

# Systematic Review of Feminist Theories on Sex Work

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## Abstract

Academic and legal researchers alike are passionately debating the theoretical and frequently political underpinning of sexual exploitation and sex work among women. The macro perspective is emphasised most frequently in the theoretical literature in this field, whereas the micro-level perspective on theory and causation is still underrepresented. Although there are many and varied theoretical explanations of sexual exploitation and sex work at the social level, these explanations are few and underdeveloped at the individual level. The divisive philosophical and ethical arguments between macro-level perspectives not only affect other macro systems (like the law), but also decide whether a woman will ever elect to exchange sex for money. In their writings and lectures, academic and legal researchers alike incorporate competing theoretical ideas, such as the utilisation of sex labour vs. sexual exploitation. On the other hand, micro-level theories make attempts to explain the victimisation, entry into, and escape from sexual exploitation and sex work but lack strong empirical backing. One school of thought suggests strongly that sex work is oppression and exploitation of women while the other contends that women are autonomous and can determine how to utilise their bodies. In light of this, the goal of this article is to have an understanding of the differing feminist views on the trade of sex through undertaking a systematic review of feminist theories related to sex work.

**Keywords:** Sex Work, Exploitation, Feminist Theories, Agency, Consent

## Introduction

A broad, transdisciplinary perspective known as feminist theory aims to comprehend how gender affects people's roles, experiences, and ideals (Miriam, 2005). Feminist theory is a term that refers to the ideas that define women's place in society and culture, and that aim to understand and end the inequality and oppression of women based on their sex and gender. The most common application of feminism is to intimate partner abuse, which is framed as a crime based on gender to maintain the institutionalised subjugation of women around the world (Nichols, 2013; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). In many cultures and communities, sex or sexual relations are considered sacred and guided by moral principles that typically apply differently for women from men. Termed prostitution from time in memorial and considered as the oldest profession, the

commercialisation or sale of sex is a highly topical issue. Infact, the term prostitution is considered problematic and holds negative connotations particularly for feminists who postulate that the trade of sex can be viewed as legitimate work like any other. The feminist perspective on sexual exploitation asks whether prostitution or any other exchange of sexual favours for money is or can be consensual (Wilson & Butler, 2014). The debate centres around women's ability to make the informed decision to trade sex in exchange for money as opposed to any other alternative means of survival or job options. Indirect service providers vary on how to interpret the statistical overrepresentation of women and girls observed in practise and research (Oakley et al., 2013; Wasco, 2003), which has a considerable impact on service delivery (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009; Farley, Cotton, Lynne, Zumbek, & Spiwak, 2008; Sullivan, 2003).

Scholars typically fall into two opposed theoretical categories. One faction, known as neo-abolitionists, view both forced and voluntary prostitution as an oppressive practise against women. Prostitution, according to neo-abolitionists, including radical and Marxist feminists, is never fully consensual and cannot be viewed as such (Tiefenbrun, 2002). From this viewpoint, women cannot apply the agency to willingly choose to sell sex. The opposing camp, which includes many sex positivists, contends that women have the freedom to choose prostitution and other sex jobs as a job or even as a career.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used is that of a systematic literature review of theories on sex work. A scholarly synthesis of evidence presented by different authors on the subject matter of sex work was done using critical methods to identify, define and assess research on the topic. The authors extracted and interpreted data from published studies on sex work and these were analysed, described and summarised into a refined conclusion. Key words were used to do the internet search for published articles on sex work which the authors extensively reviewed. The process followed a search for relevant literature of which 133 articles with the keys search words were found. Sources were evaluated due to the mammoth task of reading through all the articles. The most relevant sources were identified by skimming through to ascertain the key concepts discussed, how they were defined, key theories, credibility of the source and concurrence or unique proposition to other articles on the subject. Finally, 57 articles were thoroughly reviewed. Themes and debates were identified, analysed, synthesized and critically evaluated to give a picture of the state of knowledge and proposed theories on the subject of sex work which are presented in this article.

