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## The sex industry and business practice: An obstacle to women's equality

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## SYNOPSIS

This article looks at the increasing links between the sex industry and business in the form of executives and companies using strip clubs and brothels to network and broker deals, using prostituted women as bribes, or offering visits to brothels as Christmas bonuses. This problem is only just beginning to be recognized by feminist researchers and feminist activists. The factors that are creating this problem are the normalization of the sex industry, and in some cases its legalization and decriminalization, the entry of women to previously male dominated industries and professions, and the difficulty some men in business have in relating to women as equals. This sex industry use constitutes a serious obstacle to the achievement of women's equal opportunities in business sectors where it takes place. Women employees have less chance to create the relationships and deals that would enable them to gain promotion and recognition, and may have to suffer indignities visited upon them by male colleagues on their return from sex industry venues.

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This article investigates the effects of the normalization of the sex industry on women's equal opportunities in business and the professions in western countries. The sex industry seems to be increasingly utilized by male executives for networking, for the provision of bribes, to award bonuses to male employees, for product launches and client entertainment. This has become an issue of concern in the last decade for feminist organizations such as the Fawcett Society in the UK, for equal opportunity agencies such as the UK Equal Opportunity Commission, and even for government ministers. There is, however, little academic research or literature on this practice and this article is exploratory, aimed at raising the issue and stimulating research.

The intertwining of the sex industry and business is a corollary of the normalization of the sex industry in the last 20 years in western countries, where it has become a respectable market sector (Bureau of Business Research, 2009; Jeffreys, 2009; Poulin, 2005). In Australia, the Netherlands and Germany pimping, or what used to be called "living off the earnings of prostitution", has been legalized or decriminalized. Prostitution has become economically significant both in the west and in Asian countries where prostitution has been used as a tool of development (Lim, 1998). Prostitution is no longer small-scale, and clandestine.

It has been industrialized and globalized through international strip club chains, through military and peacekeeper prostitution, through pornography, through sex tourism and trafficking (Jeffreys, 2009). As prostitution has been normalized, so the harms that are integral to the practice have increased in significance. They include harms to the women who are prostituted (Farley, 2003, 2004), to good governance in terms of organized crime and corruption (Sullivan, 2007), to cityscapes (Rosewarne, 2005, 2007), and to women's equality. I shall concentrate here, however, on one aspect of these harms, the effect on women's equality in the workplace, in business and the professions, of the increasing practice of business networking and deal making by male professionals in sex industry venues. The proposition that prostitution is harmful to the women who are prostituted is strongly contested by many sex work organizations that are government funded to counter HIV/AIDs (Jeffreys, 2006), and academics who take the "sex work" position, i.e. that sex is legitimate work (Agustin, 2007), not much different from other professions. I do not propose to rehearse this controversy here, but to consider an effect of the normalization of prostitution that has not been considered or responded to, as yet, by the sex work movement. If one effect is to hinder the equal opportunities of women who are not prostituted, then

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it might have to be recognized that the development of the industry is on a collision course with an improvement in the status of women, even if the harms to individual prostituted women are discounted.

### **The development of prostitution as a significant market sector**

There has been a very considerable expansion in the size and profitability of the international sex industry in the 1990s and early 2000s. The increasing normalization and profitability of the sex industry is particularly apparent in the area of tabletop dancing clubs which offer private dances. Though brothel prostitution is still illegal in most jurisdictions, strip clubs which have clear links to prostitution are legal everywhere and gaining in respectability (Jeffreys, 2008). Spearmint Rhino, the American chain owned by John Gray, now has clubs in the UK, Moscow, Australia, as well as the US. British investigative journalists, Jonathan Prynn and Adrian Gattton, report that the Tottenham Court Road, London, club makes profits of more than 3 lb a minute (Prynn & Gattton, 2003). In 2001, a year after it opened, the club made a “tax profit of more than £1.75 million from sales of £7.8 million, equivalent to takings of £150,000 a week” (Prynn & Gattton, 2003). Spearmint Rhino operates in the common style of lap dancing clubs with dancers paying 80 lb per night to work and the club taking 35% of the earnings from customers. The strip club industry is estimated to be worth GBP22.1 million a year to the Scottish economy alone (Currie, 2006). The industry in the US is estimated to be worth US\$15 billion and to constitute about a fifth of the \$75 billion world market (Montgomery, 2005). The “adult cabaret” business in the state of Texas alone was worth \$266.6 million in 2007 i.e. two-thirds as large as the Texas media industry as a whole, which was worth in 2006, \$330.1 million (Bureau of Business Research, 2009).

