 2005). Marxist feminism specifically critiques the use of pornography and other forms of voluntary and involuntary sexual exchanges for money. Catherine MacKinnon, a Marxist feminist legal scholar, argues that all forms of pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking are abuses of sex and a form of power taken away from women (MacKinnon, 1982).

Both radical and Marxist feminism have been criticized for their focus on sexually exploited or trafficked victims and the lack of women's rights to choose careers in sex work (Kesler, 2002; Wolken, 2004). In addition, arguments have ironically been regarded as paternalistic, in that the abolishment of prostitution is viewed as for the good of prostitutes (Meyers, 2013).

Critics argue that categorizing everyone as victims of sex trafficking (or not) creates an unhelpful dichotomy within the law and social services of looking for victims that are always under some form of force, fraud, or coercion and therefore under the control of another (FitzGerald & Munro, 2012; Snyder-Hall, 2010). Critics also argue that these forms of feminism do not support the autonomy of women currently exchanging or who have exchanged sex for money when they choose to leave the field or provide any subsequent form of advocacy work (Meyers, 2013). Finally, some critics have argued that capitalism is a current reality, especially in countries like the U.S., and Marxist feminism loses the ability to view gender, sexuality, and class together within current day society (Beloso, 2012). In response to many of these criticisms, a new feminist framework arguing for women's right to choose sex work has emerged, adding to an entrenched debate of feminism, choice, and freedom.

*Pro-sex work perspective: Sex positivism.* The pro-sex work perspective, or sex positivism, split from previously derived feminist schools of thought to advocate for women's right to an autonomous choice of sex work. Advocates of this perspective hold that sexuality, including paid forms, is consensual in many cases and that a woman should be free to make her own decision regarding the type of work in which she chooses to partake (Ferguson et al., 1984). Similarly, sex positivists argue that the notion of intimacy and what actions or sexual acts are considered intimate should be decided by the woman. For example, former sex worker, activist, and writer, Maggie McNeil, argues that there are many professions that may be described as intimate (i.e., nurses, gynecologists, child care professionals) and that all women, including sex workers and prostitutes, should be able to choose what is considered intimate and what is not (Russell & Garcia, 2014). Thus, any mandate or perspective dictating to women that their choice of work is wrong remains dangerous and patriarchal (Kesler, 2002). Sex positivists shift the model of person-centered services from a typically neo-abolitionist model that rescues and protects victims from prostitution and sexual exploitation to providing services for women who work in the sex industry (Shah, 2004).

Critiques of sex positivism are numerous. First, the neo-abolitionist view in itself directly disputes the main principal of sex positivism, as these two frameworks grapple with finding common ground on issues of pornography and prostitution or sex work (Metcalf & Woodhams, 2012). Others have argued that sex positivism and the issue of consent cannot be addressed without also considering the high rates of sexual assault and abuse histories, in addition to a lack of economic options (Hughes, 2005; Potterat, Rothenberg, Muth, Darrow, & Phillips-Plummer, 2001). In addition to opposing feminist frameworks, some religious organizations state that sexual integrity is jeopardized on a national level with this framework, as moral culture is damaged when sex becomes commercialized (Weitzer, 2007). Debates from both the feminist left and the religious right add yet another layer of complication to understanding these philosophical perspectives that pervasively influence law and social service sectors.

*Intersectionality.* Regardless of opposing opinions, intersectionality may be intertwined with previously described feminist perspectives to explain a woman's varied experiences based on her race, class, sexual orientation or another identity she holds in addition to her sex (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Intersectionality declares that the impact of sexism is qualitatively different depending on women's class or race identities (Crenshaw, 1991). The impact of intersectionality was first utilized to explain the following within the context of domestic violence: (1) the socially structured indivisibility of certain victims (mainly that all women's experiences are not the same); (2) who the "appropriate" victims are and the denial of victimization; and (3) the real-world consequences of intersection and domestic violence (Bograd, 1999). Since then, intersectionality has impacted the way in which scholars view relationships between interrelated social divisions in society and among people's lives (Anthias, 2013). Feminists using an intersectional framework maintain that gender (or gender and class in the case of Marxist feminism) cannot be used alone to understand a woman's oppression and the impact of sexual exploitation on her (Beloso, 2012). Subsequently, feminist legal scholars (Wolken, 2004) and researchers (Chong, 2014) have described the devaluation of women of color specifically as

victimization by sexual exploitation, because they are even more likely to be considered as embodying perversions of desire and to be treated systemically as a lower class of individuals than their White counterparts.

