The Prostitution of Sexuality

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Lisa Mamac, born in a rural farming village in the Philippines, tried to escape the inevitability of marrying there and raising her own family in the poverty in which she grew up. Like many women moving from rural to urban areas as their country is industrializing, Lisa left her village for a large city with plans to go to school. Rural to urban migration socially dislocates women and girls as patriarchal power in traditional societies provides almost no possibilities for women outside of marriage or their family. Under these conditions women are made particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Away from home and on her own, Lisa fell in love and then became pregnant, only to learn that the man she was involved with was already married. He left her and she struggled alone with her infant, who died at 8 months. She tried to go back to school but did not have the money. Finally she became involved with a man who said he would put her through school. But he didn't. In October 1981, Lisa met a man who was a chief prosecutor in the court of justice of the region in which she lived. He told her of a high-paying position as a receptionist in a 5-star hotel in the Netherlands. He arranged for her to have the job. As women
are marginalized from the developing economies of their industrializing countries, emigration often appears to be the only way to survive.

Most women trafficked into prostitution are from rural areas and have been in brief marriages or liaisons with men who abandon them.¹ When Lisa arrived in the Netherlands, she was put into a brothel. Like many women trafficked into prostitution, Lisa’s only chance for help was to appeal to customers to help her escape. In 1983, one customer listened to Lisa’s story and agreed to help her. But it was 2 years before police investigations led to a police raid on the brothel. Once she was free, with the support of Philippine groups in the Netherlands, women’s organizations there, and women’s groups in the Philippines, in 1985 Lisa Mamac began the struggle to win justice in her case. In 1988 Jan Schoemann was expelled from the Philippines and was convicted in Dutch courts of trafficking and sentenced to serve two and a half years in prison. His Philippine counterpart, Nestoria Placer, a former government official, was freed by the Philippine court in 1991. The judge in the case turned the blame back on Lisa Mamac and “her glaring immoral conduct manifested by her unusual inclination for illicit sex” in contrast to Placer, whose “character is beyond reproach and whose public life remains unblemished.”² In 1993, the case was on appeal.

Lisa Mamac, caught in the vulnerability of women migrating from rural poverty, was trafficked into prostitution. At the same time, prostitution was being industrialized in her own country. Sex industrialization had been set in motion to service the military, particularly of the U.S. Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base. Furthermore, Lisa was trafficked from the Philippines to the Netherlands, one of the Western countries that has taken the lead among post-industrial nations in legalizing and normalizing prostitution. Lisa Mamac’s exploitation in prostitution encapsulated all of the stages of sexual exploitation that I have identified in this work: (1) trafficking in women, (2) military prostitution, (3) sex industrialization, and (4) normalization of prostitution.
Historical Stages in the Deployment of Sexual Exploitation

Patriarchal power is singular in its reduction of women to sex, but varied in its political and economic strategies for deploying sexual subordination. Sexual exploitation is differentially shaped according to the economic development of each region, which determines how sex is constructed and deployed to subordinate women. Therefore, there is no one strategy of patriarchal power and sexual politics. While each of these 4 stages of sexual exploitation are found in any historical period or in any stage of a country’s economic development, they also constitute progression, one leading to another with economic development and prosperity.

1. Trafficking in women prevails especially in pre-industrial and feudal societies that are primarily agricultural, where women are excluded from the public sphere. Women’s reduction to sex is a fact of their status as the property of their husbands. Under such conditions women are governed by marital relations of power through the exploitation of their unpaid labor in the home, their reproduction, and their sexuality. They are privatized by marriage, and their labor outside of the home is confined within the informal economic sector, not counted in the public economy. Sexual subordination and economic dependency resulting from women’s status as the property of their husbands is marital feudalism. In feudalism men may sexually exploit their wives, take concubines, and buy prostitutes with impunity as the privilege of male domination that services their promiscuity. By contrast, as women are sexual property of men, any sexual act outside of their marriage, including rape and forced prostitution, is usually considered infidelity and the victims are severely punished. There is little or no social space for women outside of the private patriarchal sector. However, prostitution prevails for men. In the private patriarchal sector, women and girls are supplied to
brothels primarily through brutal trafficking and forced prostitution.

2. *Military prostitution* in war and in many areas where there is a massive military presence provides for soldiers’ rest and recreation, R & R. Increasingly wars are being fought primarily in Third World countries, or in somewhat more developed areas such as Eastern Europe was when much of it was reverted to underdevelopment by war. Likewise, military prostitution proliferates in the areas where women’s vulnerabilities from war, because of rape in war, in economic underdevelopment from war, and in the patriarchal traditionalism of the society where the war is waged, makes them accessible to be prostituted as sex commodities for soldiers who are usually foreign men—either aggressors or occupiers.

3. *Sex industrialization* accompanies economic development. With industrialization and the development of a public economic sector, larger numbers of women leave the privatized household in search of jobs in the public economy, usually in urban areas. As industrializing economies shift from domestic to export-oriented production, Western-originated sex industries work with local and regional traffickers to build sex industries. Women migrating from rural to urban areas constitute a ready pool for procurers. Their labor, having been unpaid and exploited at home, is devalued in the public economy, and they are marginalized from it. Exploitation in the family leads to exploitation of labor in the public economy. As industrialization accelerates, sex industries buy women’s sexual exchange at a higher rate than most women can earn in export processing labor. Sex industries prostitute significant proportions of the female population, which can no longer be spoken of only as forced prostitution in terms of trafficking in women. In this phase, the primary emphasis of sexual exploitation shifts from trafficking in women to sex industrialization that is usually not characterized by physical coercion or slavery. Rather, economic destitution in the displacement of women from rural to urban areas and the absence of work oppor-
tunities close down the world of possibilities for women. As sex industrialization develops, for some women it has the appeal of fast money in an increasingly commercialized world of commodities that are available primarily to men.

4. Normalization of prostitution takes place with higher levels of economic development in post-industrial societies. In post-industrial, developed societies, when women achieve the potential for economic independence, men are threatened with loss of control over women as their legal and economic property in marriage. To regain control, patriarchal domination reconfigures around sex by producing a social and public condition of sexual subordination that follows women into the public world. Sexual exploitation is individualized to fit the domination of economically independent women. Sexual saturation of society through pornography promoted by sexology sustains individualized sexual exploitation in the public domain. By contrast, public images of the sexual subordination of women are not necessary under feudal conditions, wherein sex is a fact of privatized property arrangements of marriage and there is no economic or social alternative to marriage for women. Nor is the issue of women's consent important or even relevant when they are legal property of their husbands. But in the sexual saturation of society through pornography, when women are reduced publicly to sex, women's sexual consent becomes paramount in importance to sustain their subordination. Pursuing work in industrialized sectors, women are removed from men's control of them in the family. The social control of women is reinforced in the public world by invoking women's consent to the prostitution of sexuality. Economic development and the potential for women's economic equality produce a new public, social exploitation, which is built from the prior, privatized sexual exploitation of women in marriage. When single, economically independent, emotionally autonomous women evade sexual reductionism and become historical reality, publicly institutionalized sexual exploitation reverts them back to sex.

That was the experience of Anita Hill, a prominent African-
American lawyer, when she reported her experience of Clarence Thomas’s sexual harassment of her to the congressional committee that would confirm Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1991. When Hill testified before the congressional committee, the committee saw in this African-American woman her refusal to be sexed body, reduced to sex. Her refusal to be sex deeply challenged the sexual power of racism and the historical reduction of African-American women in slavery to sexual property, that is, to the sexual ownership of their white masters.

The committee’s interrogation of Anita Hill, especially the threats from Pennsylvania Senator Specter, were more than a reaction against one woman. The all-male congressional committee made of Anita Hill a nationally televised lesson to all women—and their message to U.S. women was to withdraw, to retreat. As she bravely and unswervingly stood up to that day of grilling, of intensive cross-examination, of unrelenting efforts to find a modicum of motivation, other than justice, for her allegations, women throughout the United States became aware, as many had never been aware before, of the reality that if a woman of Anita Hill’s character cannot be believed, none of us will be believed. That was the message from the congressional male bonding, racist as it was, that enveloped Clarence Thomas within its protective cover. Hill’s case acquired such prominence because she became paradigmatic of the woman who refuses to be reduced to body, sexist body, racist body, and the fact that she is African-American made her refusal to be sexed body an ultimate act of defiance.

