Faking it: Emotional labor and prostitution

Mary Pat Dutton

The University of Montana

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Date: 12-21-04

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FAKING IT:  
EMOTIONAL LABOR AND PROSTITUTION 

by 

Mary Pat Dutton 

B.A. Carroll College, Montana, 1974 

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements 

for the degree of 

Master of Arts 

The University of Montana 

Approved by: 

[Signature] 

Chairperson 

Dean, Graduate School 

12-21-04 

Date
No matter the career, employed individuals engage in varying degrees of emotional labor. This communication phenomenon entails responding to others in an organizationally prescribed manner even though it may be contrary to an individual’s true feeling. Emotional labor is further defined as either surface acting or deep acting. In the former, an individual engages in emotional labor and is cognizant of the fact that he/she is doing so. In the later, one is responding in the manner expected but is so involved in the process the individual is no longer aware of the emotional labor being performed. In looking for a group that may engage in extreme levels of emotional labor, I considered sex workers. This wide-ranging group was narrowed to women employed as prostitutes. In an occupation that can affect one’s most private emotions, the women were extremely candid in explaining how they express and protect their emotions and their emotional well being. Some women display surface acting by appearing to be interested in the emotional concerns of a client. They exhibit a caring response while mentally planning a shopping list. Generally the sex workers engage in minimal deep acting. The largest number of women appears to be concerned and interested in the lives, worries and joys of their regular clients. While this study has determined the levels and types of emotional labor performed by prostitutes, the individual prostitutes determine surface acting, deep acting or a combination of the two. As self-employed, independent women they determine the level at which they perform emotional labor.
A very special thank you to Dr. Sara Hayden for your assistance in bringing this project to fruition. Thank you also to Dr. Sally Planalp for peaking my interest in emotional labor.

My thanks to Jessica for your sacrifices, support and contagious optimism that I would succeed.

And most importantly, thank you to Norma Jean and the Ladies of the Night. This research project exists due to your willing participation and candid responses. You will always have my greatest respect and gratitude.
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Introduction

In the movie **Pretty Woman**, (Touchstone Pictures 1990) the film’s director gives the audience subtle hints that Edward, as a prostitute’s client, may be having more than sexual feelings toward Vivian, the prostitute he has hired. However, before Edward is allowed to develop any non-sexual feelings or emotions, Vivian stops him cold by telling him that prostitutes can do anything except kiss on the lips as that would signify feeling and involvement. Prior to this scene, **Pretty Woman** typifies the common understanding of prostitution – the client exchanges money for sex from the prostitute. But what happens when the client wants more than physical sex? Are emotions and feelings part of this commodity exchange?

RATIONAL

Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labor as “labor that requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality” (p. 7). Wharton (1999) gives us a weaker definition of emotional labor as that which “refers to the effort involved in displaying organizationally sanctioned emotions by those whose jobs require interaction with clients or customers and for whom these interactions are an important component of their work” (p. 160). Jobs in which an employee provides a service to a client require the employee to perform emotional labor. Even occupations that don’t have direct client contact may demand emotional labor from the employee in the form of co-worker relationships or attitudes toward the workplace. Steinberg and Figart (1999) add to Hochschild’s work explaining “emotional labor emphasizes the relational rather than the task-based aspect of work found primarily but not exclusively in the service economy. It is labor-intensive work: it is skilled, effort-intensive, and
productive labor. It creates value, affects productivity and generates profit" (p. 9). Steinberg and Figart (1999) remind us “hegemonic notions of skills have relied on increasingly outdated assumptions about work based on nineteenth and twentieth century craft and manufacturing work. Yet the expansion of the service sector has intensified the necessity of expanding the definitions of skill to include emotional labor” (p. 14). Emotional labor researchers have examined a range of occupations. In the words of Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) “perhaps the most revealing occupations, however, are those in which the internal feelings evoked by the job clash with feelings rules” (p. 33). Is prostitution such an occupation? But is more than sex exchanged? A search of numerous web sites established by prostitutes often included references by both past and current customers. One web site included twenty-two clients posted web reviews of Destiny, a prostitute. As expected all 22 commented on the physical aspects of their purchase such as her perfect balance of fitness and soft curves, her silky smooth skin, her long legs, hair color, bust size, kissing ability, and willingness to engage in various sexual positions. But beyond those remarks, 17 of the reviewers were compelled to comment on non-sexual characteristics including her down to earth attitude, great sense of humor, savvy, maturity, and great conversation skills. If sex is the only commodity provided by a prostitute, why do so many clients feel it is important to comment on these attributes? Could it be they are looking for more than sex? If, in fact, clients are purchasing commodities beyond physical sex, how does a prostitute meet her clients’ needs and what effect does this have on her? Although both men and women work as prostitutes, only recently have male prostitutes been recognized. This occupation in acknowledgement, accessibility, history and research focuses on female participants. Through her research of strip club patrons and dancers, Wood (2000) notes that “the symbolic capital being collected and displayed is not the stripper herself but rather the attention of the stripper as she performs for a tipping customer or does a table dance for a customer who has, or will, pay the fee” (p. 14).
While the money exchanged is important to the stripper, the customer focuses not on the financial aspect but rather the commodity received.