Business links with prostitution are most developed in those contexts where the industry has been legalized. In the legalized context of Australia the industry has burgeoned, and there are now market reports on the industry for those who are thinking of investing in it, or setting up prostitution retail outlets. An industry report on prostitution and strip clubs in Australia in 2007 provides much useful information on the way the industry has developed (IBISWorld, 2007). It states that the industry in Australia was worth 2.1 billion Australian dollars in 2005–2006, an 11% rise on the previous year (IBISWorld, 2007). It says that the continued growth of 6.8% per year is dependent on continuing public tolerance of the industry. The report recognizes very well that legalization/decriminalization is the foundation of the growth and profits of the industry. The industry now has 15–20 thousand “sex workers” according to the season. Peak times are around sporting events such as the racing Grand Prix, which is heavily marketed to corporations as an event for business to network and gain publicity.

### **The new glass ceiling**

This growth and increased social acceptance of the industry of prostitution can provide a boost to the masculine culture of workplaces. The masculine culture that dominates in the business world has been indicted as a main reason for

the existence of a glass ceiling that reduces the number of women who rise to the top in corporations (Sinclair, 1998). The effect of the glass ceiling is well demonstrated by a report in Australia, for instance, that indicates some disturbing trends (EOWA, 2006). The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) reveals that in 2006, as in previous years, women were poorly represented in senior positions (EOWA, 2006). While the percentage of women on board seats had marginally increased there had been a decline in the number of companies with at least one woman member on the Board. There was no increase in women Executive Managers in real terms since 2003. Comparisons with Canada, UK and USA are unfavourable and in terms of companies with at least one woman on the Board Australian women lagged seriously behind the UK and the USA. Percentages of women executives were also well behind those in Canada and the USA. Below 10% of women were in line executive positions, and line experience is needed for top corporate positions. This poor performance is unlikely to be alleviated by the significant normalization of prostitution in Australia where the industry is legalized or decriminalized in the majority of Australian states and territories.

Masculine workplace culture, which is likely to include bonding between men which excludes women, masculine forms of humour and communication in the workplace, and more overt forms of sexism and harassment, has been identified as a factor that inhibits women's participation in the profession of engineering, for instance (Bastilich, Franzway, Gill, Mills & Sharp, 2007). The culture of corporations is formed from the interests of men in a culture of male dominance (Mellor, 2006), and is likely to be organized around typical traits of socially constructed masculinity such as risk-taking (Horton, 2002). Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin have shown how masculine workplace cultures organize sexuality in ways which amplify active male sexuality and treat women as sexual bodies, practices which are particularly oppressive for women (Hearn & Parkin, 1995). The use of the sex industry by corporations and executives is one aspect of this. The effect of this masculine culture is to exclude women from the networking that is vital to their success in the workplace. Previous research on the barriers to women's equal opportunities in business and the professions has found that women describe “inhospitable and exclusionary environments” as providing a barrier. The research shows that most organizations are male-led and dominated by a “good old boy network” and that women are mostly excluded from these networks (Sinclair, 1994, 1998; Klenke, 1996; Jackson, 2001, p. 32).

It is well acknowledged in glass ceiling research that women's exclusion from networking has a negative effect upon their prospects of promotion and successful careers. Such networking provides “information exchange, career planning and strategizing, professional support and encouragement, and increased visibility” (Jackson, 2001, p. 32). The factors which are involved in creating women's unequal access to such networking include the double shift they have to perform in working within the home as well as outside, but some relate specifically to the way that male workers create an exclusionary culture. Jackson, in her work on barriers to women's mobility, states: “If organizations are interested in retaining talented women and minorities, a

change in organizational culture is called for” (Jackson, 2001, p. 33). The finance industry is particularly discriminatory in its practice towards women (Woodward & Ozbilgin, 1999). Dianne Jacobs, Principal of Human Resources at the finance industry firm, Goldman Sachs/JP Morgan, in a paper on this problem, states that the executive group needs to, “actively ensure women are included, are visible at key client and corporate events, are heard and not left out of the information loop” (Jacobs, 2004, p. 16). Recourse to the sex industry by company executives in order to bond, create networks and do deals, is in direct contradiction to these prescriptions.