Culture of Sex and Construction of Sexuality

Sexual power is a political condition of women’s lives that is either privatized and feudalistic or public and industrial, or both. In each historical period, under each set of economic conditions from marital feudalism to sex industrialization and normalized prostitution, sexuality is socially constructed, shaped in the soci-
ety by social norms and values to fit to the particular conditions of patriarchy. Society (not biology, not drives, not needs, and not desires) precedes sexuality, giving structure and context to the individual experience of it.

As society socially constructs sexuality, acts of sexual exchange are where domination is produced and, in turn, they give shape and form to physiological sexual impulses, drives, or needs. It does not work the other way around, as sexologists would have it. That is, the sex drive does not manifest itself as some innate reality that then determines sexual behaviors. Christine Delphy has pointed out that “it is oppression which creates gender” and that “gender in its turn created anatomical sex, in the sense that the hierarchal division of homogeneity into two transforms an anatomical difference (which is itself devoid of social implication) into a relevant distinction for social practice.”

In the industrialized world, the social, cultural production of “sexuality,” the sexuality of normalized prostitution, has developed and been deployed through the science of sex, sexology, and its counterpart, pornography, the graphic representation of prostitution sex. Foucault poses the question “whether, since the nineteenth century, the scientia sexualis . . . has not functioned, at least to a certain extent, as an ars erotica.” The public and social deployment of sex as sexuality, “proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and . . . controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way,” created “discourses” through which sex, which has no pre-social definition or meaning, became sexuality, a condition of sexist power.

A century of development of public, social sexual preoccupation in the West in liberal areas has shifted the social expectation of coupling away from marriage and its privatization of women under one male authority, the husband, toward sex and the public colonization of women for male sexual servicing. Conservative areas of post-industrial society demonstrate the effort to confine women within the family, under reproductive and sexual control.
A sexual imperative looms over coupling. It signifies for the late twentieth century what marriage had meant for previous centuries in terms of control of women. As women are no longer necessarily identified as wives, they are expected to be known through their sexual connection to another. Coupling has become a social signification that women are sexually connected to another—therefore under control, a control of women that marriage no longer assures. The imperative that women be/are sexual is a historically recent social force constituted to sustain male domination when women cannot be controlled by marriage or in economic dependency.

The 1960s sexual revolution took as its bibles the works of sexologists and pornographers, both of which groups, as Sheila Jeffries pointed out, were hostile to women’s liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, by the 1980s, they had reduced the meaning and significance of women’s “liberation” to pornography where “liberation” means trespassing traditional masculinist sexual norms to replace them with modern, public masculinist norms that reduce woman to sex. The culture of sexual liberation, developed in the twin discourses of sexology and pornography, produces sex as an objectified “thing” to be gotten, taken, had. That “thing” has been reified in the orgasm. As Stephen Heath points out, orgasm is “the key manoeuvre in the sexual fix”:

As long as orgasm holds the centre of the stage, we will never get out of the sexual norm, a redirection of the sexual, the realization of sex as a commodity with men and women placed and held essentially, as their “nature,” male and female, the difference, as the agents of that exchange.

In a century-long development of a masculinist culture of sex in the West, sexuality has been made compulsive, and it is compulsively treated as if compulsive sex is “normal” sex. The deployment of sexuality generally follows the progression of pornography, which emerged for massive distribution in the early 1960s. As legal control of pornography was lifted, its subject matter escalated from pictures of nude women to more provocative
poses. By 1967 more sexual explicitness was expected by consumers, which finally led to hard-core, violent, humiliating, degrading sex and the snuff films in which women were murdered in the sexual fix.

Today male domination is sustained in large part by the failure of society to distinguish between sex that is exploitation and sex that is positive human experience, enhancing rather than destroying human lives. Feminism has intervened in the patriarchal construction of sex. In their civil rights approach to pornography, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon redefined pornography to be “a systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex which differentially harms women.” Dworkin and MacKinnon defined pornography as harm not only because it is violent—because it presents women being penetrated by objects or animals, because it presents women injured, bleeding, bruised in pornographic sex—but at its core pornography is violating because “women are presented as dehumanized sexual objects, things or commodities.”

Legally, Dworkin and MacKinnon have identified the subject matter of pornography as “graphic, sexually explicit presentation that produces a subordination of women through pictures and/or words” (emphasis added). Prostitution is the enacted version of pornography, where the graphic representation of the subordination of women comes to life. The normalization of prostitution is the pornographic deployment of that subordination into private lives and personal relationships. Now, not only is it the daily, subjective experience of a class of women, identified by their commercial availability to service men sexually, but of women as a class through the prostitution of sexuality.

In defense of male domination, sexual liberals, those who have promoted sex as a form of freedom and as a matter only of individual choice without regard to whether that sex enhances or harms human experience, have moved to censor the civil rights approach to pornography. By the 1990s the progression and escalation of pornography has become the masculinist culture of sex
in which prostitution is the normative model for sexual behavior. It does not stop there. This Western masculinist construction of sex, this colonization of women's bodies, is a major dimension of Western hegemony as American, European, and Australian men, in the military, in businesses, and as tourists, impose that sex in the form of market demand on women in Third World countries. The U.S., U.N., or other occupying military forces have not just discovered sex for the first time when they rape and prostitute women of Third World countries, nor is that the end of it when they return home to lovers or wives.

In each historical condition of sexualization—feudalism, industrialization, and post-industrial society—the subordination of women is accomplished through (1) the sexualization that reduces women to biology, locating women in a class condition where they are expropriated bodies to be fetishized, which treats sex and women's lives as essential rather than social reality; (2) the reduction of human beings to bodily functions, driving women out of history; and (3) atemporality in which women cease to exist in time. In sexual exploitation, women are universalized and therefore not historical, biologized and therefore not social.

By contrast, Catharine MacKinnon summarizes the legal and social reality that would obtain if sex were not the condition of subordination:

If the sexes were equal, women would not be sexually subjugated. Sexual force would be exceptional, consent to sex could be commonly real, and sexually violated women would be believed. If the sexes were equal, women would not be economically subjected, their desperation and marginality cultivated, their enforced dependency exploited sexually or economically.13

Prostitution of Sexuality

When prostitution is normalized it is no longer the exchange of money and the anonymity in the fact that she has known this guy
maybe 10 minutes that differentiates how women in prostitution experience the night from how many women, teenagers, and young girls around the world experience it. By the 1990s, sex that is bought in the act of prostitution and promoted in pornography does not look significantly different from the sex that is taken in rape, pressured in teenage dating, and apparently given in many private relationships. This leads to the conclusion that, in the West, normatively the lines between rape, prostitution, and private sex have blurred.

The legacy to women of the sexual liberation movement and the legitimization of pornography of the 1960s has not been women’s liberation but rather the prostitution of sexuality. By the 1990s, the video cassette recorder has done more than bring pornography home into the bedroom and private sexual relations. With the camcorder, it has made the bedroom—or wherever pornography that is prostituted sex is done—the location for making pornography. It has been reported that about one-third of the approximately 75 new adult videos each month are made by amateurs at home.14 And as husbands and lovers see a market value to film their private, intimate moments at home, women are reporting that the sex scenes are becoming more and more torturous. Diana Russell in her study of rape found that 10% of the 930 women she interviewed had experienced pornography being brought into their sex lives:

Ms. C: He was a lover. He’d go to porno movies, then he’d come home and say, “I saw this in a movie. Let’s try it.” I felt really exploited, like I was being put in a mold.

