In the past four decades, feminists in the West and in Taiwan have developed two divergent perspectives on commercial sex. The first theorizes prostitution in terms of gender oppression, focusing on the sexual exploitation of women through men’s appropriation and commodification of their bodies and their consequent loss of self (Barry 1995; Pateman 1988; Hwang 1996). The second focuses on how sexual oppression shapes the ways we understand commercial sex, citing Gayle Rubin’s (1993 [1984]) idea of ‘sex hierarchy’ to argue that the stigma of sex prevents us from seeing sex work as just work while also suppressing individual sexual expression (see, for example, Ho 1998). The former position, in focusing on gender oppression, makes sexuality central; the latter, in focusing on sexual oppression, seeks to de-centre sex in discussions of prostitution in favour of work, while at the same time promoting sexual freedom.

Prostitutes’ rights groups and advocates tend to support the latter position, emphasizing that ‘the sex industry is not the only industry which is male-dominated and degrades women’ (Lopez-Jones 1988: 273) and that sex work is just like any other job (Wang and Ku 1998: 153) – except that its illegal or marginal status makes it harder for prostitutes to defend their jobs. This approach recognizes prostitution as work, and prostitutes as workers, but sidelines the sexual aspect of the work. This tendency can be identified in Josephine Ho’s writing (Ho 1998). She analyses sex work in the light of the historical transformation of labour in a capitalist market. She explains that sexual labour, like other productive and reproductive labour that was once carried out in private, is now integrated into the capitalist market through the commodification of labour. According to Ho:
As a work in public, sex work implies a possible future of sexuality, where sex will not be involved with unacceptable manipulation of affection, and it will not be the only criterion for love and intimacy. Most of all, since sex is a form of work, sex will not function as the only criterion to measure women. (Ho 1998: 223, my translation)

This is an optimistic attitude towards the commodification of sex, which envisages the possibility of women's sexual liberation by freeing sex from intimacy. Nonetheless, whether sexual liberation is gained at the cost of working-class women's involvement in commercial sex is left unconsidered. In addition, she does not clarify how sex workers understand the sex acts provided in commercial sex. Are they labour or sex? If they are labour, what is the nature of the labour involved? Moreover, even if these sex acts are labour, it does not guarantee that sex workers are free contract workers.

The either-sex-or-work approach constitutes a barrier to an intelligent feminist account of how sexuality and labour are intertwined in sex work. It seems that once we take the sexual side of prostitution seriously, we fail to deal with its labour dimensions. Once we analyse it as work, we fail to identify the sexual. Both sides fail to analyse sex work as a sequence of labour tasks that have strong sexual connotations, and to see sex workers as simultaneously waged workers and sexual subjects.

This chapter tries to fill the gap and to analyse how sex and work are intertwined in sex work. Drawing on interviews with 18 Taiwanese sex workers, I suggest that they are usually expected to undertake several forms of labour, such as aesthetic labour, explicit sexual labour and embodied emotional labour. In addition, sex workers perform labours differently due to the varying organization of sex work. Moreover, I will argue that being able to perform these labours signifies sex workers' professionalism. It is the ability to exercise the technique of 'role distance' (Goffman 1961) that makes sex workers able to differentiate the situated role they perform from their sense of self. I will draw on interview data to show how women use diverse strategies to maintain the boundary between the work role and their senses of self, and how they differentiate commercial sex from intimate sex. Nonetheless, the effort to manage the boundary signals the danger of blurring it.
Forms of labour in the Taiwanese sex industry

O’Connell Davidson’s (1998) research indicates that the employment status of sex workers and the nature of the sexual contract between clients and sex workers are the major factors that influence Western sex workers’ working conditions. The same could be said of the Taiwanese sex industry. Taiwanese prostitution can be classified roughly into two traditional sectors: mai shen (body selling) and mai xiao (pleasure selling). The body-selling sector (such as brothels, massage parlours, organized call-girl services or streetwalking) provides explicit sexual services to clients and thus the relations between sex workers and clients are relatively standardized or commercialized. In the pleasure-selling sector, there is a whole range of more personalized sexual and entertainment services and relations catering to clients’ diverse demands (from karaoke bars to traditional tearooms), in which sex is not necessarily involved. Above all, the two sectors differ from each other in terms of legal status. As body selling makes the exchange of money for sex explicit, it is directly targeted by prostitution laws which criminalize those (women) who sell sex while tolerating those (men) who buy sex.¹ In the name of urban hedonism, pleasure selling occurs in legal, modern, urban entertainment venues which serve to justify men’s sexual consumption. Usually, sex workers who work in the body-selling sector suffer more from police raids and harassment.