Articles on the glass ceiling for women, the invisible barrier that prevents women achieving equal opportunities in the workplace, are increasingly mentioning the role of visiting strip clubs in the restriction of women's opportunities in the workplace. In 2002 in a BBC discussion in the UK on equal pay, Julie Mellor, chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission criticized the culture of businesses in the City of London (Talking Point, 2002). She described the culture as “appalling” and said, “You have a culture... where entertainment is going to strip clubs, someone was actually asked to strip off and give a client a massage, entertainment included hiring escort agencies”. An article in *The Economist* in 2005 comments on the three main explanations that top business women in America give for why so few of them get to the highest level. The first of these involves the sex industry: “First comes exclusion from informal networks. In many firms jock-talk and late-night boozing still oil the wheels of progress. In America and elsewhere it has become almost traditional for sales teams to take potential clients to strip clubs and the like. These activities specifically exclude most women” (The *The Economist*, 2005, 23 July, p. 67). Research on British women executives on international assignments has shown that they face greater problems with adaptation in traditionally patriarchal cultures. Those working in China and Japan, for instance, were much more likely to report difficulties with cultural adaptation and to face specific obstacles and prejudices (Forster, 1999). This is likely to be exacerbated by the very open use of the sex industry for business networking in these countries.

The problems that these connections create for women's equality have recently been pinpointed by feminist activists. Thus in the UK the Fawcett Society, a feminist group founded in the nineteenth century, launched a campaign on 1 April, 2008, entitled *Sexism and the City*, which outlines the forces involved in making employment for women in the city unfair to women (Fawcett Society, 2008). The campaign manifesto identifies the practice of male bosses and co-employees in the city visiting strip clubs as one force which undermines women's equal opportunities (Fawcett Society, 2008, p. 10). In 2009 the Society released a report entitled *Corporate Sexism* arguing that women's security and access to promotion is affected by sex industry exposure in the workplace, through pornography use and the practice of corporate entertaining in lap dancing clubs in particular, and suggesting legal and policy solutions for women workers (Banyard & Lewis, 2009). The report provides evidence from the accounts of women workers to suggest that visits to lap dancing clubs from workplaces were increasingly normal.

Even the Law Society in the UK which represents the interests of solicitors has criticized the culture of top corporate law firms. In a 2006 research report it calls this, “a culture of heavy drinking and visits to strip bars, which could drive away gay men and discourage women from joining” (Miller, 2006). The issue has become sufficiently important in the UK for Harriet Harman, the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party to demand action (Coates, 2009). The *Times* newspaper suggests that this move was prompted by the revelation that 3i, Britain's largest equity house, had sent a “men only” invitation for a party in the West End of London, hosted by Agent Provocateur, the lingerie firm. Harman told a trade union conference that companies that used lap dancing clubs for corporate entertainment were “harassing female employees”. Her concern is shared by the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission which held an inquiry into gender imbalance in the financial services industry, in 2009 (EHRC, 2009). The inquiry found that the gender pay gap for annual gross earnings was average, 60% and for performance related pay, 80%. The report identified a number of workplace culture issues that affected women's experience and opportunities, including “client networking activities that exclude women” or demean women such as male dominated sports, lap dancing clubs and hostess bars (EHRC, 2009, p. 12). The issue of the effect of business use of the sex industry has now attracted some attention by a mainstream equal opportunity body, but it has not yet attracted research by feminist academics.

### Prostitution-related business practices

#### *Networking and entertainment for male employees*

Business use of the sex industry will depend upon which aspects of the industry are sufficiently normalized or legalized in particular jurisdictions. In the majority of countries the industry of prostitution is not legalized, though strip clubs, and in some cases “escort agencies” are, and it is likely to be these latter forms that will be engaged by businesses for the purpose of networking and entertaining. Links between the use of strip clubs and business practice are common in the UK and the US where the industry of prostitution has not been legalized. Estimates of the extent to which business usage contributes to the takings of strip clubs vary from one third, from the owner of the strip chain Rick's in the US (O'Donnell, 2006), to 40% by Dave Manack, the editor of the US strip club industry magazine, *Exotic Dancer* (Antilla, 2005). Peter Stringfellow, strip club owner from London, said that “people from Wall Street and the City and Europe play a huge part” in his business (Antilla, 2005). He explains, “The guys who come to me work hard under great pressure, and when they've just done a £6 million deal they're not going to go to McDonald's and be home by 10 o'clock. They want to take their client somewhere they can enjoy an excellent meal in the restaurant, drink fine wine and look at the beautiful girls” (Antilla, 2005). A *Telegraph* newspaper report from the UK quoted Xavier Alcan, the managing director of the broker Cantor Fitzgerald, commenting in a courtroom that “whoring” was “common practice” in his industry. Alcan said that, “On a good night at Spearmint Rhino you can see 80% of the market” (Smith, 2006). The