Ms. D: I was staying at this guy’s house. He tried to make me have oral sex with him. He said he’d seen far-out stuff in movies, and that it would be fun to mentally and physically torture a woman.

Ms. F: He’d read something in a pornographic book, and then he wanted to live it out. It was too violent for me to do something like that. It was basically getting dressed up and spanking. Him spanking me. I refused to do it.

Ms. H: This couple who had just read a porno book wanted to try the groupie number with four people. They tried to persuade my boy-
friend to persuade me. They were running around naked, and I felt really uncomfortable.

Ms. I: It was S & M stuff. I was asked if I would participate in being beaten up. It was a proposition, it never happened. I didn’t like the idea of it.

Interviewer: Did anything else upset you?

Ms. I: Anal intercourse. I have been asked to do that, but I didn’t enjoy it at all. I have had, very occasionally.

Ms. M: Anal sex. First he attempted gentle persuasion, I guess. He was somebody I’d been dating a while and we’d gone to bed a few times. Once he tried to persuade me to go along with anal sex, first verbally, then by touching me. When I said “No,” he did it anyway—much to my pain. It hurt like hell.¹⁵

In their early 1980s study of 12,000 heterosexual and homosexual couples, sociologists Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz found that married people were having more sex and more regularly. While sexual activity was increasing in the home, sexualities have configured around gender rather than sexual preference/orientation. Sexually speaking, “husbands and male cohabiters are more like gay men than they are like wives or female cohabiters. Lesbians are more like heterosexual women than either is like gay or heterosexual men.”¹⁶ Their conclusion was based in significant part on preferences for sexual practices in relation to power and control. In the gendering of sexuality, often men consider their genitals the main focus of the sex act. Generally, more sex has led to more sexual objectification that dissociates sex from an interactive experience with another. This is the sexuality that was set in motion by pornography, particularly Deep Throat, made by Linda Lovelace while she was sexually enslaved by the pimp/pornographer Chuck Traynor.

Sex that is not mutually interactive and is dissociated from one’s partner will eventually invoke women in disengagement, dissociation, and disembodiment. It is not surprising then that for women reciprocity was important in their sexual relations. In the couples study, heterosexual women expressed preference for intercourse because it involves mutual participation; it was more
central to their sexual satisfaction. But, as Andrea Dworkin points out:

women have wanted intercourse to be, for women, an experience of equality and passion, sensuality and intimacy. Women have a vision of love that includes men as human too; and women want the human in men including in the act of intercourse. Even without the dignity of equal power, women have believed in the redeeming potential of love.¹⁷

Women and men have arrived at different places to participate in the sexualization of society and the intensification of sexual exploitation in private life. Continuing with Dworkin, “these visions of a humane sensuality based in equality are in the aspirations of women; and even the nightmare of sexual inferiority does not seem to kill them.”¹⁸ By choice and desire, male sexuality configures around disengaged sex, sex for the sake of itself, separate from the human experience and interaction that it actually is, thereby destroying sexual interaction in favor of sex that is objectifying, the origins of the prostitution of sexuality. This is socially constructed sex, the conditions that prevail when sexuality is made an element of power relations of sexism.

If the prostitution of sexuality, the reduction of oneself to sexual object, is increasingly demanded of adult women, it is an even more pressing requirement of teenagers. With the sexualization of society, first sex is occurring at earlier ages, in the teenage years. Sexual norms in high school and college dating are expressed now in the language of prostitution: “hooking up” identifies dating for the purposes of having sex. In 1981, 19% of unmarried girls had had intercourse by the age of 15. By 1988 that figure increased to 27%. In 1991, 50% of unmarried females and 60% of unmarried males between the ages of 15 and 19 have had sexual intercourse. Not surprisingly, 1 in 5 girls age 15 to 19 who are sexually active become pregnant.¹⁹

The fear of AIDS and the crisis in teenage pregnancy has led to new programs in the mid 1990s that promote sexual abstinence among teenagers. Their approach teaches girls how to resist pres-
sure for sex and "hooking up." It is similar to drug prevention programs that teach young people how to resist pressure to take drugs. They are taught to turn away from pressures to have sex by asserting their own goals. These initiatives are being promoted especially by the African-American communities and by organizations such as the Urban League. These programs may lead teenagers to increased sexual autonomy and sexual self-determination. But they do not directly confront the harm of early sex to human development. Abstinence or virginity projects are frequently dismissed as moralistic, representative of repressive "family values" promoted under the Bush-Quayle administration. And indeed some of them use the fear of AIDS and the crisis in teenage pregnancy to reinvoke sexual repression. However, programs focused on sexual and personal autonomy through controlling sexual activity until developmentally mature hold the potential of challenging sexual power relations that frequently undermine teenage female development.

While there have been racial differences in frequency of early sexual intercourse, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, "most of the increase in female sexual activity in the 1980s was among white teenagers and those in higher income families." 20 This trend reflects the normalization of early sexual behavior by the bourgeois and upper classes in their exploitation of women and girls, which sets the standards that eventually produce that exploitation among the working classes and the poor. In a 1993 survey of high school seniors in a private girls preparatory school on the East Coast, (with a total of 67 from 108 responding) 40.3% had had sexual intercourse, 92.5% of them having had first intercourse between ages 15 and 17. The pattern of sexual behavior in 1993 for high- and middle-income, mostly white teenage girls in this school follows the pattern that Blumstein and Schwartz found in 1983 among adults. The study found that 63.2% had stimulated a boy to orgasm while 50.7% had been stimulated to orgasm by a boy; 45.6% had performed fellatio on boys while 36.8% had experienced cunnilingus.
Research is beginning to make the connections that feminists established a long time ago. "A substantial proportion of young adolescents who are sexually active are active only because they have been coerced," according to Bruce Ambuel and Julian Rapaport who cite research that reports that "although 7% of White and 9% of African-American 14-year-old girls have experienced intercourse, only 2% of White and 6% of African-American 14-year-olds participated voluntarily." This is the sexual socialization into the prostitution of sexuality where coercion becomes a normalized dimension of sexual life. These are the conditions under which coerced sex becomes chosen sex. As a recent study conducted by the American Association of University Women establishes, these are the conditions for producing educational, economic, and political subordination because these are the conditions that diminish achievement far beyond the experience of sex. In the AAUW study, 81% of all students in grades 8–11 say they have experienced unwelcome sexual behavior at school. Seventy-six percent of the girls and 56% of the boys in the study reported receiving sexual comments or looks while 65% of the girls and 42% of the boys were touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way. These figures indicate how sexual development of teenagers initiates female sexual subordination in the early years and cuts off female potential for development. The negative effects of present normative teenage sexual behaviors overwhelmingly impact on girls' experience of and success in school. Thirty-three percent of girls and 12% of boys subjected to sexualization do not want to go to school, and 32% of girls and 13% of boys do not want to talk in class because of their experiences. Other effects disproportionately impacting girls are that after being sexually harassed many find it hard to pay attention in school and difficult to study. Twenty percent of the girls' grades have dropped and 17% are thinking about changing schools.

Every year, Ed Donnellan, a high school teacher, conducts a survey with female students who range in age from 14 to 17. Donnellan uses this survey for consciousness raising about sexual
exploitation. In 1992, of 70 students surveyed, 17% reported that they had been subjected to intercourse against their will. And 57% reported being kissed against their will while 25% indicated that their genitals had been touched against their will. In 1993, 9% had intercourse against their will while 78% had been touched in their thigh or crotch against their will.

Donnellan's survey produced other responses from students. One 14-year-old told him privately that she had sex with 13 boys in the previous 9 months and “I don’t even like it.” The widespread sexualization of women through pornography and the media has intensified teenage male expectations of sex and female teenagers’ experience of social pressure to be sexually active, believing that they can’t say no.

When I spoke to Donnellan’s class, some students asked what they should do if they find pornography when they are babysitting. I suggested that they call a friend or trusted family member to come over, stay with them and accompany them home, but not to remain alone in the company of a potential sexual exploiter. Some of the girls feared that such protection would appear to be too extreme a response, making them appear weak or uptight, a fear that extends to pressures for sexual relations.