Main criticisms of intersectionality include a lack of defined intersectional methodology and empirical validity (Nash, 2008). In addition, some critics also argue that intersectionality has only primarily been used to address Black women's experience and is not politically and empirically inclusive of other identity intersections (Anthias, 2013), such as sexual orientation or even other races. Intersectionality is more commonly viewed as a framework to understand the impact of multiple identities on the oppression of women but is criticized for actually contributing to or creating additional hierarchies for women.

*Political economy perspective.* First used to address intimate partner violence, the political economy perspective has evolved to recognize important tenets of intersectionality and is applied to all forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking. The political economy perspective describes the relationship between the state and economy, arguing that violence against women occurs because of the economic welfare and political processes driving the state (Adelman, 2008). For example, political welfare reform and the economic state exacerbate some women's experiences, as poor women became more dependent on cash and in-kind assistance from sexual partners, intimate relationships, children's fathers, etc. (Edin & Lein, 1997). Marxist feminism and the political economy perspective share the understanding that political economy and lower social economic status may drive sexual commerce; however, political economy perspective is rooted more in capitalistic differences in wealth alone, rather than differences in wealth as a result of systemic oppression against women. Thus, the political economy allows for unequal opportunity and pay for women and drives women to be more dependent and find opportunities to survive (often times from men), thus shifting the discourse from individualized deviancy toward structural inequality.

In view of sexual exploitation, women who are poor and have few options for survival may fall victims to traffickers



or may prostitute themselves when they seemingly have no other choice (Anthias, 2013). Without the possession of cultural or social capital, women ranging from exotic dancers to trafficked women struggle against economic, social, and sexual oppressions (Konstantopoulos et al., 2013). Women would not be compelled to sell sexual or erotic services if the political environment at the policy level afforded equal opportunities to gain social capital, thus increasing poor women's vulnerability to being preyed upon or trafficked. Proponents of the political economy perspective point to studies with disproportionate percentages of housing instability and poverty among youth who trade sex to survive, as well as the lack of economic options for girls and women who engage in prostitution (Farley et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2011; Valera, Sawyer, & Schiraldi, 2001; Van Leeuwen et al., 2004; Watson, 2011; Wilson & Butler, 2014).

Like critics of Marxism or radical feminism, criticisms of the political economy include the removal of a woman's choice to prostitute or trade sex (Weitzer, 2012). With this perspective, personal agency is removed entirely and replaced with structural and economic barriers to "appropriate" options of employment or money (Wolken, 2004). A woman's ability to choose is called into question.

*Legal perspectives.* Divided feminist and political theories of exploitation have practical consequences, namely the laws and legal frameworks by which individuals purchase, provide, and facilitate sex. Contrasting theoretical frameworks drive the debate with regard to the prohibition, decriminalization, or legalization of prostitution and commercial sex. Although one approach has been applied to the confines of United States law, the debate remains heated and ongoing.

*Prohibitionist perspective.* With the exception of parts of Nevada, the U.S. currently maintains a prohibitionist stance on prostitution, as anyone who participates in the promotion or participation of sexual activities for profit in the U.S. may be charged with prostitution and commercial vice (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). No distinction is made between those who buy, sell, or facilitate the selling of sex acts. Exceptions include cases that involve: (1) minors, in which any commercial sex act is illegal; and (2) adults, only when elements of force, fraud, or coercion are present.

Considering the complexity of perspectives on the concept of choice in prostitution, it is unsurprising that many would disagree with U.S. law. Some who support prohibition point to studies with high rates of homelessness, mental health trauma, and sexual/physical assault over the course of prostitution and indicate that most in prostitution do not freely consent; therefore legalization and decriminalization would not decrease its harm to women and girls (Farley et al., 2008). Others, including many of those in the sex positivist movement, argue that countries like the U.S. set a high standard or burden of proof for trafficking victims and criminalize other women who sell sex who also may be in need of services (Wolken, 2004). Pro-sex feminists, such as Carole Vance, argue that these standards are detrimental to women, as women are viewed and treated as criminals unless there is proof of force or coercion (Vance, 2011). It is important to understand the current national legal perspective in order to understand the proposed and much debated alternatives.

*Decriminalization & legalization.* Utilized to varying degrees across the world and in parts of Nevada, two alternative and controversial methods of legally addressing prostitution are continually proposed among legal and academic scholars. First, the decriminalization of prostitution is offered, which would remove criminal penalties for any prostitution-related activity (Hughes, 2005). There are a few different models in which this may apply. For example, in Sweden, the sellers of sex are decriminalized, however the buyers of sex, in addition to pimps and traffickers, are not. This contrasts greatly from the model in New Zealand in 2003, when all parties involved in the buying, selling, and facilitating of sex were decriminalized (Wyler & Siskin, 2010).