journalist, Matthew Lynn, comments, “In effect, just as their fathers might have taken clients to one of the gentlemen's clubs of Pall Mall, so brokers today take their business associates to see lap dancers. The old gentlemen's clubs banned women – some still do – whereas the lap dancing establishments merely intimidate them” (Lynn, 2006). He explains that if one bank won't let its workers take clients to lap dancing clubs then its rivals certainly will.

Business use of strip clubs is by no means restricted to finance houses, and it can be extremely profitable for the clubs. In 2006 the Manhattan strip club Scores settled a lawsuit over a contested \$241,000 bill belonging to the former CEO of St. Louis information technology company Savvis, Robert McCormick. McCormick resigned amid an investigation into the bill, which was charged to his corporate American Express card (Antilla, 2005). Law firms too make use of the sex industry. An attorney who was a regular at the US strip club Rick's, Rohit Sabharwal, stated in 2006 that he “often takes clients of his small law firm with him and such entertaining was common when he was at a large firm, too” (O'Donnell, 2006). Sabharwal says that “Nobody really objects...I think it's a lot more civilized in the law profession. I don't think women have a problem succeeding in law firms” (O'Donnell, 2006). The problems of sex industry usage arise as women seek equality of opportunity in particular business sectors. In 1997 there were court cases alleging discrimination through strip club usage involving the auto industry in Detroit (Meredith, 1997). The advantages of strip club visits are described by an auto industry salesman who said he had entertained auto executives at strip clubs thus, “You get a bunch of guys in a room who don't know each other, you get drunk and look at naked women and the next day you're great friends” (Meredith, 1997). Such comments suggest that the male bonding that takes place through the sharing of naked women can be particularly efficacious.

In Australia, where brothel and escort prostitution have been legalized in most states and territories, the possibilities for business use of the sex industry are more extensive. Strip clubs and brothels in Australia promote themselves on their websites to businessmen for meetings, after work activities, networking with clients and product promotions. The first legal brothel set up in Queensland after legalization in 1999, called Purely Blue, provides “corporate membership” for \$300 for the first year and \$250 thereafter, rather in the manner of an airline loyalty plan. It is for “the corporate entertainer who wants to provide their clients with the very best executive experience”. Corporate members get “the full executive experience package with complimentary personal toiletries provided to pamper you”. New members get a pack of “Purely Blue adult taste in coffee of their choice plus a subscription to BRW (*Business Review Weekly*) magazine” (Purely Blue, 2008).

The Penthouse Club in Sydney describes itself as a gentlemen's club but is in fact a brothel that also offers strippers. The website makes it plain that businessmen are a target market niche, “Many gentlemen treat The Penthouse as their own private club. Our discreet lounges with the cool granite bar and billiard table are the perfect venue for sealing that important business deal. And when business is over, fulfill your fantasies in one of our private rooms with its huge double shower or deep, soothing spa” (The Penthouse, 2008).

The Boardroom brothel in Melbourne indicates in its name the kind of clientele it expects. The website explains that “Corporate Membership” is aimed at “the corporate entertainer who brings their clients to us to entertain...there are further bonuses like, reduced Limousine Rentals to help look after and impress your clients” (The Boardroom, 2008). Business and professional women in Australia are not in a position to network with clients in this way and the practice can be seen as a form of discrimination that legalization has opened up.

The practice of men in business fraternising in strip clubs in Australia extends to politicians on the business of the state. In 2007 it was revealed that Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister of Australia and a committed Christian, before his accession to that office, visited the strip club Scores in New York while on official business observing the UN (Summers, 2007). He was invited by Col Allen, editor of the New York Post, owned by Rupert Murdoch, to go to the club along with Australian Labour MP Warren Snowdon. Anne Summers, Australian journalist and director in the 1980s of the Equal Opportunities Commission, writes of her disappointment that this visit was greeted with jovial acceptance in the Australian media despite being a practice that discriminates against women. The newspaper in the Kevin Rudd story is likely to have picked up the bill. Scores strip club, she points out, “settled a contested bill of \$US 241,000 charged to the American Express card of the former CEO of information technology company Savvis” (Summers, 2007). The use of strip clubs for discriminatory male bonding activities offers opportunities for corruption too to men in business and political elites as they hobnob with another male network, organized crime. The Scores club was controlled in the 1990s by the Gambino mafia family (Raab, 1998).