### **Literature review**

#### **Neo-abolitionist perspective: Radical & Marxist Feminism**

Modern-day neo-abolitionist views on the sexual exploitation of women and girls have their roots in radical and Marxist feminism. As sexism exists to uphold male privilege and the patriarchal social order, radical feminism is based on the idea that society is essentially patriarchal (Loue, 2001). Issues of violence against women are framed in a long history of institutional and structural sexism and paternalistic attitudes by radical feminists and patriarchal theorists. The founding principles of this theory, which contends that violence against women is a systemic manifestation of men's dominance over and societal control over women, were initially stated by Dobash and Dobash in 1979. As a result, assaults happen mostly because men feel they have a right to use violence against women due to entrenched male privilege.

The pervasive sexist acceptance of hierarchy has been made possible by the patriarchal structure of both government and society, which excludes women from the public sector, higher education, structural labour forces, and religious institutions (Loue, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This also aided in the development of a male-centered viewpoint, according to which women were restricted to the house and had no business holding highly regarded positions in the community. According to this oppression model, male dominance and structural disparities between men and women are the foundation of sexual trade. The patriarchal access to women's bodies provided by sexual commerce ensures the continued subordination of women to males (Farley, 2005). Radical feminists argue against the use of pornography because they believe it harms and violates women. For instance, Gloria Steinem and the leaders of NOW and Planned Parenthood wrote to President Clinton to express their displeasure with the government's failure to classify all forms of prostitution as "sexual exploitation" (Stolz, 2005). Advocates should be persuaded to outlaw all forms of sex labour and the sex industry since radical feminists typically see all commercial sex acts as patriarchal and repressive (Weitzer, 2007).

Marxist feminism is another neo-abolitionist perspective that, like radical feminism, generally sees all forms of sexual commerce as a form of violence against women. Marxist feminists have maintained that sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism—that which is most one's own and yet is taken away—despite the fact that Marxism had very little to do with women (MacKinnon, 1989). Marxist feminism contends that capitalism continues to be the primary oppressor of women and attributes women's exploitation to their economic dependence on men in a male-dominated society (Bryson, 1992). Women will continue to live in patriarchal societies where they are economically dependent on males in socially stratified societies as long as capitalism endures.

According to this approach, economic exploitation takes many different forms, primarily prostitution and pornography, and must be seen as sexism and class injustice. Similar to how any worker's energy is seized by capitalists for their profits, men who control or buy the exchange of sexual services for women (i.e., pimps) usurp women's sexuality and sexual energy, which results in alienation of one's physiological capacities and very bodily existence (Miriam, 2005). Pornography and other forms of paid sexual encounters, both consensual and involuntary, are explicitly criticised by Marxist feminism. According to Marxist feminist legal expert Catherine MacKinnon, all forms of pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking are sexual abuses that deprive women of their power (MacKinnon, 1982). It goes without saying that in any economic context there are those with power and those without who are exploited. However, this school of thought negates to consider the possibility that women selling sex could possibly be women controlling the means of production, so to speak, thus applying agency and utilising sex as a resource for profit rather than having their labour exploited. Although the fact that the bottom line for many sex workers is low gives weight to the argument that the sale of sex is exploitative and only done out of absolute necessity (forced) rather than out of choice.

### **Sex positivism**

The pro-sex work perspective, also known as sex positivism, broke away from earlier feminist schools of thought to support women's autonomy in their choice of sex work. This viewpoint's proponents contend that sexual activity, including paid sexual activity, is frequently consent-based and that women should have the freedom to choose the type of employment in which they engage (Ferguson et al., 1984). Sex positivists contend that a woman should determine what behaviours or sexual acts are deemed intimate and how such

behaviours or acts should be defined. For instance, Maggie McNeil, a former sex worker who is now an activist and writer, claims that many professions, such as those of nurses, gynaecologists, and childcare providers, can be characterised as intimate, and that all women, including sex workers, should have the freedom to decide what is and is not intimate (Russell & Garcia, 2014). So, any directive or viewpoint telling women that their career choice is improper is hazardous and patriarchal (Kesler, 2002). Sex positivists change the focus of person-centered services from rescuing and protecting “victims” from prostitution and sexual exploitation to offering services to women who work in the sex industry (Shah, 2004).