Equally (if not more) controversial, the second method to address prostitution in the law is the legalization of prostitution in its entirety. This model is currently utilized in New Zealand as well as the Netherlands, Australia, and other countries (Cho, Dreher, & Neumayer, 2013). As the name suggests, legalization of prostitution frees all those who participate in, sell, buy, or facilitate the selling of sex from criminal liability and responsibility. Thus, prostitution is redefined as a form of service work (Hughes, 2005). With this method, selling sex

may be regulated and taxed, contributing to national economies. Many who favor legalization argue that ability to apply labor standards will help women and provide them access to legalized health insurance or other benefits of the legalized working world (Sullivan, 2003). Two independent studies respectively reported that 44% and 57% of female prostitutes in their samples indicated that legalized prostitution would help them or keep them safer (Farley & Barkan, 2008; Valera et al., 2001); however, both of these studies concluded that this could be a result of the extensive rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and other mental health issues.

Advocates of both legalization and decriminalization argue that these methods reduce the stigmatization of individuals who sell sex (Richards, 1979; Weitzer, 2012). Some former prostitutes and sex workers have also been influential in the promotion of legalization or decriminalization through writing and advocacy organizations (Russell & Garcia, 2014). One such example is the organization COYOTE, an acronym for "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics." Founded by Margo St. James, a former sex worker convicted of prostitution, COYOTE is one of the major social organizations to challenge the prohibitionist stance on prostitution in favor of decriminalization (Jenness, 1990). The organization and other similar-minded advocates maintain that voluntary prostitution is a legitimate and chosen work and should be reflected in legal policy and practice as such. Other prominent advocates of decriminalizing and legalizing prostitution have argued that the morality of prohibitionist stances has no place in the law and may cause further harm to women (Richards, 1979; Wolken, 2004).

Criticisms of both decriminalization and legalization of prostitution or sex work are most often linked to one another. Critics claim that decriminalization is best understood as a transition or part of a legalization or abolition, but not as an endpoint itself (Hughes, 2005). Some claim that either decriminalization or legalization of prostitution would result in the normalization of commercial sex and thereby legitimize sexual demands of an employer in any field of his (or her) employees (Anderson, 2002). Although evidence has emerged globally indicating that legalized prostitution may increase human trafficking (Cho et al., 2013), this analysis has not been conducted on domestic trafficking in the U.S., where the dynamics

of prostitution and sexual exploitation differ from other parts of the world.

Scholar Melissa Farley (2004), as well as other advocates of both forms of prostitution, condemned New Zealand for their legislature decriminalizing and then legalizing prostitution. She summarized the arguments of many abolitionists, stating that: (1) harm to women is not decreased by legalization or decriminalization; (2) stigmatization and violence against women continue to affect women under legalized or decriminalized policies; and (3) the choice to prostitute oneself is made because of a lack of other economic options and exists as another form of oppression against women. These arguments repeatedly appear in the literature and in response to growing global changes to prostitution laws (Hughes, 2005; MacKinnon, 1982; Raphael & Shapiro, 2002, 2005).

The criticisms and support for legalization, decriminalization and prohibition of prostitution are ongoing and continually divisive in the field. The breadth with which these frameworks guide actions of policymakers, activists, and scholars is extensive, with no end in sight to the debates. Although the bulk of the theoretical work has been and continues to be executed at the macro level, other perspectives have emerged and contribute to the dialogue of sexual exploitation and sex work.

### Micro Theories at the Individual Level

In sharp contrast to the wealth of scholarship with regard to macro level theoretical perspectives, as well as the contentious debates and divisions among them, there is a dearth of academic theories at the micro or individual and relationship level. An extensive search among books and articles regarding sexual exploitation, prostitution, survival sex, and sex trafficking resulted in the utilization of varying theoretical perspectives that may be grouped to describe either: (1) the victimization or the process into sexual exploitation or prostitution; or (2) the exit process of sexual exploitation or prostitution. Unlike macro theories in this area or micro theories of other fields, there is very little support, debate, or even progress in the literature. Instead, individual articles or scholars have hypothesized and applied one theoretical perspective without the replication of other studies or support from researchers. As

such, individual-level theoretical perspectives are reviewed here within the context of entry into and exit out of sexual exploitation and sex work.