Why study the emotional labor of prostitutes? Work by previous researchers has been confined to the more traditionally acceptable occupations. Hochschild’s well-known study of flight attendants and bill collectors is a case in point. Wharton (1999), who believes that emotional labor is found in many diverse work environments, challenges researchers to look beyond the standard occupations as “this occupational diversity suggests that variations between jobs that require emotional labor call for serious attention, as this variability may be even greater than the variation between jobs requiring emotional labor and those not requiring the effort (p161).

What are men purchasing from a prostitute?

Monto (2000) notes, “both researchers and lay persons tend to assume they already know the reasons men seek out prostitutes” (p. 68). The unstated reason is physical sex. It seems that there is more than sex being sold by prostitutes. Previous research on prostitution has avoided in depth study of what exactly men are purchasing.

Early research done by Alfred Kinsey in 1948 suggested that men purchased services from prostitutes that they were unable to obtain elsewhere. These services were most often reported as deviant and violent sex acts. However, modern researchers (Monto, 2000) disclaim Kinsey’s work in part due to its convenience sampling method as opposed to the more acceptable method of probability sampling. A client’s quote from the World Sex Guide web site that “I think that we should be treating these girls with the respect and dignity that some of them pay us and that everyone else gets” may speak more accurately to the attitude of clients toward prostitutes. Because prostitution is illegal in all but one state and because a culturally negative stigma is attached to prostitution, it is difficult to obtain information from men who frequent
prostitutes. Interestingly, although the legal ramifications are more severe for the prostitute than for the client, research access to prostitutes has been more obtainable than to clients. Social desirability also needs to be considered. Does a client refrain from discussing a visit to a prostitute because of the social stigma that he is unable to attract a woman on his own merit? And, is a prostitute willing to discuss her activities in an effort to convince her audience that there is legitimacy to her career choice? Planalp (1999) says, “the important thing to recognize, is that emotion and not only reason stands at the foundation of moral assessment and moral action” (p. 161).

Although previous research is minimal, Monto (2000) provides a good summary of research done by McKeganey and Barnard, Holzman and Pines, and Jordan that encompasses interviews with clients. McKeganey and Barnard “argue that men are attracted to paid sex because they desire sexual acts they cannot receive from their partners; they are able to have sex with a larger number of sexual partners; they are attracted to specific physical characteristics; they like the limited emotional involvement; and they are excited by the illicit nature of the act” (cited in Monto p. 77). Holzman and Pines found that “men’s primary motivations for having sexual relations with a prostitute are the desire for sex or for companionship” (Monto p 77). And Jordan’s research (Monto 2000) “suggests that men’s reasons for seeking prostitution vary depending on their personal circumstances and their ability to meet their needs through conventional relationships” (p. 77). Monto’s (2000) own research, which asked clients via thirteen possible answers to identify their reasons for hiring a prostitute, found “the most frequently endorsed statements, by around half the men, were ‘I like to be with a woman who likes to get nasty’, ‘I am excited by the idea of approaching a prostitute’, ‘I like to have a variety of sexual partners’, ‘I want a different kind of sex than my regular partner’, ‘I am shy and awkward when trying to meet women’, and ‘I like to be in control when I’m having sex’” (p. 80).
It is important to note that all the above research was conducted with a relatively small sample and possibly with clients of both street and indoor prostitutes. It is difficult to assess the importance of emotional issues from these studies, as it appears that the researchers were focusing on the physical needs of the client. In Monto’s (2000) study, the fact that clients were presented with a set of possible answers developed by the researcher further limits the possibility of understanding the basic needs of the clients.

In addition to the limited information obtained from clients, it is also possible to develop some client profiles from prostitutes. Lever and Dolnick (2000) reference the L.A. Women’s Health Risk Study, which cited call girls whose clients “only want to talk or only want to be held. One woman told of holding a client who cried for his entire hour. Another described a new client who cried during his screening interview when he revealed that his wife had left him a year before” (p. 97). In a birthday note to a brothel prostitute, her long-time client had written “With you for my sweet and special friend, I don’t feel like I’m alone in this world, it makes me feel wonderful and alive that you are the beautiful lady in my life” (Albert 2001 p. 123).

Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) explain, “the emotions conveyed by role occupants also have long-term effects on the organization. Emotion work may lead to further gains either by repeat encounters with the same client or through the comments that are passed by him or her to a third party” (p. 30). Prostitutes consider repeat customers to be superior as they consider them safe and reliable. Widespread use of websites to post client remarks adds to the impact of third party recommendations. Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) continue this concept when they state “skilled emotion work can bring encore gains even when the organization’s product is of questionable quality” (p. 30). The perceived equality of value between physical and emotional performance by prostitutes may be an interesting comparison to explore.
While there is little research to prove that some clients are seeking something besides or other than sex from prostitutes, there seems to be enough reference that further investigation is warranted. Monto (2000) probably says it best when he states that “there is no single or simple reason men patronize prostitutes” (p. 82).