There is little evidence of the effect of early sex on identity development in adolescence. But as coercion is increasingly normalized, the roots of female dependency can be found here. Rather than in some natural or essential design of femaleness, here is where the foundations are for girls’ and women’s difficulty in marking separate identities of their own, the basis for autonomy, independence, and, of course, equality. Here are the contemporary foundations of sexual subordination and gender inequality.

On one hand, those who promote sexual exploitation emphasize women’s choice to prostitute and to engage in pornography. On the other hand, campaigns against sexual violence make women’s consent the primary issue. Both approaches separate the sexual power of male domination from the system of patriarchal
oppression by which men as a class subordinate women and thus reduce them to a sex class. Consent—either its willed assurance or its denial—does not determine, identify, or cause oppression. When violence is separated from oppression, violation of consent must be established in order to establish a woman's victimization. Such legalistic construction of victimization, which fails to recognize patriarchal political oppression, incessantly places women and girls in the position of claiming sexual violation from an increasingly passive, non-interactive role—as beings acted upon by brute force and therefore violated. Yet subjection to that kind of force is part of a continuum of sexual exploitation and oppression, and it is not necessarily the most frequently occurring element. Consent to violation is a fact of oppression. Any oppression. All oppression.

Sex as Labor?

The prostitution exchange is the most systematic institutionalized reduction of woman to sex. It is the foundation of all sexual exploitation of women. It is the prototype, the model from which all other sexual exploitation can be understood. Put another way, if this practice is not recognized as sexual exploitation and as a model for the sexual subordination of women, then all other forms of sexual exploitation will be ineffectively addressed, many going fully unrecognized as sexual exploitation.

In the normalization of the prostitution of sexuality, it is not surprising to find that prostitution is increasingly considered to be merely another form of labor. Considering prostitution as merely another form of labor raises the question, what kind of labor? Slave labor or exploited labor of feudalism or class exploitation of capitalism?

Slave labor is condemned universally because it deprives human beings of freedom and of the gains from their labor, and child labor is considered to be work that not only denies freedom but
is developmentally premature. If, for example, consent was the criterion for determining whether or not slavery is a violation of human dignity and rights, slavery would not have been recognized as a violation because an important element of slavery is the acceptance of their condition by many slaves. So deeply is the self-hatred of racism and sexism encoded.

Various theories of labor and analyses of labor markets treat capitalist labor as the exploitation of surplus value, revealing inequalities and dual labor markets. Consider labor in the production of the commodity of human services. In between unremunerated, exploited domestic labor that includes emotional labor and private sex exchange exists a range of personal services that are marketed—psychological therapy, counseling, and physical therapies, including massage. Human services begin with distinctions and differentiations—demarcations of what is saleable. Psychological therapy and massage each identifies appropriate treatments for particular conditions that are provided for a price. They may be meant to improve emotional and personal life, and the purchaser may receive emotional and/or personal satisfaction and even pleasure from them. But the therapist is not selling emotions, desires, drives or other aspects of their person. The difference from prostitution is that these services do not invoke sex; in fact, professional ethics in these fields require of the service providers that all protections against sexualizing the services be accorded their clients or customers.

The question of whether paid sexual exchange is exploited as labor does not fully address the question of whether certain experiences and actions should be conditions of labor at all. Dangerously, feminism has not yet asked about sex what marxists and socialists have asked about labor. Marxists ultimately envision labor freed from capitalist exploitation and laborers owning their own labor power. Can feminism, without contradicting its commitment to liberation, envision women as free sexual laborers sometime in the future? As prostitution becomes the model for patriarchal sexual relations of power, the unasked, unexplored,
and seemingly hopelessly mired question surfaces: What do we as women want sex to be? How shall we socially construct sexuality as a condition of our liberation?

The recent research on women's unpaid domestic labor that addresses that part of it that is emotional labor has confounded this issue and the answers to these questions, as it tends to adopt the terms "sexual labor" or "sex work." The terms "sex work" and "sexual labor" imply that sex, if it were not exploited by traffickers, pimps, and industries, should be labor, or a condition of laboring, work that anyone should be able to engage in at a fair wage with full benefits of social services. In the absence of political consciousness of the exploitation of labor by capitalists and by husbands, the term "sex work" becomes imbued with a sense of normalcy.

There is an even larger question beneath this debate: Is emotional labor exploited because it is unremunerated, or is it exploited because emotional and sexual life have been reduced to mere servicing, to a labor that sustains gender power relations? Women's subordination in general and sexual exploitation in particular raises the question asked earlier: What in the range of human experience should be considered as labor? And how do we achieve a condition of unexploited labor?

And beyond reducing the human experience of sex to labor, the promotion of "sex work" is specifically gendered: services are bought by men, provided for men—services that are not only the privilege of male domination, but the cause. With economic development and advancement, as material conditions improve for communities, families, and individuals, more emphasis is placed on inner life, emotions, and the personal. The self begins to be understood and developed in relation to inner life and emotions. Emotions, inner life, and the personal are gendered; they have distinctly different meanings for women and for men. Emotional work and sexual service become part of what men require from women. Men's emotional disengagement and sexual requirements are not merely a matter of masculinist socialization.
Rather, male underdeveloped emotional life and objectified sexual life are produced in power arrangements. In those power arrangements, emotions and sex are reduced to labor that is exploitation of women.

When sex is a requirement in the line of domestic duties, it is made into a form of labor and a dimension of sexual power in marriage. When sex is accepted as another form of labor, human beings cannot be protected from the destruction of that human sexual experience. Given that the human body is the location of ourselves, its fragility and vulnerabilities require protections. The body is extended into realities beyond it through social interaction, from the inner to the outer world, from self to other, and in this location of the body in the human condition, there is fragility. Then what do we constitute as the norms for its (our) protection? Patriarchal domination of women and capitalist markets that are now internationally interdependent have brought us to fundamental questions of human existence: Not can, but should emotions, sex, and reproduction be rendered into saleable commodities?

The principle that guides my work is that in confronting prostitution as an exploitation of women, we are also concerned with freeing women from being reduced to sex and reproduction as acts of labor and of market exchange. Janice Raymond has critiqued the marketing of reproduction in *Women as Wombs*. If feminism is to win women’s liberation, then sex and reproduction must be treated as experiences that protect rather than violate human fragility and vulnerability while supporting women as sexual and reproductive beings of their own choosing. I would suggest that the minimum conditions for sexual consent are in sex that is a human experience of personal dignity and one that is enjoyed with respect and pleasure. Neither marriage nor prostitution, as structures of patriarchal domination, institutionally provide for them. Therefore, although women and men may experience sex that does not violate human dignity and personal respect, their experiences are not because of but external to structured
patriarchal power. And those experiences do not obviate the fact of women’s class oppression produced in the prostitution of sexuality.

The logic of the present study, and all of the suppositions of the women’s movements against violence against women and against pornography, assume a new possibility—that sex, when it is a condition of our liberation, will be experienced in the human condition as a human experience, a personal interaction of pleasure, of attachment and affection, of human wholeness, and, for those who choose, for reproduction.

**Proprostitution**

In the small but highly vocal proprostitution movement, some few women are treating their prostitution affirmatively, as “sex work,” as experiences of unrepressed sex that they control. Theirs is not unlike some heterosexual women’s and lesbians’ defense of sadomasochism as an enactment of sexual desire for women; in the movement to promote pornography this group is led by F.A.C.T. and its views are promoted in works like Carol Vance’s. Many women actively promote pornographic sexuality as a chosen dimension of their lives while many other women actively claim and positively assert a “prostitution identity.” Are they dehumanized by these dissociations, or are they only claiming a self-chosen identity? If women actively choose pornographic, prostituted sex, can we consider that sex as harmless because it is chosen? These questions collapse the experience of harm into the act of consent, rendering invisible the harm of the prostitution exchange, dissociating it from the fullness of lived experience, and locating it only in human will. This is a variant of liberal ideology, which drives economic markets by elevating individual choice in order to maximize consumerism. In this way, the sex of prostitution is reduced from being a class condition of women to a
personal choice of the individual. Under the decadence that elevates individual choice above the common good, chosen patriarchal violation serves capitalist market exchange.