#### *Bribes and bonuses*

Corporations also use the sex industry to offer bribes and inducements to potential clients. In Australia the provision of prostituted women as bribes is carried out principally through escort agencies. Thus Ibisworld explains that the biggest escort agency in Australia, Royalty Services, which has an annual turnover of \$20 million dollars, provides “escorts with modelling backgrounds to clients for negotiable prices ranging from \$5000 per night to \$130,000 per month” (IBISWorld, 2007, p. 23), with “the bulk of business being visiting businessmen being entertained by corporations attempting to gain their custom”.

Corporations may also supply prostituted women to their male workers as bonuses or supply prostituted women to oil relations with trade unions. The use of brothel visits as bonuses in Australia was sufficiently startling to the media in the UK as to prompt a 2001 BBC News feature (Mercer, 2001). It pointed out that some of “Australia's biggest retailers” were offering “sex parties” at brothels as Christmas bonuses. It quotes Robbie Swan from the Eros Foundation, an umbrella organization representing the Australian sex industry, saying that firms should not be criticized for offering these sorts of inducements to workers, because “It's an extremely popular way of paying bonuses,’ he said. ‘Even politicians have been known to take friends to a brothel’” (Mercer, 2001). Swan explained that a company sending four clients to a brothel

would expect to pay around \$500 (\$987 AUD) for a spa, massage, sex and a complimentary drink or, according to Robbie Swan, "a nice cup of coffee" (Mercer, 2001). The paying of bonuses in this way is tax deductible in Australia, as in other countries.

In Germany, where the industry of prostitution is legalized, the sex industry is being utilised by corporations to smooth relationships between management and unions. This practice has been revealed, in an ongoing court case over corruption, to lie at the heart of employer/employee relations in the German corporation, Volkswagen (Boyes, 2008; Connolly, 2008; Marsh, 2007). In big companies in Germany industrial harmony is created by having workforce representatives on the boards and even involved in investment decisions. This system, called co-determination, raises productivity and enables Germany to maintain a large manufacturing base, but is open to abuse. In the 1990s the company set up a large slush fund to provide prostituted women to workforce representatives, support their mistresses, and even rent an apartment in which the men could bond through the bodies of prostituted women. The company "bought the support of union officials by supplying prostitutes and luxury holidays" and during a meeting in Lisbon, "a string of escort girls arrived to order" (Marsh, 2007). Peter Hartz, VW's head of personnel and a former government adviser requested a "young and lively dark-skinned girl" in Lisbon and this Brazilian woman was later flown first-class to meet him again in his Paris hotel where he was attending a board meeting (Marsh, 2007). She also met him in Sao Paolo. The Euro 700,000 slush fund was managed by Klaus-Joachim Gebauer, a personnel manager who used the money to buy Viagra for colleagues and rent a flat in northern Germany where union leaders and a "top manager" then secretly met prostitutes. In 2002 the German ban on bribery of foreign politicians and civil servants was extended to include employees at private companies. Such a law would render the Australian practice in which corporations supply "escorts" illegal. This behaviour creates problems for women employees too. The personnel manager's secretary, Silke W., had to find the flat for the sex parties, one with an underground garage and a lift opening at the door of the flat to ensure privacy, and organize the décor. She describes this as "really very unpleasant" (Connolly, 2008). Germany legalized the business of prostitution in 1999 but the practice was tolerated before that time. The normalization of prostitution is necessary to these business practices which could not take place so easily in Sweden which has penalized the practice it describes as the "buying of sexual services" (Ekberg, 2004).