**Does the work done by a prostitute constitute emotional labor?**

Given Hochschild’s earlier noted definition of emotional labor, a prostitute who fakes sexual attraction so that her client will believe she is enjoying sex with him is engaging in emotional labor. Albert (2001) notes in her research of brothel prostitutes “a good prostitute was able to get a man to forget he was a paying customer during sex” (p. 122). For women who are self-employed as escorts or call girls, Lever and Dolnick (2000) clearly identify a call girl’s act of “psyching herself up” in preparation for a client as emotional labor.

Research by Lever and Dolnick (2000) found that call girls often establish on-going relationships with their clients and part of this relationship is setting up a comfortable feeling with these clients. This comfortable feeling can be established by meeting at either the client or the prostitute’s home, which creates a more familiar atmosphere than a hotel room. They also found that while some call girls charge for all time spent with a client “others cultivate the fantasy of wanting to be in a man’s company by not charging for time spent dining” (p. 93). Gifts from clients of jewelry, perfume, flowers and champagne also enhance that comfortable feeling. Lever and Dolnick found that “clients expect call girls to create at least the illusion of intimacy in the exchange” (p. 97). And from the prostitutes’ perspective, Lever and Dolnick found that “not all call girls are being phony or acting all of the time” (p. 98). Lever and Dolnick suggest that “call girls should be added to the list of listening occupations” and likened their positions as often having the “stranger on a train phenomenon” (p. 98).
Another consideration as stated by Lever and Dolnick (2000) is “the old fascination with female prostitutes as purveyors of sex without responsibility neglects the possibility that some female prostitutes may also be purveyors of intimacy without responsibility” (p. 85). Is a prostitute selling lack of attachment or commitment? An important portion of her product may be sex with no strings attached. And Hausbeck and Brents (2000) note that one owner of a Nevada brothel complained “that the women don’t take a business approach to their work. They get absorbed in the party and don’t work the bar as well as they could” (p. 236). According to Waldron (1994) “In some organizational cultures, genuine emotion may be admirable” (p. 404) and so the question becomes how much of a prostitute’s emotion is genuine and how much is emotional labor. In making a possible distinction between deep acting and surface acting, Waldron (1994) states “members may distinguish between emotional states that they ‘feel’ and emotional states that they ‘do’. The latter are emotional performances, executed as part of the work role or job description or to achieve some desired effect” (p. 403).

*What strategies of emotional labor does a prostitute perform?*

Steinberg & Figart (1999) further clarify emotional labor, explaining that “emotional labor is not only differentiated on the basis of whether the employees or the client’s feelings are the focus of attention but also on the basis of the degree of authenticity of the employee’s emotion. Here the concern is less the work that is being performed than the effect of emotional labor on the employees who perform it” (p. 11). What makes a good prostitute? Beside the obvious sexual qualifications, how much does the ability to manage the emotional labor aspect affect the well-being of a prostitute? Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) tell us that “organizations seek to employ people who can convey emotions deemed to be appropriate for the role” (p. 26).

Along with the innate physical and emotional abilities a prostitute brings to her profession, a certain amount of emotional labor education comes from other sex workers. According to Rafaeli
and Sutton (1987) this may work well as “story telling provides an opportunity for vicarious
learning about feeling rules: As role models tell stories, rookies imagine how they would have
acted” (p. 26). Waldron says (1994) “interactions with other members yield feedback about the
appropriateness of emotional displays” (p. 395).

Prostitutes use their emotions to manage the emotions of their clients. Albert (2001)
gives an excellent example of surface acting by a prostitute in her rendition of the relationship
between a prostitute who called herself Baby and her regular customer Philip. “Baby knew that
in order to sustain regular customers like Philip – men who wanted intimacy and the feeling of
being special – she had to give them the illusion of mutuality. To that end, she gave Philip her
pager number and her supposed real name and details about her outside life, to make it seem as if
she had begun letting down her guard” (p. 126). A telling example of deep acting by a prostitute
is the case of the prostitute who falls in love with a client.

Current culture has sensitized us to scripted exchanges in service situations. “Hi, my
name is Dave and I’ll be your waiter tonight” has become such a common script that jokes
abound regarding possible responses. However, Steinberg & Figart (1999) caution “scripted
emotional labor can assist employees in enforcing their will over others. Thus, while there are
costs to employees in performing employer-controlled, scripted behavior and in manipulating
others, there are also the practical and psychological benefits of distancing oneself from these
emotional performances” (p. 20). Conrad and Witte (1994) argue that forcing positive emotions
in the workplace does not have a negative effect on an individual (p. 420). Standard advice to
smile while recording an answering machine response or while speaking on the phone with a
client gives the message a positive twist and has a positive affect on the individual. The “fake it
till you make it” adage may be as meaningful for the attitude of a prostitute as it is for her sexual
behavior.
How does a prostitute maintain her sense of self?