There are many sex positivism objections. First, the neo-abolitionist viewpoint immediately contradicts the central tenet of sex positivism, since these two theoretical frameworks struggle to reach an understanding of the problems with pornography, prostitution, and sex labour (Metcalf & Woodhams, 2012). Others have stated that the high prevalence of sexual assault and abuse histories, in addition to the lack of economic possibilities, must also be taken into account when discussing sex positivity and the problem of consent (Hughes, 2005; Potterat, Rothenberg, Muth, Darrow, & Phillips-Plummer, 2001). Several religious organisations argue that this framework threatens sexual purity on a national level in addition to being opposed to feminist theories since the commercialization of sex harms moral culture (Weitzer, 2007). Understanding these philosophical stances that pervasively affect the law and social service sectors is further complicated by debates from both the feminist left and the religious right. Regulating women’s sexuality whether from a legal, moral or religious perspective seems absurd and somewhat of a double-standard since the multi-partner nature of men’s sexuality is largely accepted. The assumption that women have no autonomy to “choose” depicts women only as victims or potential victims who are either pushed or pulled into trading in sex with no capacity to determine for themselves what options to take whether for means of survival or any other motivation.

### **Intersectionality**

Despite differing viewpoints, intersectionality can be used with the feminist perspectives already discussed to explain the different experiences that women may have depending on their ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, or another identity they hold in addition to their sex (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). According to intersectionality, the effects of sexism on women's class or racial identities are qualitatively distinct (Crenshaw, 1991). The effects of intersectionality were initially used to explain the following in relation to domestic violence: (1) the socially structured indivisibility of some victims (primarily that all women's experiences are different); (2) who the "appropriate" victims are and the denial of victimisation; and (3) the practical effects of intersection and domestic violence (Bograd, 1999). Since then, intersectionality has changed how researchers perceive connections between related socioeconomic divisions in society and inside individuals' lives (Anthias, 2013). Women's oppression and the effects of sexual exploitation on her cannot be understood solely in terms of gender, or gender and class in the case of Marxist feminism, according to intersectional feminists (Beloso, 2012). Due to the fact that women of colour are more likely than White women to be seen as embodying perversions of desire and to be treated as a lower class of people on a systemic level, feminist legal scholars Wolken (2004) and researcher Chong (2014) have specifically described the devaluation of women of colour as victimisation by sexual exploitation.

Lack of a well-defined intersectional approach and the lack of empirical validity are the main objections to intersectionality (Nash, 2008). However, some detractors contend that intersectionality has exclusively been used to the experiences of Black women and is not politically or factually inclusive of other identity

intersections, such as sexual orientation or even other races (Anthias, 2013). Intersectionality is sometimes used as a framework to analyse the effects of many identities on the oppression of women, but it is also critiqued for adding to or developing new hierarchies specifically for women. It is profoundly important to take into consideration the different dynamics that impact women's socio-economic status and subsequently what options they have available to them to self-sustain. Race is certainly a critical marker of such differences and it goes without saying that women of colour are disproportionately disadvantaged in general and more likely to undertake the sale of sex for purposes of survival, particularly in the Global South.

### **Political economy perspective**

The political economy viewpoint, which was first employed to treat intimate partner violence, has developed to identify crucial intersectional principles and is utilised to address all types of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking. The political economics perspective explains how the state and economy interact, contending that violence against women is a result of the political and economic systems that govern the state (Adelman, 2008). For instance, political welfare reform and the status of the economy intensify certain women's experiences since poor women grew more reliant on financial and in-kind support from intimate partners, dads of their children, and other men (Edin & Lein, 1997). Marxist feminism and the political economy perspective both acknowledge that lower social economic status and political economy may be the driving forces behind sexual commerce; however, the political economy perspective is more rooted in capitalistic differences in wealth alone than in differences in wealth as a result of systemic oppression against women. As a result, the political economy permits unequal opportunity and remuneration for women, encourages them to depend more on men for possibilities to survive, and shifts the conversation away from individualistic deviancy and towards structural inequality.

Women who are destitute and have few options for surviving may become victims of traffickers or turn to prostitution themselves when they seem to have no other option due to sexual exploitation (Anthias, 2013). Women, from exotic dancers to trafficked women, battle economic, social, and sexual oppression when they lack cultural or social capital (Konstantopoulos et al., 2013). If the political climate at the policy level provided equitable possibilities to obtain social capital, women would not be forced to sell sexual or erotic services, increasing the susceptibility of poor women to being exploited or trafficked. Advocates of the political economy perspective cite research showing that disproportionate numbers of young people who use prostitutes and trade sex to survive live in unstable homes and are impoverished (Watson, 2011; Wilson & Butler, 2014).