### *Victimization and Entry Perspectives*

While other studies address individual risk factors or common themes of recruitment and initiation experiences (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Wilson & Butler, 2014), they are predominantly descriptive and not theoretical or process oriented. A comprehensive search provided very few studies which report the integration or even guided use of theory in understanding the pathway into sexual exploitation or sex work. Although the exceptions to this, four studies in all, are described here, it is important to note that no theory applied to entry into sexual exploitation or sex work was supported or described by more than one author or study.

First, Reid (2012) applied life course theory to victimization in sex trafficking, which suggests that the impact of any experience, including victimization in this case, is influenced by the person's life stage. Reid found that indicators of harmful informal social control processes during childhood and adolescence in particular were common, creating a desire for acceptance and love commonly exacerbating initial entrapment. The desire for a better life and love, in combination with curiosity about sex work and attraction to fast cash, resulted in a girl's entry into the sex industry.

In the second study, Gwadz and colleagues (Gwadz et al., 2009) were guided by the theory of social control, emphasizing the role of youths' bonds to conventional society as deterrents to delinquent or deviant behavior. Without these bonds, Gwadz and colleagues hypothesized a propensity for the initiation of homeless youth into trading sex. Their results showed that social control did play a role in homeless youths' initiation; however, other factors, such as benefits to street economy and barriers to formal economy, also contributed to the initiation.

Third, Whitbeck & Simons (1993) explored a social learning model of victimization in their study of homeless adolescents and adults. Adolescents in both the model and particular study were more likely to come from abusive family backgrounds and rely on deviant survival strategies such as

survival sex. As a result, they were more likely to face criminal justice consequences and experience increased victimization.

A fourth study used structural-choice theory of victimization (Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, Cauce, & Whitbeck, 2004) to examine the context-specific effects of lifestyles and daily routines on the risk for victimization. Tyler and colleagues used this framework to interpret their study's observed association between survival sex and sexual victimization among homeless youth. The prevalent associations were a result of the choice afforded to them because of low income and lack of other survival options.

In addition to these individual studies, many descriptive studies of sexually exploited women and girls have showed high rates of substance abuse and addiction occurring before or as a result of sexual exploitation (Burnette et al., 2008; El-Bassel, Witte, Wada, Gilbert, & Wallace, 2001; Tyler, Gervais, & Davidson, 2013; Valera et al., 2001), yet theoretical underpinnings of addiction theory with particular regard to this population remain vastly underdeveloped. Differences in the addiction process and its influence on the pathway to sexual exploitation or sex work are documented descriptively but not explored theoretically; therefore, it is important to consider how they may relate to the process.

Addiction has been theoretically understood as a disease, a behavioral disorder, a cognitive disturbance, and/or an expression of, or way of coping with, internal and interpersonal conflict and trauma (West & Brown, 2013). However, the emerging theory of addiction has worked to combine several biological, neurological, and emotional aspects of these viewpoints. According to West and Brown (2013), addiction should be understood as a chronic condition involving a repeated powerful motivation to engage in a rewarding behavior, acquired as a result of engaging in that behavior, that has significant potential for unintended harm. The pathologies underlying addiction involve one of three types of abnormalities which either: (1) are independent of addiction, such as depression, anxiety, or impulsiveness; (2) stem from the addictive behavior, such as acquisition of a strongly entrenched habit or acquired drive; or (3) exist in a social or physical environment, such as presence of strong social or other pressures to engage

in activity. In other words, the theory of addiction may derive as a response to a mental health factor, an internal motivation, or a social environment.

While the theoretical component of addiction is not empirically tested in the sexual exploitation literature, use of substances and subsequent addiction is well documented, specifically among sexually exploited women (Clawson et al., 2009; Schauer, 2006). Many women and girls often begin using substances prior to their exploitation or become addicted to substances as a result of a pimp's influence or as a coping mechanism (Farley & Barkan, 2008; Miller et al., 2011). Only one study examined the differences in pathways to drug use and found that individuals who began trading sex in adulthood were more likely to use drugs before trading sex than juveniles, who were more likely to use drugs after trading sex (Martin, Hearst, & Widome, 2010). With the empirical support in the literature regarding substance use/abuse and sexual exploitation as a risk factor that precedes or follows initiation into exploitation, there is a distinct need to explore substance abuse theories and their impact on the pathway into sexual exploitation.