A feminist analysis of sexual exploitation requires analyzing the class condition of women in relation to actual, lived experience. Developing a feminist human-rights perspective refocuses the question back to the act, to lived experience, to the conditions under which sex takes place, and asks whether or not that constitutes violation. In human rights, the determination of harm must rest on the act, the experience and its representations, not only individually but collectively in women’s class condition. If the act exploits, it is in itself destructive of human life, well-being, integrity, and dignity. That is violation. And when it is gendered, repeated over and over in and on woman after woman, that is oppression.

But some women in prostitution promote their own sexual exploitation and treat it as a condition of women’s freedom or self-determination. Erich Goode points out, “For most of us to find the behavior attractive, something we would want to participate in, we must ‘neutralize’ the negative status of the behavior or nullify our feeling about participating in it”28 because “most of us find despising ourselves as too painful.”29 Therefore, to neutralize not only the deviant status of prostitution but also the actual harm it produces, to treat that harm as sexy, fun, and a kick, is to valorize it and to promote it. In prostitution that means actively incorporating dehumanization into one’s identity—to live it, embrace it, and ultimately to promote it. What is dehumanized sex, if it is not sex in which one has become disembodied? To actively accept this, to live dehumanization as if it were an original human condition, the act of an intact self, is to live one’s fragmentation, that which kills the human self, as an actively chosen option, as wholeness, as fun, as pleasure.

Ultimately, the only way to promote such dehumanization for oneself is to promote it for others, assuming that doing so will neutralize its social stigma. Hence a proprostitution movement.
Hence the validation of pornographic sex in marriage and intimate coupling. Hence the promotion of lesbian sadomasochism. But promotion of prostitution is not only about trying to change social stigma. Prostitution lobbying has become increasingly validated in a general climate of dehumanization of sexual relations, what I now consider to be the prostitution of sexuality.

Promoting prostitution publicly is not the way prostitution will be neutralized and destigmatized. The sexual relations of power constitute the political context for prostitution movements that publicly affirm the use of sex to exploit women. To “embrace” prostitution sex as one’s self-chosen identity is to be actively engaged in promoting women’s oppression in behalf of oneself. It means that the sex that customers buy, which is an objectified sex that dehumanizes, is what a woman in prostitution promotes when she chooses it as her own identity.

For women who promote prostitution, neutralization of it requires internalization of all that women who simply survive prostitution have distanced themselves from, have dissociated from themselves, going through each of the steps—from distancing to disembodiment—and then internalizing their opposite, treating the sex as their own spontaneous experience of it. It is the embodiment of prostitution sex even as prostitute women are disembodied while doing it. Women who experience everything from distancing to disembodiment are not rejecting that which for some few women in prostitution is accepted. As prostitution is sexual exploitation, it harms the human self and destroys through sex, dehumanizing women. In other words, to promote the sexual servicing of others through the use of oneself, one must re-embody that which has been disembodied of the original developing self.

It does not work the other way around. There is not an original, essential, embodied prostitution. To treat prostitution as if it is not sexual exploitation is to assume that sexual dehumanization is the original human condition.

Typically the proprostitution lobby, fronting for the international sex industry, has been credited with neutralizing the nega-
tive status of prostitution by promoting legal and social acceptance of it. If, then, accepting one’s prostitution and incorporating it into one’s identity requires only “deviance neutralization,” it is because prostitution is identified as “deviant” instead of as the human-rights violation and dehumanization that it is. Prostitute organizations are absolutely right in wanting that deviant label removed: as long as prostitute women are the deviants, all of the women who accept sexually objectified sex and incorporate it into their identities are protected from having to incorporate into their identities the recognition of themselves as prostitutes.

In the sexual objectification of women, the problem is more complex than the theory of “deviance neutralization” suggests, for this theory requires that what one does be understood as deviant in the society. Prostitution has been considered deviant, but through the prostitution of sexuality it is losing its deviant label because it is increasingly the normalized experience of sex. Therefore, when women in prostitution defend and promote their activity as work, it is not that they are merely trying to neutralize a deviant category that has been assigned to them. They are requiring that their sex exchange for money be treated merely as sex. When they achieve their goal, then equal acceptance of every form of sexual objectification and dehumanization that goes under the overall designation of “sex” will achieve the prostitution of sexuality. This is how the sex of prostitution is normalized.

In the normalization of pornography, and the prostitution of sexuality, the experience of sex is no longer relevant in determining whether sexual enhancement or sexual degradation has taken place. Normalized prostitution is a product of liberal individualism where free will or consent prevail.

In the prostitution of sexuality we can find the basis for the developing support for the proprostitution movement from many women who are not prostitutes. Nonprostitute women’s promotion of prostitution is about something other than destigmatizing prostitution. The wider support for prostitution from nonprostitute women has to do with reinforcing the distinction between
prostitute and nonprostitute women, especially as it becomes indistinguishable in the sexual acts through the prostitution of sexuality. In other words, as prostitution sex becomes recognized as the prostitution of "normal" sexuality, the only way nonprostitute women know that they indeed are not whores is by insuring that some women are sustained in a separate category, whether they call it prostitute, or they call it "sex work." Through non-prostitute women's promotion of prostitution, the separation of prostitute and nonprostitute is maintained. Knowing those women who do "sex between consenting adults" as "sex workers" protects other women from being seen as whores when they are doing that same sex in their marriages, in dating, or in anonymous, unpaid liaisons.

Sexual Relations of Power

To locate all of sexual exploitation within the real, lived experience of patriarchal oppression is to speak about power. In his search for a theory of sexual power, Foucault came close in his History of Sexuality. Establishing that the term "sexuality" originated in the nineteenth century, he located sexual power in history rather than ahistorical biology. He rejected the marxist tendency to identify power only as an overarching power of the state or as a general class condition, in other words, to identify power only as public and social. He theorized on sexual power at a level of analysis that invokes the personal, private, social domains that have been ignored by earlier theorists of sexuality.

Sex as power, Foucault told us, is ubiquitous—it is everywhere at once "not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another." Foucault gave us a middle ground of theory in which the sex relations of power can be recognized as "a multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which
they operate and which constitute their own organization.” 31 Consequently, he found that the domain of sex and power is not driven but rather constitutes an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality; useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies. 32

Yet, in order to understand how sex is constructed into power, we need to get at it where it operates without becoming lost in its individualized components. The problem with Foucault’s theory is that in seeking to elucidate sexual power at the micro level, he abandons attention to the collectivized conditions that produce classes of power. 33 Sexual power operates at all levels. It is constantly being reproduced in sexual relations that are at once private and coupled and at the same time collective, institutional, and public. Important to Foucault’s contribution is his recognition that in sexual relations “power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.” But he eliminates structure, and by doing so, he dissolves the hierarchy of power, making power amorphous. In defining power, he makes it undefinable and his theory diminishes responsibility for power.

As Foucault tells us, sexual power is everywhere and comes from everything, but its agency is secreted in its ubiquity. For Foucault, “there is no subject”; the agents of oppression elude identification. What is important about Foucault’s definition of power is that he reveals the difficulty in exposing sexual power as it is constantly “produced from one moment to the next” in the intertangled web of the “multiplicity of force relations.” However, because Foucault does not directly confront power as gender-structured hierarchal relations, in the context of sex in marriage, in prostitution, in structured inequality, his theory achieves what he sought to avoid. His definition of power merely reinforces
masculinist theories of power that obscure that privatization and personalization of patriarchal power by considering power primarily at the level of the state.