The eradication of a woman's option to engage in prostitution or trade sex is one of the political economy's criticisms, just like those of Marxism or radical feminism (Weitzer, 2012). According to this viewpoint, institutional and economic constraints to "acceptable" job or financial possibilities completely supersede personal agency (Wolken, 2004). The argument that the structural drivers of inequality and socio-economic status are largely responsible for women "choosing" or being "forced" into trading sex holds water as the possibilities are very high that in the absence of lack, sex work would not be the preferred work. However, it is unfair to assume that women have no agency or capabilities to make decisions about matters affecting their lives and survival regardless of their circumstances. Diminishing and limiting factors may indeed exist and at structural levels where the individual can do very little, but a choice is always to be made.

### **Decriminalisation and Legalisation**

Two competing and contentious approaches to dealing with prostitution legally are consistently put out among legal and academic researchers, and are used to varying degrees all across the world. First, the decriminalisation of prostitution is proposed, which would eliminate legal sanctions for any behaviour associated to prostitution (Hughes, 2005). This may apply to a number of distinct models. In Sweden, for instance, pimps and traffickers as well as sex consumers are not decriminalised; only sex sellers are. Compared to the New Zealand model, which decriminalised all parties involved in the buying, selling, and facilitation of sex in 2003, this is a stark contrast (Wyler & Siskin, 2010).

The second approach to addressing prostitution is the total legalisation of prostitution, which is just as contentious. Currently, this concept is used in New Zealand, the Netherlands, Australia, and other nations (Cho, Dreher, & Neumayer, 2013). As the name implies, legalising prostitution absolves everyone involved in, involved with, or facilitating the sale of sex from any and all criminal culpability and blame. Therefore, prostitution is reclassified as a type of service employment (Hughes, 2005). This approach enables the regulation and taxation of sex trade, strengthening national economies. Several proponents of legalisation contend that allowing the enforcement of labour laws will benefit women and give them access to legalised health insurance or other advantages of the legalised working environment for example better wages (Sullivan, 2003). However, both of these studies came to the conclusion that this could be due to the high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and other mental health issues (Valera et al., 2001). Two independent studies reported that 44% and 57% of female prostitutes in their samples indicated that legalised prostitution would help them or keep them safer.

Both legalisation and decriminalisation proponents contend that these measures lessen the stigmatisation of people who sell sex (Weitzer, 2012). Via literature and advocacy groups, several former prostitutes and sex workers have also had a significant impact on the campaign of legalisation or decriminalisation (Russell & Garcia, 2014). The COYOTE organisation, which stands for "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics," is one such instance. COYOTE is a significant social group that opposes the prohibitionist view of prostitution in favour of decriminalisation. It was founded by Margo St. James, a former sex worker who was convicted of prostitution (Jenness, 1990). The group and other like-minded activists contend that voluntary prostitution is an acceptable and voluntary occupation that ought to be represented in legal practise and policy as such. The morality of prohibitionist attitudes, according to other well-known proponents of decriminalising and legalising prostitution, has no place in the law and could injure women even more (Richards, 1979; Wolken, 2004).

Most typically, criticisms of legalising prostitution or sex work are tied to criticisms of decriminalising prostitution. According to detractors, decriminalisation is best understood as a step in the process of legalisation or abolition rather than as a standalone goal (Hughes, 2005). Others assert that decriminalising or legalising prostitution will normalise commercial sex and so legitimate an employer's requests for sexual favours from any of his (or her) employees (Anderson, 2002). Although evidence from around the world has shown that legalised prostitution may increase human trafficking (Cho et al., 2013). Domestic trafficking in the United States has not been the subject of this analysis because the dynamics of prostitution and sexual exploitation there are different from those in other parts of the world.

Academic Melissa Farley (2004) and other proponents of both types of prostitution criticised New Zealand for having a law that first decriminalised prostitution before making it legal. She enumerated the points made by numerous abolitionists, noting that (1) harm to women is not lessened by legalisation or decriminalisation; (2) stigmatisation and violence against women continue to affect women under legalisation or decriminalisation policies; and (3) the decision to engage in prostitution is made due to a lack of other economic options and exists as another form of oppression against women. In the literature and in response to expanding global changes in prostitution legislation, these arguments are frequently made (Hughes, 2005; MacKinnon, 1982; Raphael & Shapiro, 2002, 2005). The debate on the legality of sex work and whether it should be legalised or simply decriminalised is quite heated due to different belief systems about what is morally acceptable, right according to varying religions and legal according to precedent. However, the real focus should never be on legislating moral behaviour and deeming it criminal when it does not align with the moral beliefs of the majority. The focus should be on protection and ensuring that there is no exploitation, oppression or violence. No human being should be forced into sex slavery and the choice to sell sex should truly be an informed decision and not out of desperation or dire necessity as this in itself is a form of oppression.