No matter the training, education or previous experience a certain amount of learning and adjustment takes place over the course of a career. With experience, prostitutes may adapt their emotional labor to protect their senses of self. Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) explain “the cycles of displayed emotion, reaction and readjustment may reinforce or weaken the effects of feeling rules as an emotional transaction unfolds” (p. 29), According to Hochschild (1983) “emotional labor poses a challenge to a person’s sense of self” (p. 132). Hochschild (1983) offers three questions to those who perform emotional labor, the answers to which will determine how “self” is defined. Her first question is “How can I feel really identified with my work role and with the company without being fused with them? (p i32) A response requires that a prostitute engage in deep acting, a state of actually feeling what is being portrayed to the customer. A brothel prostitute at Mustang Ranch in Nevada remarked (Albert 2001), “Prostitution doesn’t need to be demeaning, done without self-respect. It’s a very intimate, service-oriented, people-oriented profession” (p. 106). In reference to the prostitutes at Mustang Ranch, Albert (2001) explained that “most of the women took their work very seriously and many expressly considered it a form of social service on par with others” (p104). In the previously referenced L.A. Women’s Health Risk Study, Lever and Dolnick (2000) note that “several call girls recognized a parallel between their work and the psychotherapist’s; in fact, seeing oneself as a type of therapist is one source of pride for some call girls” (p. 97).

The second question (Hochschild, 1983) asks “How can I use my capacities when I’m disconnected from those I am acting for?” (p. 132). This references surface acting or what Hochschild (1983) defines as “we deceive others about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves” (p. 33). The husband of a brothel prostitute explains his wife’s ability to “separate from her work ... she disconnects and doesn’t feel anything ... she sees blackness and
nothingness where the man’s face should be... she sells things ... she is a salesperson just like I’m a salesperson” (Albert 2001, p. 86-87). Another brothel prostitute told Albert (2001) “it’s like putting up a block in your mind. You go through the motions, but you’re not really there, you’re taking a trip out of the room. I put myself on a sandy beach somewhere. Or I think about something I really want to do, say plant those shrubs and do a garden when I get home” (p.135). Warr and Pyett (1999) note that “some women have developed an ability to ‘switch on and off’ from ‘work mode’ to ‘home mode’, but few were comfortable about telling friends or family about their work” (p. 296).

And finally (Hochschild, 1983), “If I’m doing deep acting for an audience from whom I’m disconnected, how can I maintain my self-esteem without becoming cynical?” (p. 132) which reaches into the realm of creating an illusion and it is here that prostitutes may suffer the most. Referring to the prostitutes at Mustang Ranch, Albert (2001) noted “given the social stigma of prostitution, these women kept their work secret from neighbors and square friends making it difficult to establish honest relationships in their home communities” (p. 167). And Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) caution that more serious consequences may haunt employees who express inner feelings that clash with role expectations but have internalized those expectations” (p. 33). Waldron (1994) notes that “emotion is used to define relationships with customers and clients” (p. 408). Wharton (1999) addresses the concern of workers who become their work. She states “workers who are too identified with their work role are at risk precisely because the feelings expressed at work are inseparable from the self” (p. 162). It is hard to imagine a work role that would be harder to separate from than the intimacy sold by a prostitute.

For the most part, Hochschild (1983) paints a negative picture of emotional labor. In fact, Sass (2000) interprets Hochschild saying that she “casts emotional labor as external use and control of emotional experiences and expression. Thus, emotional labor can only be a self-
alienating experience with negative personal consequences” (p. 331). Others do not share Hochschild’s (1983) negative stance. Waldron (1994) discovered that “in some organizational cultures, genuine emotion may be admirable”. He goes on to say that “emotion is very much a part of the task and social component of work” (p. 404, 389). According to Conrad and Witte (1994) “when individuals start acting cheerful and positive, they start feeling cheerful and positive” (p. 421). Is it possible that the prostitute who acts friendly, funny, loving and concerned actually begins to feel that way about herself? And Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) comment that “the display or expected emotion is not always detrimental to well-being…the display of normative emotions may also protect incumbents from ill-being.” They go on to point out that what is important is “emotional harmony (which) occurs when expressed feelings are congruent with expressed emotions, feeling rules and expectations the incumbent holds for herself about emotional expression” (p. 31-32). Or is a strategy of a successful prostitute the use of detached concern as described by Miller, Stiff and Ellis (1988). Their research, done with caregivers at a psychiatric hospital, found evidence that caregivers, while showing concern for patients had “developed a posture of detached concern – an emotional distancing from the patients they deal with.” (p. 262).

It appears that when men make a financial transaction with a prostitute they may be attempting to purchase more than sex. Their financial investment may include a desire for the prostitute to produce emotional pleasure or release beyond or in addition to the physical. This added demand requires that the prostitute perform emotional labor. And it may well be that the most difficult aspect of the profession of prostitution is the woman’s ability in maintaining her sense of self.