However, Foucault is correct that there "is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled" in the sense that such oppositions suggest that the one who has power is acting, thus making the oppressed who is acted upon a passive figure. But there is interaction and reciprocity in the relations of power. Power is produced through interaction, and that interaction includes the participation of both the "ruler" and the "ruled," the oppressed who are acting, historical, and temporal, even though the ruler thinks and behaves as if they are not. Exploring interaction makes it possible to reveal power, and this is particularly true in the sexual relations of power. In women's shelters, as women recount the interactions of privatized abuse, consciousness exposes and makes public previously obscured power relations.

Power is not exclusively enacted among opposites, by one gender on the other, as men and boys are not excluded from sexual exploitation as individuals. The evidence that men and boys are in some cases sexually exploited is not a negation of sexual power that is a female class condition. Rigid adherence to false binary oppositions (individual men and boys versus individual women and girls) conveys the contrary (that men and boys are not equally exploited) and then makes the exception, the sexual exploitation of boys, into the rule.

However, Foucault's rejection of binary oppositions are not based on the same assumptions as those of the feminist theory I am presenting here, which looks beyond oppositions to understand the complexities of sexual relations of power. For Foucault and his followers, rejecting binary oppositions provided him (and them) with the opportunity to deflect attention away from the agency and social location of domination, the dyad, the couple wherein sexual power is constantly constructed. In destructuring power, he made the relations of power disappear because he made
their agents invisible. In trying to connect sex and power, Foucault dismantled the dyad, the nexus wherein sexualized human relations become dialectically hierarchical sexual power relations. But a theorist’s denial of reality does not change that reality; it only hides it. It is impossible to eliminate from the social landscape that which constructed it, the institutional and individual power structure. Without an analysis of power, Foucault’s “multiplicity of force relations” becomes mired in its own diversity. Domination becomes particularized into and unidentifiable among these multiple lines of power. For Foucault, individualized sexual relations of power, operational in dyads, are not collectivized to form systematic domination, because in his definition of sexual power he has eliminated class conditions, the referent for interpersonal, gendered relations of power. Sexual power would lose its interpersonal enforcement if there were no class-based, institutional, systematized, and state-based domination beyond and distinct from its individual manifestations.

Foucault relativizes sexuality to each instance of it. The idea that sexuality is used to “serve the most varied strategies” and is “endowed with the greatest instrumentality” goes nowhere. There is no overall pattern, no consistency from one unit or one sexual relation to another.

Power is relational. It actively engages oppressor and oppressed. In its “multiplicity of force relations,” power operates between classes—economic classes, the capitalist and proletariat; race classes, whites and people of color; and sex classes, men and women. Hegel’s description of the reciprocity of master and slave and Marx’s analysis of the economic relations of the capitalist and working classes identify power relations dialectically constructed into power hierarchies that are sustained by the advantages gained by oppressors in their exploitation of the oppressed. The power of oppression is as diffuse as it is direct. Direct violence, then, is only one aspect of oppression in the subordination of the “other.”

Laborers go to work voluntarily and take a wage for their work
that does not represent the full value of their labor; the difference between the value of their labor and the wage paid constitutes the profits of the capitalist. The relations of power between them are sustained in the wage-profit calculation. That is fundamental to the interaction in domination; it is the foundation of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. A relational theory of power identifies the way subordination is frequently held in place through the active participation of the subordinated without blaming them for their oppression. Hegelian and marxist theories of power reveal dynamics of oppression that account for the interactive relational force that keeps oppression in place.

The relational power of male domination reaches into the private, into and onto the body, through interactive sexual relations that are rendered into sexual exploitation by the power that forges the economic relations of women under patriarchy. Considering sexual exploitation as lived experience, identifying it in sexual acts, whether or not they involve consent, and analyzing sexual exploitation in terms of institutions that promote it, namely prostitution and marriage, gives oppression a substantive context and identifies it as a sex-class condition.

Among the collective conditions of domination, only in the subordination of women are class relations of power simultaneously personal relations, where interactions that are as intimate as sexual relations are also the relations of power. Sexism and sexual exploitation of women as a class by men as a class are class relations that operate as individual interactions. A feminist relational theory of power, of the subordinated female gender class, must reveal power in personal interactions, in physical and emotional relations that operate at the most private and intimate levels of human existence.

Patriarchy superimposes class conditions of power relations upon sex/gender relations between men and women, interpersonally establishing a near-perfect fit between the class relations of power and gendered interpersonal relations. This has created a particularity to women’s oppression, making it unique in that it is
constructed in gendered interpersonal relations that invoke sex. It is highly public, visible, and structural, and yet simultaneously it is personal—hidden, secreted, and bodily, physically, and emotionally internalized.

Gender relations of sexual power are institutionalized and simultaneously individualized in prostitution, pornography, and marriage. Sex is a relational power that is realized in human relations that take place in private, usually hidden from view. In the French history of private life this is referred to as “the secret.” As sexual relations are usually unseen and often unspoken, except in group sex and/or gang rape, power relations are structurally privatized and yet commercialized.

When private interactive sexual power relations are made invisible, so is power in sex industries denied. As sex becomes industrialized, not only in business but also through multinational conglomerates, the use of sex in the power relations in which the United States dominates the Third World is made invisible. Consequently, the individual unit of interaction in the sexual relations of power is both realized and sustained by state policies and the industrial development of sex industries that commodify and exchange women.

In the context of these sexual relations of power—the privatized, sexualized location of women’s oppression—when women leave home—as runaways in Western countries, as migrants in the Third World, in the absence of feminist political refuge or of viable economic alternatives—they are most frequently reduced to the public, political institution of sex: prostitution. Again, the power relations of racism and Western hegemony that close down economic alternatives for women of color invoke prostitution as a normative condition for women in poverty.

Power is gain; it produces advantage and superior status by and for the dominating class through the subordination of the “other.” Because sexual exploitation actively harms women, the gain that men derive from it does not merely advance men. Sexual exploitation also forces women backward, regresses women into
the harms it conveys, thereby thwarting women’s ability to achieve, to move forward, to grow and to develop.

_Feminist Political Consciousness vs. Ideology_

Over the last decade, as I have listened to women’s responses to my first book, _Female Sexual Slavery_, I have heard from some women that they found the book “too painful to read” or “depressing,” while others were “empowered” by it because their experiences had been revealed as exploitation and slavery, or simply because domination had been named and explored.

Yet another reaction has been to classify this work as “victim feminism,” or “male bashing.” In the United States this is more than backlash. This highly vocal, media-hyped assault on feminism as a _liberation_ movement is aligned with conservatives and liberals, who both attack feminism for “political correctness” (p.c.). They silence social protest and political consciousness not only of sexism but racism, homophobia, and the environment by denying women’s oppression. Anti-feminism in the form of women’s defense of men is not new to the women’s movement. But the alignment with right-wing anti—“political correctness” forces is new. Katie Roiphe typifies a dangerous women’s movement collusion with both the right and the liberals against what they call the political correctness of feminism. With no data of her own, citing flawed critiques as her sources, Roiphe has challenged the existence of date rape and Mary Koss’s date rape statistics that reveal that 1 in 4 women will be raped in college. Roiphe, raising a women’s movement defense, is concerned that women are being seen only as victims, or “that men are lascivious, women are innocent.” Roiphe questions women’s agency when rape takes place after a woman has been drinking or has taken drugs, as if the society is not gendered, is not patriarchal, and has no relationship to individual behavior.

Since the emergence of the U.S. women’s movement in the
late 1960s, the political left has consistently tried to delegitimize feminism on the same terms that, today, Wendy Kaminer defended Roiphe in the *New York Times*: “protesting their sexual victimization enables privileged, heterosexual white women to claim their share of the high moral ground ceded to victims of racism, classism and homophobia.” Kaminer’s support for Roiphe suggests the origins of the anti-feminist women’s movement in the left. Right-wing accusations of political correctness build from the left wing’s 25-year campaign to delegitimize independent feminism, denouncing it as privileged or bourgeois. Yet until now, until it became politically incorrect to indicate one has been raped, or that men oppress women, it had been impossible for the left wing to invalidate the women’s movement, precisely because the movements against sexual exploitation raised feminism beyond only issues of economic class.