### **Victimisation and Entry perspectives**

While some research (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Wilson & Butler, 2014) addresses individual risk factors or common themes of recruitment and initiation events, they are primarily descriptive and not theoretical or process oriented. Few studies that report the integration or even guided use of theory in figuring out the route to sexual exploitation or sex work were found after a thorough search. It is crucial to highlight that no theory applied to entry into sexual exploitation or sex work was supported or detailed by more than one author or study, despite the exceptions to this rule—four studies in total—being described here.

Reid (2012) first applied the life course theory to victimisation in sex trafficking, which contends that a person's life stage affects how an experience, including victimisation in this case, affects a person. Reid discovered that during childhood and adolescence in particular, signs of negative informal social control mechanisms were prevalent, leading to a craving for acceptance and love that frequently exacerbated early entrapment. A girl entered the sex industry due to her desire for a better life and true love, as well as her interest in sex work and attraction to quick money.

The theory of social control served as the basis for the second study, which focused on the importance of teenagers' ties to mainstream society as deterrents to delinquent or deviant behaviour. Gwadz and colleagues (Gwadz et al., 2009) were guided by this theory. Gwadz and colleagues speculated that without these ties, homeless youth would be more likely to start trading sex. Their findings demonstrated that social control did contribute to the beginning of homeless teenagers, but that additional factors, such as advantages of the informal economy and impediments to it, also played a role.

Finally, Whitbeck & Simons (1993) investigated a victimisation model based on social learning in their research of homeless adults and adolescents. Teenagers in the model and specific study were more likely to originate from dysfunctional families and to use unconventional survival techniques, like survival sex. They were consequently more likely to encounter heightened victimisation and criminal justice repercussions.

The structural-choice theory of victimisation was applied in a fourth study (Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, Cauce, & Whitbeck, 2004) to investigate the context-specific impacts of lifestyles and daily routines on the risk of victimisation. This theory was utilised by Tyler and colleagues to explain the correlation between survival sex and sexual victimisation among homeless youth that was found in their study. Due to their limited resources and lack of other options for survival, they were forced to choose the common alliances.

In addition to these individual studies, many descriptive studies of sexually exploited women and girls have shown high rates of substance abuse and addiction occurring before or as a result of sexual exploitation (Gervais, & Davidson, 2013; Valera et al., 2001), yet theoretical underpinnings of addiction theory with particular regard to this population remain vastly underdeveloped. It is crucial to take into account how differences in the process of addiction and their impact on the approach to sexual exploitation or sex work are described in descriptive rather than theoretical terms.

Theoretically, addiction has been described as an illness, a behavioural condition, a cognitive problem, and/or as a means of coping with trauma and internal and interpersonal conflict (West & Brown, 2013). The evolving theory of addiction has combined a number of these positions' biochemical, neurological, and emotional facets, though. According to West and Brown (2013), addiction should be viewed as a chronic disorder characterised by a persistent, strong urge to engage in a rewarding conduct that is acquired as a result of engaging in that action and that has a high potential for unintentional harm. The pathologies underlying addiction involve one of three categories of abnormalities, which either: (1) are independent of addiction, such as depression, anxiety, or impulsivity; (2) result from the addictive behaviour, such as the development of a deeply ingrained habit or acquired drive; or (3) exist in a social or physical environment, such as the presence of intense social or other pressures to engage in activity. In other words, the notion of addiction may have its roots in a response to a social context, an internal drive, or a mental health condition.