Lever and Dolnick (2000) conclude, “more research on the emotional dimensions of sex work would heighten the appreciation of the many interpersonal skills required in this occupation” (p.
100). More definitive answers need to be obtained regarding what a client is attempting to purchase and how the prostitute manages to provide these “extras” while maintaining her own sense of self. At the same time, Wharton (1999) cautions that “some aspects of emotional labor may have positive consequences for workers’ well-being while others may have negative consequences, it is important that researchers not restrict attention to only positive or only negative outcomes” (p. 173).

**RESEARCH**

In an attempt to limit confusion and misconceptions, it is necessary to make a distinction between the different types of prostitution. The term ‘sex worker’ is used for any business venture that exchanges money for sex. This umbrella covers dancers who perform in strip clubs, individuals who sell phone sex as well as prostitutes. Current culture makes a further distinction between indoor prostitutes and street prostitutes. Distinctions between the two can be seen in the following chart from Lever and Dolnick (2000), which provides information regarding the differences between street prostitutes and call girls, a type of indoor prostitute.
Lever and Dolnick obtained the street prostitute information from the L.A. Women's Health Risk Study. The call girl information was obtained through a study conducted by Lever and Dolnick. Brothel workers and escorts were not included in the Lever and Dolnick studies. Their work style however would place them in the same category as call girls. My research will focus on indoor prostitutes.

Indoor professional prostitutes form an entity that loosely fits the structure of most business organizations. The majority of prostitutes are self-employed, although many pay a portion of their income to an escort agency. Some brothels do legitimately employ prostitutes –
### Instrument

The survey consisted of both open and closed questions and is attached as Appendix A. The respondents were assured that their identity would remain confidential. A pretest was conducted to identify problems. The proposed questionnaire was e-mailed to four prostitutes. Two completed surveys were returned. The e-mailing process worked well and the responses were congruent to the questions asked. At this point it was noted by both the University and C.O.Y.O.T.E. that the possibility existed that the identity of the prostitutes could be traced via the internet. A decision was made to distribute the questionnaires via the U.S. mail. To maintain confidentiality, surveys and self-addressed envelopes were mailed to the contact at C.O.Y.O.T.E. who in turn mailed the questionnaires to prostitutes. In this manner the completed forms were returned to the researcher as a blind research survey.

Forty-one surveys were mailed. Twenty seven were completed and returned for a response rate of 66%.

### Procedure

![Table showing number of clients per day, week, month, and year]

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To study the emotional labor of prostitutes, a survey was conducted with women who work as prostitutes. While face-to-face interviews would be enlightening, the time required and the difficulty in arranging interviews made this method unfeasible. The determination was made that a questionnaire appeared to be a more realistic manner of collecting data about this population. Internet research revealed that prostitutes use websites to advertise thus leading to the assumption that prostitutes have access to the internet and that they feel comfortable in being contacted via the web. A secondary assumption was that indoor professional prostitutes are more likely to have access to the internet than street prostitutes. An inherent problem in using the internet was the possibility that individuals, other than prostitutes may respond to the questionnaire. To limit this possibility, working through an organization rather than contacting individuals who advertised on the web appeared to be more reliable. Two organizations of sex workers were contacted with a request to assist in the distribution of a questionnaire. A response was received from the C.O.Y.O.T.E. ("Call Off Your Tired Ethics") organization. C.O.Y.O.T.E., which was formed in 1973 to work for the rights of all sex workers, has headquarters in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. The contact at C.O.Y.O.T.E. agreed to post the questionnaire to a list serve composed of prostitutes. The contact reviewed the proposed survey and made recommendations for wording in an effort to make the questionnaire user friendly and non-offensive to her peers.

RESULTS

When men make a financial transaction with a prostitute what are they purchasing?

A web-based review by a brothel client provides a glimpse of what was important to her client. He writes, "She is a great conversationalist and is very understanding. I told her some very personal things about myself...Bridget treated me like I was her boyfriend" (gppays.com).
From the cited web example it appears clients may be purchasing emotional goods as well as sexual behavior. In some cases might they also be purchasing lack of commitment?

By definition men are purchasing sex from a prostitute and when asked what the prostitutes and their clients discuss a large number of those surveyed responded “sex”. However the survey results are clear that men are purchasing other commodities in addition to sex. Twenty-five of the returned surveys demonstrated that the prostitutes engaged in conversation with their clients. Discussion between the two included topics such as the client’s lives, job and family, hobbies, personal challenges, current events, music, politics, books, travel, the economy, psychology, philosophy and the stock market. One woman remarked “we talk about them.” Respondents also noted that the emotional issues of their clients were frequently a topic of conversation. One prostitute answered that an often-heard statement is “I love my wife but she doesn’t understand me.” Another sex worker remarked that conversation with her clients may include his problems at home. She replied her clients “seem to just need someone they trust to talk to” and that “they can’t open with anyone else.” One woman explained that she “tries to let them open up about their stresses/emotional burdens.” A certain curiosity also exists among the clients as many prostitutes responded that the clients wanted to know about the prostitute. Questions in this area ranged from her emotional life, background, education and experiences. One respondent remarked “sometimes the conversation would center on me and my interests in art and writing.” Overall the theme was best expressed by one woman when she stated “they love to talk and mostly I listen”.