#### *Conventions and conferences*

When male workers attend conferences and conventions aimed at business they are likely to access the sex industry or the organizers may lay on sexual entertainment. Both practices chill the equality of women employees. This problem was evident at the Australia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit which took place in 2007. At the time of the summit the city of Sydney, Australia, where brothels are legal, experienced a prostitution boom. The male buyers were mostly secret service agents and international trade envoys. Business went up by 300% (Sydney Morning

Herald, 2007). The varieties of sexual abuse of prostituted women on offer reveal a worrying lack of respect for women, "Interstate prostitutes were brought in to fill demand at the city's establishment, where APEC-themed specials such as the Condi Combo, the UN Duo and the Presidential Platter were on offer". The "United Nations Duo" comprised time with "two girls of different ethnicities" (Ahmed, 2007). Such practice harms the equality of women in the international delegations and the possibility of women's issues being fairly discussed at such meetings.

At a scientific conference in Australia, sexual entertainment was provided by the organizers in a way that caused considerable outrage amongst some women scientists who attended. In the first week of September 2006 women scientists protested and walked out of the government-sponsored climate change conference when scantily clad "burlesque" dancers were presented as the entertainment at the conference dinner. The conference, the 17th Australia New Zealand Climate Change Forum in Old Parliament House, had government sponsorship. The male scientists were encouraged to pop the balloons that covered one performer's body. One angry female scientist commented, "This is... supposed to be a gathering of scientists at a government-sponsored event in an already male dominated industry where it is hard enough for a woman to make inroads" (Murray, 2006).

#### **The effect on women's equal opportunities**

##### *Sex industry use as discrimination*

In the west these practices are being protested in significant legal cases where women employees are claiming that they constitute sex discrimination. In the US this form of exclusion of women from equal opportunities has resulted in some high profile actions for sex discrimination against top finance houses by women employees. Morgan Stanley, for instance, in 2004, agreed to pay \$54 million to settle EEOC charges that it had "discriminated against women in pay and promotions, and tolerated crude comments about sex and men only outings to strip clubs with clients" (Lublin, 2006, p. 33). In another finance industry case, six female employees of Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein, launched an 800 million pound lawsuit claiming, amongst other things, that an American director was "put under pressure to leave a meal celebrating a business deal so that her male colleagues and the clients could go on to a strip club" (Thompson, 2008). In the UK in 2009 several cases were before the courts. Anna Atkins claimed at an employment tribunal that she was overlooked for promotion at the finance firm Standard Chartered because of a macho culture in which it was "not uncommon for off-site meetings to end up in strip clubs" (Leach, 2009). The chairman of this bank was appointed Trade Minister in the UK in January 2009 to help to tackle the banking crisis.

A 2006 study (Morgan & Martin, 2006) shows how women professionals in rural USA are blocked from engaging in the vital social networking which secures clients and contracts. It explains that many women professionals "traverse other settings beyond the office in the course of their work including conferences, airplanes, hotel rooms and

lobbies, restaurants, shop floors, golf courses, tennis courts, sporting events, bars, cars, and trade shows” (Morgan & Martin, 2006, p. 109). The study explains that, “Employer-sponsored out-of-the-office socializing with colleagues, customers and suppliers is institutionalised”. In this way day-to-day work is done as well as the “relationship building” that “embeds the foundation for reciprocity and long-lasting organizational ties in personal ones” (Morgan & Martin, 2006, p. 109). Thus, this out of office socializing has important purposes which are necessary to a woman’s work and career. The study chooses two forms of such socializing to examine, strip clubs and golf. Many of the forms of activity involve what they describe as “homosocial” environments e.g. golf is usually a male only activity, especially in rural areas in the US, to which women are not admitted. Alternatively they may have no time, since they are often mothers and wives as well after all and doing two jobs already. They may lack both time and inclination to learn golf and become good enough to compete with men and not feel inadequate. But the strip club is gendered in a way that golf is not. Women cannot learn to be good at visiting strip clubs. Women are not able to join in the bonding that takes place. When men enter strip clubs in groups they become raucous and may be more sexually objectifying towards the strippers (Morgan & Martin, 2006, p. 118). Saleswomen in the study said that at such events “they undermined the ‘cavorting’ and ‘fun’ and ultimately the ‘bonding’ that the events were intended to promote” (Morgan & Martin, 2006, p. 118). One woman described trying to attend a strip club with a customer and two company managers. While her male colleagues were bonding through the sexual objectification of women the only bonding left open to her was with the other women in the club, i.e. the strippers, as she explains, “And I’m like, ‘Okay where do I look?’ I’m talking to the strippers” (Morgan & Martin, 2006, p. 118).