Roiphe is representative of some women who have come to the movement in a general apolitical climate and who have learned about women’s issues from books, the media, lectures, and through women’s studies. By and large, women’s studies, having dissociated itself from feminist activism, is an increasingly apolitical study of women. Where feminism originated in the 1960s in consciousness raising that raised the personal to the political, many women replace feminist consciousness and political liberation with personal choice (the real p.c.). The movement, increasingly emptied of political consciousness, approaches issues in terms of personal choice, an inheritance from the earlier “me” generation that is almost a perfect fit with the ideology of American individualism. It treats issues as if they exist outside of, apart from, and indeed irrelevant to any social conditions and power arrangements in the immediate or distant environment, that is, anything that exists outside of their own conjuring.

In the 1990s we risk repeating history. By the 1890s the women’s movement that had originated in the 1850s was emptied of political consciousness. The movement was rapidly reduced to apolitical reform that blindly supported prevailing national
ideologies, ideologies which aside from the narrowed concept of women’s rights then, were exploiting the rest of the world. That generation brought feminism to an end. It invoked the silencing of confrontation against sexism for over 60 years until the 1960s.

By the mid 1990s, it appears that the women’s movement is going in the same directions, which intensifies the isolation of feminists whose commitments to women’s liberation is framed from hard-won, difficultly achieved consciousness. And what is at the root of the reactionary positioning of the women’s movement? Their term “male bashing” is more than accusatory; it is representational. First, it represents collusion between women who identify themselves as feminists and the most reactionary forces of the right wing, particularly Rush Limbaugh, who originated this term. Now, in a reactionary alignment between right-wing agitators and sexual liberals, some women are identifying their feminism as that which will protect men, racists, heterosexuals, and polluters from being “bashed.” The strategy is not direct nor is it straightforward. As sexual relations of power have surfaced through consciousness and in activism with other movements, presumably some men, some whites, some heterosexuals, some environmental polluters have become uncomfortable as their groups and some specific members are increasingly identified as perpetrators of injustices and exploitation. Rather than confronting sexual power, these women turn on women who are exposing oppression and confronting injustice and charge that we are reducing women to victims, a concept that could only create attention in the absence of political consciousness as consciousness recognizes victimization as other than passive. As Janice Raymond has put it,

Once upon a time, in the beginnings of this wave of feminism, there was a feminist consensus that women’s choices were constructed, burdened, framed, impaired, constrained, limited, coerced, shaped by patriarchy. No one proposed that this mean women’s choices were determined, or that women were passive or helpless victims of patriarchy. That was because many women believed in the power of feminism to change women’s lives, and obviously, women could not change if they were
socially determined in their roles or pliant putty in the hands of patriarchs.\textsuperscript{37}

We are faced with a movement that is not only not remembering that history but is increasingly driven by women who were not there when consciousness ignited, and for the first time in decades of deadening silence, women created new possibilities for themselves which were possibilities for their class. The critiques of power relations that characterized the feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s have been replaced by the apolitical emphasis on the personal choice of hopelessly mired individualism. This is the sexual liberalism that Sheila Jeffreys defined as “a set of political beliefs and practices rooted in the assumption that sexual expression is inherently liberating and must be permitted to flourish unchecked, even when it entails the exploitation or brutalization of others.”\textsuperscript{38} It is now evident that neither “sexual liberalism” nor “backlash” are adequate terms to identify the nonconscious ideology of personal choice as it is interlinked with the agendas of the right wing as well as liberals.

Under these conditions, the women’s movement is increasingly compelled to prove extreme force in order to charge rape, and to ignore how the sexual relations of power seep into daily life, shaping particularly male–female interaction in the society. Being laden with the burden of proving extreme force is a reversion to where we were in 1970 when we first launched the movement against rape in the United States. This is how the women’s movement against sexual violence is placed on the defensive as it has been since the beginning of the Reagan administration’s threatened cutback of social services and its censorship of social protest. Many rape crisis centers and wife abuse shelters began to limit their services or restrict the kinds of cases they took. Trying to look more like social service agencies, they hoped to protect the precious little funding they had. Roiphe and the vanguard of women who are intent on protecting men from supposed male bashing now perpetuate the self-imposed limitations initiated in
the reactionary administration of Reagan and perpetuated by Bush. It is a curious and dangerous allegiance between the right-wing, fundamentalist, and political reactionary stance and these women who promote personal choice to treat rape as normal sex, to promote pornography, to treat racial hatred as a personal preference for a racially "pure" environment, to treat homophobia as the personal choice to live with and work outside of association with lesbians and gay men. Hyper-individualism and elevation of personal choice as the only and therefore ultimate condition of freedom, if it prevails over the feminist movement, will be its final deconstruction.

The harm of personal choice politics and campaigns against political correctness is intensified for oppressed groups as it is another manifestation of capitalist market liberal ideology that emphasizes individualism to serve market competition and promote consumerism. But more than that, it creates an ideological environment that elevates personal choice above any concept of a common good or collective well-being. The idea is that freedom is defined as personal choice in a context of structured, politically imposed inequality that ranges from male–female relations to the relationship between Western nations and the Third World. Ultimately the reduction of political consciousness to personal choice reverses all issues to the liberal construction of consent. At base this is how market economy ideology promotes patriarchal domination in post-industrial society.

While the slogan of the movement against sexual violence, "No Means No," firmly asserts that individual women refuse to be cajoled into sexual experiences they do not want with men they reject, it also suggests that sexual victimization of women takes place only when consent is not given, when women explicitly say no. It suggests that when women do not say no, when women actively consent, they are not violated. Defining rape in terms of violation of consent shifts the emphasis of political consciousness from the act of victimization, the use of sex to exploit, to individual will; it shifts oppression from a class condition of sexual
exploitation to individual experiences of it. That is how women in prostitution are excluded from being recognized as sexually victimized. Prostitute women are made to be the “other”—the women for whom the act of abusive, violating, dehumanizing sex is meant—because their consent is established in the market exchange, where they take money for sex.

The patriarchal power of sexual liberalism has deployed ideologies that narrowly construe consent in context of social normalcy of impaired judgment. Patriarchal law can address individual conditions of coercion but it will not help women confront conditions of collective oppression. It is not a crime to oppress women through sexual exploitation where those lines blur. The law will not resolve women’s subjection to sexual power. Nor will it correct its own liberal ideology that individualizes every case so that there is no recognizable collective condition. Only a collective liberation movement’s struggle with analysis of oppression can do that.

The facts of women’s subordination often lie in realities that are obscured in silence or normalized in acceptance but that nevertheless dehumanize and brutalize us as women even when we do not directly experience their most extreme manifestations—unless we bring to them consciousness of women’s condition as a political reality.

Breaking silence and facing the brutal realities of sexual exploitation require feminist political consciousness. Consciousness transforms brutal facts and painful realities into new knowledge that exposes power and ignites action. Confronted with sexual exploitation, to move from not knowing to awareness without political consciousness of power relations leaves one confronted either with prevailing liberal ideology or raw pain, and therefore unable to know that because sexual exploitation is not inevitable and has been politically constructed, it can also be deconstructed—by women.

The common denominator in all sexual exploitation is the disruption of and violation of a woman’s identity, that sense of
"who I am" and "who I can be." Prostitution and incest abuse are twin acts—they are the terrorist models of female subordination in that they invoke girls’ and women’s splitting from their selves, segmentation of the unsegmentable, partitioning of human realities that can only be whole. Consciousness of sexual politics in confronting oppression restores the whole from its segmentation. It is the foundation for healing and action.

Feminist political consciousness moves feminism back and forth in a dialectical interaction between the personal and the political, the particular and the general, inevitably taking us from our own cultural and national specificity to the international community and global feminism, and back again. Political consciousness extends our awareness of our social location from our homes to our communities, from nation-states to the international economy and the global political order. International feminist activism leads us logically to analysis of patriarchal power.