Beyond the conversation purchased, it appears that clients also hire prostitutes in a quest to have emotional needs filled. Twenty-two women responded positively when asked “do your clients have emotional needs that you deal with during your interaction”. Among those emotions, the survey listed sadness, loneliness, love, anger, anxiety, embarrassment, joy and boredom. Ten
of the twenty-two replied that they deal with “all of the above” emotions. Other needs that were noted included alienation, neediness, vulnerability, joy, depression, recovery-related, intimacy, affection and unconditional approval. One woman stated, “One is coming out of severe depression. Another is always joyful. Many are grateful. Some are lonely.” Another explained that “Many times a client will see his favorite prostitute when they’ve had a good day and they want to celebrate, sometimes because they’ve had a bad day and need someone to console them.”

It is also apparent from the surveys that clients expect particular emotional responses from the prostitutes. While one woman responded that “they just wanna get laid” others explained that their clients want acceptance, lack of judgement, reassurance, authenticity, honesty, sympathy or empathy and validation.

As a result of the responses, when men make a financial transaction with a prostitute they are not only purchasing sex, but also conversation and emotional responses.

*If clients are purchasing more than sex, does the work done by a prostitute constitute emotional labor?*

Hochschild (1983) provides the following three characteristics of jobs that require emotional labor. Such a job would - “require face to face or voice to voice contact with the public; require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person; and allow the employer, through training and supervision to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees” (p. 147). The first characteristic is met in prostitution; in fact, ‘face to face’ is probably a minimalist statement of what occurs. Sexual satisfaction, both physically and emotionally, meets the second characteristic (Albert 2001) although other emotional states are also produced in the client by the prostitute as witnessed by one prostitute who remarked that “I believe what I do is a healing job. I kept getting clients who just needed to weep in my arms” (p. 105). The third characteristic (Albert 2001) is evident in brothel management’s control over
prostitutes such as “on cursory inspection, most of the women appeared pleasant, smiling
cordially but reticently in compliance with house rules” (p. 19). For the truly self-employed
prostitute, money may be considered the employer with the prostitute through trial and error
actually providing her own training.

Those surveyed were asked “Is the emotional response that you give your client
consistent or inconsistent with your actual feelings”. Eleven women replied that their emotional
responses were consistent with their actual feelings; five responded that their feelings were
inconsistent and eight answered that their emotional responses were sometimes consistent and
sometimes inconsistent with their actual feelings. Based on Hochschild’s (1983) theories, the
women who responded “inconsistent” or “both” are engaging in emotional labor. One sex worker
succinctly stated that, “They expect and want to know that I am enjoying myself while I am with
them. I have a reputation for providing a good service and part of that is providing warmth and
affection. Regardless of what my mood is when I meet with a client, I put on a happy face.”

Given the range of responses, it can be theorized that prostitutes often engage in
emotional labor. Statements in following sections regarding employed techniques further confirm
this conclusion.

**If the work done by a prostitute is emotional labor, what strategies does she employ?**

Two strategies noted by Hochschild (1983) are deep acting which she describes as
“deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others” and surface acting when “we deceive others
about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves” (p. 33). If prostitutes manage their
emotions through surface acting is that sufficient to satisfy their clients? If instead they engage
in deep acting how do they manage how they feel about their clients, their work and ultimately
themselves? Planalp (1999) notes that an advantage of deep acting is that “you don’t feel the
strain of being torn between your real feelings and your fake feelings because they are the same”
Is prostitution an occupation that lends itself to surface acting or deep acting or a combination of both?

The sex workers were asked to rank the frequency in which they engaged in surface acting or deep acting. The trend seemed to be that most of the surveyed women employed surface acting rather than deep acting. In response to the statement “I change the way I act to show the desired emotions without changing the way I think and feel” most responded “nearly always”, “often” or “sometimes”. In contrast, when responding to the statement “I change the way I think and feel in order to feel the emotions my client wants” responses were “not often”, “almost never” and one very resounding “never”. One woman summarized many responses when she stated “the emotional labor is more demanding than the physical labor.”

Many of those surveyed stated that they are the same person whether they are working or not and therefore engaging in neither deep acting nor surface acting. For example, one prostitute stated “I just relax and enjoy myself”. She continued to say “If the sex is dull, I’ll think about things I need to get done, how much time I have left in the session, etc.” “Be honest” was one reply when asked how the woman produced the emotional response required for her job. Many commented that they are naturally empathic, maternal care-givers and these qualities surface and make it easy to perform their job.