The authors of the study, Morgan and Martin, explain that entertaining clients at strip clubs is an ordinary part of the work of the sales representatives they were researching in many industries. They write that, “Accounts from industry trade magazines suggest that almost half of salesmen, but only 5% of saleswomen, had entertained clients in topless bars” (Morgan & Martin, 2006, p. 116). Saleswomen, they point out, are excluded from “industry contacts and denied access to professional information exchange”. The interview information they were examining showed that some of the women professionals were disgusted by the visits to strip clubs while others were just angry that they were excluded by being sent to their hotel rooms while the men went on to the clubs. The entertainment receipts showed the clubs as restaurants so that the accountants did not have to know where the events took place.

In the US the spate of lawsuits being brought against investment banks by female staff alleging sex discrimination because of use of the sex industry for business purposes that excludes them, has caused the companies to take action. The NASD (National Association of Security Dealers) and the New York Stock Exchange both recently proposed rules that would force firms to adopt business entertainment policies that cap amounts and specify appropriate venues. The move is aimed at company-paid or work-related visits to strip clubs (O’Donnell, 2006). It was prompted by a Fidelity

Investments trader’s 2003 bachelor party, paid for by brokerage firms including Jeffries & Co., that allegedly included dwarf-tossing and paid female escorts (O’Donnell, 2006).

#### *Status of women in the workplace*

Women employees may be affected in another way, also, by the practice of business related use of the sex industry. Their status as women in the workplace is likely to be affected by the behaviour since the respect in which they are held as female colleagues could be reduced. Prostitution use is associated with negative attitudes towards women. More than three quarters of prostitution buyers in a study carried out in London, where massage parlour prostitution is tolerated, saw prostituted women as dirty (89%) and inferior (77%) (Coy, Horvath & Kelly, 2007). This is problematic for the safety and mental health of prostituted women. But their motives for prostitute use indicate how such male behaviour undermines men’s respect for women’s equality in general. Analysis of the reasons in this report for the men’s prostitution behaviour concluded that it, “reflects an underlying theme of male entitlement” (Coy et al., 2007, p. 19). Sex was viewed as a product to shop for, or something to be bought as a group after an evening out. It enabled the buyers to be disrespectful of women, “I don’t have to ask or think ‘No, is that too dirty for her?’ or – like I don’t really have to be as respectful as if it was my girlfriend or my wife or partner” (Coy et al., 2007, p. 22). In one possible instance of such disrespect, Rosemarie Corscadden gave evidence to the Central London Employment Tribunal that there was a culture of sexual discrimination and harassment at the equity broker, Cheuvreux (Beckford, 2009). She told the *Telegraph* newspaper that her male boss spoke of feeling as if he was “running a brothel” and a “team of prostitutes” (Beckford, 2009). She claimed that his behaviour was part of a “sexualised culture” at work which included sexual “banter” and inappropriate emails.

#### *Normalization of sexual harassment*

The effect of recourse to the sex industry may be to increase the risk of women employees being sexually harassed. In prostitution, sexual harassment, in the form of unwanted touching and comments, is what is being paid for, whereas in the world of business it is precisely what women are trying to bring to an end. Male employees may not be able to differentiate adequately between the women in the office and the women who are naked in the strip club. In a case brought by an auto industry employee in Detroit for discrimination by her company, the lawyer for Judith Copeland commented that after visiting strip clubs and drinking heavily, the salesmen would “return to the workplace and sexually harass the female employees” (Meredith, 1997).

The problem is that all the behaviours of sexual harassment are an ordinary part of what goes on in everyday legalized prostitution, and likely to be what the male buyer considers that he has paid for. Buyers regularly use degrading language and expression, and pornography is continuously shown on brothel ceilings (Sullivan, 2007). Women will continuously have to struggle to fend off men’s hands from

parts of their bodies they consider not to have been part of the booking. A fact sheet from a Queensland sex work agency that works closely with the Prostitution Licensing Authority has produced factsheets for prostituted women which show quite clearly the forms of sexual harassment that male buyers consider themselves to have paid for. One, entitled “Dealing with difficult clients”, advises on “redirecting clients” i.e. getting buyers to stop an activity that is causing distress (SQWISI, 2006). The advice makes it clear how difficult it is for prostituted women to set boundaries and avoid violation. It is hard for them to take the risk of deflating the buyer's erection since they may lose the booking or provoke violence. It says that the buyer can be “redirected” without causing the man to “feel offended” or “ruin” the “erotic mood” through, “Suggesting something else... For example, if a client puts his hand on your crutch from the moment you hit the bed but you are sore from the last few clients, you could tell them you really enjoy your breasts being played with” (SQWISI, 2006). Advice is given on how to escape from drunken clients as well as how to behave with “Rough or annoying clients” since what is “acceptable for some may be painful or uncomfortable for others” and women might wish to “set limits” on activities such as “biting, kissing, hickies or other marks being left upon your body”.