Consciousness requires being able to see the conditions by which sex is exploited, and that requires considering what occurs in the sex exchange. Consciousness is not only an intellectual awareness; rather, political consciousness allows us to know women’s experiences of individual exploitations and of oppression, not only as painful subordinations but also as potentialities for their transcendence. I am not speaking of transcendence in only spiritual or ephemeral terms. Feminist consciousness is knowledge of material, concrete conditions that, because it knows them in terms of domination that produces brutal realities, also knows of the possibility of revolutionizing those material conditions in confronting domination. Feminist consciousness recognizes the fuller terrain of male domination—oppression. Consciousness of oppression makes strategies clearer, vision fuller, and action deeper.

Popular criticism of feminism alleges that it reduces women to victims. But women’s knowledge of themselves as victims, as "empowered," as oppressed, and/or as liberated is knowledge that is realistically accessible to women only through political
consciousness. Due to fear of the potential of consciousness to produce change, this dynamic, powerful knowing has been reduced to "political correctness." But, in fact, the power of political consciousness is that it is personally liberating because it enables vision of the world of patriarchal domination as it is. Without consciousness, in the suppression of consciousness, prior to consciousness, knowledge is isolated to individuals and in that isolation it goes unnamed, unspoken. As knowledge is produced in interaction with others, isolation relativizes it and relegates it to intra-individual psychological conditions. While feminism is charged with reducing women to victims, women’s isolated, suppressed anger and pain from domination is reduced to clinical conditions, material sources of the pain. Objective knowledge is located outside of, as well as within, the self. It can either function as an exterior determination of the self as it does in oppression or as the basis for collective action as it does in consciousness.

Personal empowerment that treats overcoming objective domination as an act of will, a psychological state, is an idealistic approach that traps knowledge of oppression within individualized, personal feelings and preferences.

Consciousness reframes personalized, isolated knowledge of objective conditions, recognizing them as political conditions. Reformulating knowledge redefines victimization, which is no longer recognized as an intra-individual experience and therefore is not a matter of consent or will of individuals.

Thus, the crucial difference involved in knowing the worst of patriarchal domination of women turns on political consciousness of women’s oppression. Consciousness, as I am discussing it here, is a political knowing of the personal reality that is carried into action that not only confronts but also includes the knowledge and conviction that it can/will/must transform present realities. It is active knowledge, found and created in social action, surpassing the patriarchal limits of the possible to imagine and to know another reality as possibility.

Consciousness is the basis of activism, of project, of new
knowledge and political confrontation generated by the feminist movement against sexual exploitation. Because it is the consciousness of sexual politics and because it confronts the political and social realities of domination and oppression, that same consciousness is the foundation from which it is possible to find ways for women individually and collectively to heal from rape, prostitution, and all forms of sexual exploitation. Consciousness of sexual politics forms the supportive network that women find coming off the streets, running away from home, and/or going into therapy. That consciousness becomes constructed in political struggle and knowledge.

Most importantly, political consciousness is feminist only if it is multidimensional and inclusive. Therefore, if it is not global, it is not consciousness; if it does not embrace the range of conditions that constitute oppression, it is merely reform of patriarchy, to make it work better with modifications. Feminist consciousness is diminished if the movement confronts and effectively addresses only one issue, such as pornography in the West or trafficking in the Third World, without addressing the entire matrix of sexual exploitation. Therefore, single-issue feminism is a contradiction to feminist consciousness of oppression. So is missionary feminism, which occurs when Western women do not recognize that which exploits women in the Third World springs from their own experience of sexual politics. Likewise, precisely because of the power of prevailing misogynist ideologies, in the superabundance of poverty that appears impossible to see beyond, in the intense sexualization of women that seems to be all there is, feminist consciousness must see the possibility of a future that is the rejection of these present realities.

Consciousness is not a matter of having the correct political analysis or knowing the right answers. That is ideology. Ideology is a structured, preformed set of ideas that justify particular power arrangements. Ideology replaces political consciousness either with an embedded taken-for-grantedness of the present situation or with a prefabricated political analysis. Consciousness, on the
other hand, exposes everyday realities as power relations, making it possible to see and identify that which is taken for granted as structured power. Consciousness is accessed through critical reflection, which reveals power, dominance, and subordination in the dailiness of life. Feminism must confront dominant ideologies not only in the state but also in the home, not only in public but also in bed. In the West, the liberal legalism that rationalizes the market economy and promotes individualism often remains unquestioned as feminists struggle for legal change for women. The first failure of consciousness occurs in feminism when one assumes that she can be immune from the influences of her national and cultural ideology.

Personally, I have had to confront the limits of legal liberalism many times in order to try to shed its ideology from my work. This is an ongoing condition of consciousness. In 1983 I met with Hanna Olssen, the Swedish researcher who was responsible for a major government study, *The Prostitution Report*. Hanna and I had previously had the opportunity to discuss our research on prostitution in Sweden in 1981. We had been struck with the fact that, in different parts of the globe, unknown to each other, we had not only researched the same subject but had come to very similar conclusions that were published at the same time. In *The Prostitution Report*, she spoke of the “loveless male society” while I discussed befriending and love (terror bonding) as pimp procuring strategies in *Female Sexual Slavery*. In 1983, getting away from the pressing business at hand in the international meeting I had convened, she candidly asked me, “My god, Kathy, why did you have to call it slavery?” Realizing that she knew very well why prostitution was enslaving and that was not the question, I mentally searched for the issue behind her question.

Of course. Unwittingly, I had fallen into the “free-force” dichotomization of women’s choices, which had led me, in *Female Sexual Slavery*, to propose decriminalization as the appropriate legal strategy for confronting prostitution. At that moment, I felt refreshed, having been caught in what I now perceive to be the
trap of the American mind, which must contend with a U.S. concept of rights limited and distorted by the individualism that promotes market exchange. Intense hyperindividualism narrows rights to individual rights and in so doing it instrumentalizes them. Under an individualism that promotes market economies, rights are reduced from being enhancements of the full human condition to serving the instrumental end of market economies and therefore promoting the competitive edge of individualism. Reducing human rights to individual consent instrumentalizes the meaning of rights as they serve the market economy. When instrumentalized, rights are not primarily concerned with the quality of human experience. In the extreme represented by U.S. sexual liberalism, rights are understood in market-economy terms, in terms of a deregulated human condition that emphasizes individual choice and human will over the quality and content of human experience.

According to the feminist human-rights concepts I am developing in this work, "consent" is not the indicator of freedom, nor is absence of consent the primary indicator of exploitation. The liberal construction of consent narrows the feminist analysis of oppression to individual wrongs and drowns feminism in the ethics of individualism. It confines sex to a matter of consent and will and does not consider how sex is used, how it is experienced, and how it is constructed into power.

Individually and institutionally, the lived experience of dehumanized sex harms women and sustains the gender class condition. It is oppression. Consent to oppression or an apparent "will" to be objectified is a condition of oppression. It is never a state of freedom. Sexual exploitation is oppression, and that means that it will be accepted and even promoted within the oppressed class. That is what oppression is! This is how every form of oppression is sustained. Violating consent may then be an aspect of exploitation, but it is not its defining feature. Therefore, freedom cannot be confined within a unidimensional concept of consent; it must expand to the full human condition—the female condition. It
must be inclusive of the full range of exploitations visited upon women as a class. In that context the movement against sexual violence or violence against women is one challenge to a broad-based condition of sexual oppression that includes prostitution just as it includes sexual subordination of women in marriage and of teenagers in dating.

And thus I find that the issue of consent and the concept of force have falsely separated prostitution from rape, legally and socially. In marriage, in dating, and in rape, what women have to prove is not that they were abused but that they are not whores, that is, that they are not sexed bodies. In response, movements against sexual violence are increasingly confined within “no means no” campaigns that treat rape not as sex but as aggression, as if the two could not be considered together. That is too little for a liberation struggle to demand. Fully confronting sexual power will only take place when women are determined, as we have been, to win our full liberation.