The remainder of respondents appear to engage in surface acting. One woman remarked that she “practices smiling”. While two others offered “smile” and “practice”. Another sex worker remarked that what she does is acting and when asked what she thinks about while engaged in physical sex answered “sex, money, grocery lists.” The same women related “Sometimes I produce the response externally but not internally. A positive attitude is a big help in changing my own mood.” Again when asked what she thinks about, one sex worker remarked “I am usually thinking about how to make it seem like I am having a good time even
though I can’t wait for it to end.” Another response that speaks of surface acting was “when I’m working, I feel obligated to be charming, flirtatious, admiring, encouraging, sensual, upbeat and mischievous”. As testimony to the reason for surface acting, one prostitute remarked “we’re paid big bucks to be nice to them”. More than one woman shared their understanding that what they are doing is acting.

Some women appeared to manifest some but not total surface acting. One sex worker responded “I definitely have a ‘character’ for work but I feel like I’m fundamentally the same person.” Another stated “I have a lot of compassion for clients but money is the motivating force.”

**If emotional labor is part of a prostitute’s work, how does she maintain her sense of self?**

Hochschild (1983) offers three manners in which a worker can respond to the demand for emotional labor. In the first “the worker identifies too wholeheartedly with the job and therefore risks burnout. In the second, the worker clearly distinguishes herself from the job…but she may blame herself for making this very distinction and denigrate herself as ‘just an actor, not sincere.’ In the third, the worker distinguishes herself from her act, does not blame herself for this and sees the job as positively requiring the capacity to act: for this worker there is some risk of estrangement from acting altogether and some cynicism about it” (p. 187).

In responding to the survey one sex worker succinctly stated “I act. It’s theatre. When the client arrives, it’s ‘showtime’”. Another says “I perfect the act and make sure I play the role to a tee. It’s not even sexual. It’s a job I’m good at.” One woman spoke of the “working me” and states her job “is draining but very rewarding.” Another sex worker responded “I have done plenty of soul searching and self help to get to this point of acceptance and positive attitude about my work.” One woman stated “The working me is much more shallow emotionally. I enjoy doing a good emotional and physical performance but it is not healthy to open one’s self
all the way to a customer”. Another answered based on society’s view. She said “you are isolated because you have to live a lie”. And yet another seems not to identify too wholeheartedly with the job as she responds “I push all my emotions to the side.” One sex worker offers the advice “you must be sure to set boundaries for yourself”. Distinguishing herself from the act may be why one prostitute says “I am always aware of my emotional response”. Explaining the reason for differentiating herself from the job one woman stated “I allow these men who are virtual strangers to me inside my most private physical space so I must maintain some emotional space, some personal space that they are not allowed to see”. She goes on to say “I have often pretended to share intimate thoughts with clients because they wanted me to but I always protect myself, keep my truest feelings secret. They belong to me and my real friends.” And another responded “emotional risk-taking would be dangerous and counterproductive professionally so it is reserved for my personal life.”

It appears that many prostitutes maintain their sense of self by distinguishing themselves from their job. They acknowledge their use of acting to accomplish this distinction but consider it a necessary technique in maintaining their very sense of self.

CONCLUSION

Hochschild’s (1983) study of airline attendants and bill collectors brought the concept of emotional labor into focus. Further studies have examined numerous occupations and the effects of emotional labor. This research explored an interesting sector of employment and expanded the varied methods and range of emotional labor. By continuing the study of emotional labor through the lens of prostitution more information was revealed regarding the blending of communication and emotion as individuals move in and out of their work world.

Through this research it is apparent that the distinctions of surface acting and deep acting may not always be clear. A blurring of the two types emerge in the emotional labor performed by
prostitutes. While a few sex workers exhibit behavior true to the definition of surface acting others show characteristics of deep acting. The majority however seem to perform a blended version of surface and deep acting. Further research should determine if in fact there is a third type of emotional labor, one that combines attributes from both surface and deep acting. The question arises, how does one know when it is deep acting or when it is real emotion? What is the means to validate deep acting? How much of what is done is truly deep acting and how much is honest deep felt behavior? These questions occur from the very nature of sex work. As noted by the survey responses, a number of women sincerely care for their clients while at the same time finding the need to separate themselves from the actual sex act.

Prostitution is a unique occupation. It touches on an aspect of ourselves that we often consider most private. In this respect, the emotional labor performed by sex workers is more intense than that performed by workers in other occupations. As all of the women surveyed were self-employed, there is no demand by management to act in a certain manner thus requiring surface or deep acting. There is the possibility that the very job of prostitution pressures women into performing emotional labor. It may be necessary for sex workers to engage in emotional labor to protect themselves. Without the appearance of care and concern clients would be lost. On the other hand without the protection of emotional labor the possibility exists that prostitutes could begin to care too much for certain clients thus risking emotional attachment that is not allowed in their business dealings.