Surprisingly, SQWISI suggests that prostituted women in Queensland might like to seek the protection of the State's sexual harassment legislation, which states that sexual harassment covers, as SQWISI defines it, “touching, lewd comments or smutty jokes, asking for sex, questions about someone's private life, unnecessary familiarity, assault, and displays of offensive material” (SQWISI, 2006). SQWISI recognizes that these practices are precisely the ordinary acts of prostitution but comments that they may constitute sexual harassment when taken too far, “while these things may be part of a booking, they become sexual harassment when they are unwanted”. When some client “just don't listen” and do not respect their “boundaries” prostituted women are advised that they can “argue sexual harassment and use the laws to assist you” (SQWISI, 2006). It is hard to see how this could be an effective strategy, since if buyers were required only to engage in practices that were “wanted”, then prostitution could scarcely take place at all. Prostituted women do not, after all, actively “want” to be touched and used, only to survive these encounters in order to pay the rent or buy drugs. Though women employees in business may seek the protection of sexual harassment laws, prostituted women are not realistically in a position to do that. The possible implications of this is that business executives who visit brothels are educated in how to sexually harass, rather than to learn the good practice of treating women colleagues in a way which is consonant with women's equality.

#### *Outsourcing women's subordination*

Another way in which women's equal opportunities in the business world are likely to be affected by their male colleagues' sex industry use, is that such practice outsources women's subordination. The business men who access the sex industry gain psychological satisfactions from being able to put women back in their place. Men interviewed in a

study of clients of strip clubs expressed their anxieties about women's increasingly equal roles in the workplace and in marriage which could be assuaged by paying women to get naked and show them their vulvas (Frank, 2003). Through the sex industry men are able to outsource women's subordination. Frank found that an important reason for men to visit the clubs was that they provided a compensation for the decline in power that they experienced as their wives, partners and women workmates shed their subordination, began to compete with them and demanded equality. The strip clubs provided an antidote to the erosion of male dominance by institutionalising the traditional hierarchy of gender relations. The men found everyday relationships with women “a source of pressure and expectations” and described relations between women and men in general as being “strained,” as “confused,” or “tense.” One buyer referred to the “war between the sexes” (Frank, 2003, p. 65). Frank's respondents in the strip clubs sought respite from the problems of having to treat women as equals in the workplace too. “Philip” said that he was able to, “let frustration out”, particularly about, “this sexual harassment stuff going around these days, men need somewhere to go where they can say and act like they want” (Frank, 2003, p. 66). Frank points out that the rapid increase in strip clubs in the US in the 1980s “was concurrent with a massive increase of women into the workforce and an upsurge of attention to issues of sexual harassment, date rape” (Frank, 2003, p. 66). A similar motivation was expressed by one respondent in research on the motivations of male prostitution buyers in Scotland. The man explained, “Women are becoming more domineering in the workplace and I think a lot of guys like to have power over women. They use prostitutes and talk bad about them, exercising their power” (MacLeod, Farley, Anderson & Golding, 2008, p. 20).

#### **Conclusion: a new glass ceiling**

The impact of the normalization of prostitution on equal opportunities for women in business and the professions undermines the argument that prostitution is just like any other business. Through the sex industry men are able to strengthen their dominance in business, the professions, sports and politics. Women are not in a position to use sex industry venues to network with colleagues, entertain clients and have product launches. They are not easily able to offer prostituted women to clients as bribes. Equal opportunity for business and professional women to use prostitution in this way is not only impossible to achieve, but undesirable since they would then be complicit in the harms to other women that are integral to the industry. Strip clubs recreate the gendered spaces for men that were challenged in second wave feminism. When businessmen use them it could be understood as a counter attack, in which men have reasserted their right to network for and through male dominance without the irritating presence of women, unless those women are naked and servicing their pleasures. In response to this problem for diversity and equal opportunity, companies could begin by instituting codes of ethics and social responsibility which explicitly prohibit employees from using the sex industry.

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