### **Exit Perspectives**

The process by which women and girls leave sexual exploitation or sex work is equally complex and theoretically underdeveloped, similar to the entry progression. A few studies (Williamson & Folaron, 2003) suggest models or steps to exiting prostitution and sexual exploitation based on qualitative analysis and observations of a woman's escape from prostitution. An experimentally testable hypothesis of quitting prostitution is put forth (Cimino, 2012). There aren't many ideas that describe the departing process, and the ones that do are hard to verify quantitatively. This study examines intents to leave prostitution by looking at the attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy beliefs that support a woman's decision to leave prostitution using the integrated model of behavioural prediction. The model is improved by prostitution-specific characteristics like agency and societal context. Although there have been no studies yet, this theory might explain and forecast a move away from prostitution on the street (Cimino, 2012).

Just street-level prostitution is the focus of the "Phases of the Lifestyle Model" (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). This process entails stages of losing interest in the prostitution lifestyle as a result of violence, drug abuse, arrests, and trauma, before leaving as a result of unfavourable circumstances and a shift in perspective. The second model, dubbed the "Breakaway Model" (Mnsson & Hedin, 1999), contains a tipping point where a bad experience occurs, prompting thoughts of leaving and attempts to do so. This concept assumes that a change in social networks helps women successfully avoid prostitution. Finally, Sanders' 2007 book "Typology of Transitions" outlines four ways to leave the prostitution industry: (1) Reactionary transition—women undergo a life-altering event that prompts their exit; (2) Gradual transition—women start using formal



support services gradually; (3) Natural progression—women experience a natural or intrinsic desire to leave; and (4) Yo-Yoing—women cycle in and out of prostitution, treatment facilities, and the legal system. Fourth, the "Integrative Model of Exiting" is based on the stages of change behaviour, in which the final leave happens after several tries and results in a change in identity, routines, and social networks (Baker et al., 2010).

Recently, a predictive theory of intents synthesised a number of hypotheses to determine the exit route (Cimino, 2012). This study examines intents to leave prostitution by looking at the attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy beliefs that support a woman's decision to leave prostitution using the integrated model of behavioural prediction. This hypothesis, which has not yet been tested, holds that all behaviour is a person's decision based on four factors: (1) the action (e.g., to leave); (2) the target (e.g., the lady); (3) the context (e.g., prostitution); and (4) the time period during which the conduct is to be studied (e.g., permanently). The woman's choice is also influenced by the local attitudes, customs, intentions, skill, and surroundings. The issues raised by pimps or traffickers are not addressed by this suggested theory, which primarily focuses on voluntary exits.

### Conclusion

All four studies that examine the use of trade or survival sex emphasise victimisation as a result of increased vulnerabilities, which appears to lend support to the neo-abolitionist viewpoint overall. The studies' limited alternatives are cited by the authors as a result of different hardships and traumas, such as abusive families, abusive childhoods, poverty, and homelessness. Theories of addiction also influence how sexual exploitation proceeds and any decisions a woman or girl may make. These findings do not necessarily refute that people who trade sex have the option to do so; rather, they raise the possibility that they might not have made the same decisions in the absence of early vulnerabilities or in the context of their current circumstances.

Both exit models, like entry perspectives, appear to support the abolitionist viewpoint in that they provide numerous reasons why a woman would not be able to fully make a decision on her own, free of any other considerations. According to sex positivists, these theoretical justifications for prostitution take away the possibility of complete personal agency and allow women to choose whether or not to engage in sex work. Neo-abolitionists contend that sex labour is only selected because there are no other viable economic options at all; as a result, it is never truly a "choice." The argument between neo-abolitionists and sex-positivists, as well as macro-level theoretical perspectives, can undoubtedly be found in these smaller works as well.

It is clear that the majority of study and discussion centres on the macro and structural theories of causality and that the micro level theories at the person and relationship level are still significantly underdeveloped. The divisions within the legal systems that govern the various nations of the world have been substantially influenced by the contentious discussions of diverse feminist perspectives. At the macro level, there has been a lot of theoretical and legal writing, but there has not been a lot of work that has been empirically tested. No clear consensus is likely to be formed anytime soon given the volume of comments from one academic or legal scholar to another, frequently in refutation or defence of his or her own unique framework (Weitzer, 2012; Wolken, 2004). Although there is very little external factual backing, micro level perspectives help to understand the entry and exit processes for women and girls in sexual exploitation or sex industry. Notwithstanding the divergent bodies of work across macro and micro level theories, theoretical developments are crucial for comprehending female sexual exploitation and sex labour as well as the current policies, services, and interventions available to women.

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