It appears that while this study has determined the levels and types of emotional labor performed by prostitutes, surface acting, deep acting or a combination of the two are determined by the individual prostitutes. As self-employed, independent women they determine the level at which they perform emotional labor.
As the movie Pretty Woman unfolds, Vivian the prostitute and Edward her client fall in love and presumably live happily ever after. In reality, this rarely happens. The study of prostitutes and their use of emotional labor may be a key in understanding why Vivian and Edward are the exception. Based on this research, if Vivian were real, she would kiss Edward on the lips, engage in stimulating conversation and listen to his problems. She would care for him on a personal level or pretend to care but she would not connect with him on a deep emotional level. Most importantly Vivian would acknowledge with pride that she was an exceptional actress.
Appendix A

Greetings -

My name is Mary Pat Dutton and I am a graduate student at the University of Montana working on a research project for a master’s degree. I have chosen to study the emotions that prostitutes are expected to express when they are with their clients. Your help, by completing the enclosed questionnaire, will assist me with my project. The survey should only take 10 – 15 minutes to answer. Please write as much or as little as you like. If possible, I would appreciate the return of the survey by March 17, 2004 if at all possible.

There is a long history of research about emotions that are required in a wide variety of professions. When waitresses are having a crabby day they put on a smile and act very pleasant to their customers. Bill collectors have to act angry and impatient when they make calls to people who aren’t paying their bills. Sometimes it takes work for people to produce emotions they don’t feel, to hold back emotions they do feel, or change their feelings to fit their jobs. Researchers call this “emotional labor.” As far as I could find, no one has researched the emotional labor of sex workers. I am asking you to fill out this questionnaire so that we can learn more.

You should know that answering these questions could bring up feelings or issues that you have previously not considered. Your involvement in the questionnaire is purely voluntary. Only my faculty advisor and I will have access to your completed survey. If you have any questions about this research please contact me via e-mail at mdputton@carroll.edu, by phone at 406-442-5645 or through the address on the return envelope. You may also e-mail my faculty advisor at shayden@selway.umt.edu. A stamped return address is included for your convenience in returning the questionnaire.

Although I do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms:

In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University’s Claims representative or University Legal Counsel.

By completing this survey and mailing it back to me, you are acknowledging that you have read the above information, that any questions you had have been satisfactorily answered and that you are voluntarily agreeing to take part in this research project.

Again, thank you for your assistance by completing the survey and returning it to me in the enclosed stamped, addressed envelope by March 17, 2004.
First I would like to ask you some basic information about you and your job:

1. How old are you? _______
   (If you are under the age of 18, please do not complete this survey.)

2. Are you Male _______ or Female ______

3. How do you describe your ethnicity?
   Hispanic _______ Asian or Pacific Islander _______
   American Indian ______ Black, non-Hispanic ______
   Caucasian ______ Other, please explain -

4. How long have you worked as a prostitute?

5. What is your primary type of prostitution?

6. On the average, how many clients do you have each working day?

Now I would like to ask about emotional labor on the job:

7. If you engage in conversation with clients, what do you talk about?

8. Do your clients have emotional needs that you deal with during your interaction? (For example, do you deal with their sadness, loneliness, love, anger, anxiety, embarrassment, joy, boredom or other feelings?)

9. Do you think your clients expect or want a particular emotional response from you?

10. Is the emotional response that you give your client consistent or inconsistent with your actual feelings? Consistent _______ Inconsistent _______
If you answered inconsistent, what do you do to hide or change your real feelings?

11. What do you do to produce that emotional response in yourself?

12. Describe one incident in which a client came to you because of emotional needs instead of or in addition to sexual needs.

13. While you are engaged in physical sex with a client what do you think about?

Use the following numbers to respond to questions 14 and 15:
1  = nearly always
2  = often
3  = sometimes
4  = not often
5  = almost never

14. Please rate each of the following statements

      ______ My interaction with my customers is completely sexual
      ______ My interaction with my customers is mostly sexual but somewhat emotional
      ______ My interactions with my customers is an even mix of sexual and emotional
      ______ My interactions with my customers is mostly emotional but somewhat sexual
      ______ My interactions with my customers is completely emotional.

15. Please rate the following statements

When I am with a client,

      ______ I change the way I act to show the desired emotions without changing the way I think and feel.
      ______ I change the way I think and feel in order to feel the emotions my client wants.
Use the following numbers to respond to each statement in question 16:
1 = nearly always
2 = often
3 = sometimes
4 = not often
5 = almost never
6 = other

16. When I am with a client,
   ______ I am really into the sex and what I am doing with my client
   ______ I am doing a great job of acting but feel guilty about acting
   ______ I am doing a great job of acting but figure it's part of the job.

17. Many of us seem to have two lives – one at work and one when we aren't working. For some that difference is pretty extreme. On the other hand, for some of us, the difference between work and not-work is not that obvious – the line between the two is more blurred. How is the “working you” different from the “non-working you”? Tell me about the emotional differences in you when you are working as compared to when you are not working.

18. Is there anything else about your emotions as they relate to your profession that you want to tell me about?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Please return it to me in the enclosed envelope.

I VERY MUCH APPRECIATE YOUR HELP.
References Cited