### *Exit Perspectives*

Similar to the entry progression, the process by which women and girls exit sexual exploitation or sex work is equally complex and theoretically underdeveloped. Drawing from qualitative analysis and observations of a woman's exit from prostitution, a few studies propose models or stages to exiting prostitution and sexual exploitation (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). One theory of exiting prostitution is proposed as empirically testable (Cimino, 2012). Few theories exist that explain the exiting process and those that do exist are difficult to test quantitatively. This article applies the integrative model of behavioral prediction to examine intentions to exit prostitution through attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy beliefs that underlie a woman's intention to exit prostitution. Constructs unique to prostitution—agency and societal context—enhance the model. This theory may explain and predict an exit from street-level prostitution (Cimino, 2012),

yet no studies have done so to date.

The "Phases of the Lifestyle Model" (Williamson & Folaron, 2003) targets street-level prostitution only. This process involves phases of disillusionment with the lifestyle of prostitution after violence, drug addiction, arrests, and trauma and then exiting as a result of negative events and attitude changes. The second model, known as the "Breakaway Model" (Månsson & Hedin, 1999) includes an experiential tipping point of a negative experience, resulting in the contemplation of and attempt to exit. This model postulates that women are successful in staying away from prostitution with a change of social networks. Third, Sanders' "Typology of Transitions" (2007) identifies four transitions out of prostitution: (1) reactionary transition—women experience a life-changing event sparking their departure; (2) gradual transition—women begin to access formal support services slowly, starting their progress; (3) natural progression—women develop a natural or intrinsic desire to exit; and (4) yo-yoing—women drift in and out of prostitution, treatment centers, and the criminal justice system. Fourth, the "Integrative Model of Exiting" (Baker et al., 2010) draws on stages of change behavior, when the final exit occurs after numerous attempts are made, resulting in a change of identity, habits, and social networks.

Most recently, a predictive theory of intentions combined several theories to estimate the path to exiting (Cimino, 2012). This article applies the integrative model of behavioral prediction to examine intentions to exit prostitution through attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy beliefs that underlie a woman's intention to exit prostitution. This proposed but untested theory assumes that all behavior is under a person's choice in light of four elements: (1) the action (e.g., to exit); (2) the target (e.g., the woman); (3) the context (e.g., prostitution); and (4) the time period under which the behavior is to be observed (e.g., permanently). The surrounding attitudes, norms, the woman's self-efficacy and intentions, skill, and environment also contribute to her choice. This proposed theory targets voluntary exits only, and does not address any pimp or trafficker-related quandaries.



### Relation between Micro and Macro Level Theories

All four studies addressing entry into trading or survival sex focus on victimization as a partial consequence of additional vulnerabilities, which seem to support the neo-abolitionist perspective at the macro level. Authors point to the studies' reduced options because of various adversities and traumas, ranging from family backgrounds and abuse to poverty and homelessness. Theories of addiction also play a role in impacting the course of sexual exploitation and any choices a woman or girl may have. These studies do not necessarily dispute that individuals trading sex had the choice to do so, but rather suggest that they may not have made the same choices without increased vulnerabilities from childhood or in their present situations.

Like entry perspectives, both exit models seem to side with the abolitionist perspective in that they describe many reasons why a woman would not be able to be able to fully make a decision on her own, free of any other factors. Sex positivists would suggest that these theoretical explanations for prostitution remove the possibility of full personal agency and that a woman could make her own choice to do sex work. Neo-abolitionists would argue that sex work is chosen only because of the complete lack of other options and therefore can never truly be described as a "choice." Even in these smaller studies, macro-level theoretical perspectives and the debate between the neo-abolitionists and the sex-positivists can certainly be found.

### Conclusion

It is evident that the majority of the research and debate is centered in the macro and structural theories of causation and remains substantially underdeveloped in micro level theories at the individual and relationship level. The heated debates of various feminist perspectives have greatly influenced the divisions within the legal frameworks with which countries of the world are governed. Even with the extensive theoretical and legal writing at the macro level, the amount of empirically tested work remains limited. With the high levels of responses

from one legal or academic scholar to another, often in rebuttal or defense of his/her own particular framework (Farley, 2005; Raphael & Shapiro, 2005; Weitzer, 2012; Wolken, 2004), no clear consensus is likely to be reached any time soon. Micro level perspectives contribute to the understanding of entry and exit processes for women and girls in sexual exploitation or sex work, but contain very little outside empirical support. Regardless of the contrasting body of works between macro and micro level theories, theoretical advancements play an important role in understanding sexual exploitation and sex work among females as well as the policies, services, and interventions available to them in present day.

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