Furthermore, the conditions under which women perform sex work are also affected by the degree to which commercial sex is institutionalized. Those who work in highly organized or hierarchic sexual establishments (such as karaoke bars or call-girl stations) are usually subject to the surveillance of a third party and have less control over their work – but are better protected from police raids and thus face lower risks. The other extreme is independent streetwalking, where women control the whole process of the sexual transaction and keep all the earnings, but are most vulnerable to police harassment. The labour sex workers actually perform is varied and diverse. To avoid falsely homogenizing sex work(ers) I interviewed sex workers who worked in different settings.²

The labour dimensions of sex work

By seeing prostitution as selling sex, mainstream discourse in Taiwan tends to see sex work as something any woman could do and as therefore
lacking professionalism. Hwang Shu-ling (1996: 142) wrote that ‘when any female aged 8 to 68 can get high pay from the sex industry, it is a job that needs no talent or skill. It thus cannot be professional’ (my translation). This comment not only neglects variation in sex workers’ incomes, but also fails to recognize the fact that sex workers’ ‘high pay’ is in sharp contrast to many female workers’ inadequate wages in the formal labour market. It also fails to unveil various labour dimensions of sex work, and how they are performed differently in different sex industry locations.

Dressing like a whore

‘Dressing like a whore’ is identified as the first step to performing the role of whore. Interviewees reported that they knew they would have to ‘dress for that job’ before they got involved in it. Young girls, mainly casual call girls, reported that their bosses or ‘companies’ would demand that they dress in a particular style (typically mini-skirts, tiny tight vests, and high heels) to ‘present female beauty’ and ‘show off their good figures’.

This dress code draws attention to gender as performance. Performing femininity is rarely considered or appreciated as a kind of labour, mainly because women are generally expected to be feminine and sexually desirable both in private and in public. Pan-pan, the only lesbian interviewee, always bound her breasts and wore jeans when she was not working, but reported that for work: ‘[I] would pay attention to my clothes . . . because clients would be scared, if I looked more masculine.’ ‘Dressing like a whore’ became a task of negotiating the boundary between maintaining her gendered sexual identity of being a ‘very masculine tomboy’ and being a feminine and sexually desirable whore.

Performing femininity is not confined to sex work, but is common in the service economy. Adkins suggests that service work creates ‘a new sovereignty of appearance, image, and style at work’ (2002: 61) and thus excludes some specific workers. Witz et al. (2003) argue that interactive service work involves aesthetic labour in which workers’ embodied dispositions are mobilized, developed, and commercialized by employers of service occupations. It is no surprise that the performance of aesthetic labour is strongly demanded in sex work: uniformed bar girls offer an excellent example.

Pretty Girls is a jyh fiwu diann (uniformed bar) where bar girls’
uniform comprises three pieces (and cost them NT$4,000, about £80, at the time they were interviewed): a well-decorated bra that clearly shows off the girls' 'big breasts', which are augmented by padded sponge, a tiny piece of mini-skirt which opens in a slit to the waist, and a silk robe which has to be taken off when seeing clients. Moreover, each bar girl is required to wear a G-string for clients' sexual pleasure. Moreover, doing 'body work' is an important daily routine, which includes skin care, putting on (subtle) make-up, wearing designer perfume and fashionable hair styles. Echoing Witz et al. (2003), the uniform and girls' 'body work' signify the bar: they embody the image of the bar and present it as a more 'stylish' or 'refined' sexual establishment. The workers' embodied dispositions are thus successfully mobilized by the bar, put on sale, and transferred into economic capital for the bar owners. Moreover, the emphasis on the 'refinement' of the bar also serves the girls' interests and self-identity: it indicates that they work in a unique bar that makes them different from other working women who are seen as vulgar in their dress and speech.

Just 'doing that thing'
Whether in high-class or low-class locations, sexual acts are central to what sex workers do. Apart from a few interviewees who could clearly report this aspect of their job content, most when asked about it replied that they are 'just doing that thing' or 'doing something that people would do with their boyfriends'. At first glance, 'that thing' seems self-evident. However, 'that thing' not only includes diverse sexual practices, but is also deeply embedded in workers' various working settings.

We simply did what ordinary lovers do to each other. . . . I charged NT$5,000 per hour, but clients were only allowed to do it once in an hour. Usually [we] let them come in ten minutes. After they finished it, we would just leave. (Wei-wei, 18, six months as an [independent] call girl)

By posting small advertisements on the Internet, Wei-wei organized her call-girl services independently. She therefore controlled all the details of her work, such as deciding what services to provide, keeping all the earnings and insisting on using condoms. Her account, however, does not unveil the secrecy of the sexual services or labour
she provides. Sue-lian, one of the few interviewees who explicitly described the sequence of turning a trick, offers a fuller account:

Usually a man came in and lay down on the bed. I would rub his dick. He then got a hard-on and then I let him penetrate. That's it. So, I didn’t have many clients. (Sue-lian, 41, ex-licensed sex worker, in prostitution for 28 years)

Commercial sex here is so standardized that male sexuality is considered as nothing but a series of stimulus-response bodily reflexes. Ho (2000) pointed out that this standardized service indeed functions to save labour and desexualize the sexual encounter. These sexual services were desexualized to the extent that Sue-lian could completely ignore the existence of her clients:

Sometimes I even kept knitting a sweater when a man was fucking me. (Laughs.) Yes, it's true. . . . Sometimes I would read a comic when clients were fucking me. But, you know what, he was moving on my body all the time, so the comic would jump up-and-down in front of my eyes. That really tired my eyes. (Giggles.) It's true. I did. (Sue-lian)

If this was a ‘sexual’ encounter, it was an alienated one. The scene described above is more like a postmodern parody than an erotic sexual encounter. It offers perhaps an extreme example of why so many clients complain about sex workers’ bad performances or blame them for being cool or heartless (Høigård and Finstad 1992; O’Connell Davidson 1995). It is precisely the desexualization of these encounters that opens up a space for working women to differentiate ‘sex as work’ and ‘sex for fun’. Many sex workers, however, are expected to mask this distancing by performing emotional labour.

*Embodied emotional labour*  
Hochschild (1983) argues that emotional labour is in high demand in service occupations. As performing emotional labour deeply involves people’s feelings and inner self, she concludes that workers who have to perform emotional labour might develop particular strategies to construct their self. She also mentions that prostitution is one of the few working-class jobs which involves meaning making and/or feeling management (1979: 570). Western literature on the subject indeed shows that emotional labour plays an important role in sex work, which includes talking and flirting with clients (Chapkis 1997;
Sex and Work

McIntosh 1996). In my study, interviewees from both body-selling and pleasure-selling sectors expected to perform emotional labour to different degrees. The demand for emotional labour could be identified easily when they were asked if there is any professional skill in doing sex work:

No, I didn’t think so. You simply need a good temper. (Mei-yun, 61, ex-licensed sex worker, in prostitution for 17 years)

Professional [skills] . . . no, I don’t think so. You just need to be able to please clients and . . . be able to drink. And . . . you should be highly cooperative. There is nothing professional. Anyhow, you need to please clients and . . . umm, don’t show a bad temper. (Fung-fung, 29, three years as a bar girl)

While these women deny having professional skills, I would argue that these accounts mark out the ways in which women’s emotional work is taken for granted and devalued both in public and in private (Meerabeau and Page 1998; Duncombe and Marsden 1998).

Young call girls talked about the paradox of ‘professionalism’ in sex work, when asked the same question:

Clients would be more fond of you, if you didn’t have much sexual skills. Because he could teach you and that turns him on. (Xin-xin, 16, casual call girl)

If you looked very (sexually) experienced, he would feel that ‘Oh, you are a . . .’. So, it’s better to make yourself look not so experienced. For example, you could shyly ask that ‘Is it all right?’ [smiles] before he did something to you. Umm, pretending to be pure. . . . Tut, I don’t know . . . because if you looked too pure, they knew that you was faking [laughs] . . . . (Wei-wei, 18, six months as an independent call girl)

Performing femininity here is both sexual and very much embodied: shyly ask . . . ‘Is it all right?’ and smile at the same time. The performance turns the men on because Taiwanese clients tend to eroticize sexually inexperienced young girls. Paradoxically, the phrase ‘Oh, you are a . . .’ highlights the embodied performance of femininity demanded here. The missing word in the phrase is, no doubt, ji nu (whore). It suggests that the performance of embodied femininity is a balancing act in which ‘professional’ working women should present themselves as not ‘real whores’ in order to turn on clients!
Furthermore, the embodied emotional labour is extremely sexualized: many interviewees reported that they had to ‘sound sexy’ and ‘act high’ and fake orgasms:

Even though you didn’t have an orgasm, you would pretend you did. Umm, if I didn’t have an orgasm, I still would pretend I have one. Making a noise like, ‘ah, ah...’ [smiles]. Umm, I mean... pretending you are extremely high. That turns men on. You just need to make an effort to make noises [giggles]. (Wei-wei, 18, six months as an independent call girl)

‘Men make a mess; women make a noise’ (Jackson and Scott 2001: 107) sums up the gendered performance of orgasm in heterosexual relationships. Faking an orgasm is not only a matter of ‘making noises’ mechanically. These noises, as Pan-pan put it, should ‘sound sexy or feminine’. In order to perform a living orgasm, one should ‘sound sexy’ and ‘look high’. This performance nonetheless is very exhausting and/or annoying, hence some interviewees do not want to be bothered with it. Again, whether sex workers perform orgasm relates to the ways their work is organized. Call girls in this study frequently reported they made a great effort to ‘make noises’ mainly because their work was controlled and organized by a third party.

It is worth noting that performing embodied emotional labour does not mean that sex workers are helpless victims or that they lose their ‘authentic self’. Many did emotional labour not only on bosses’ demand, but also as a means of investing in business in the long term. Bar girls who strongly emphasized mobilizing show wan (social skills) to woo clients actually were keen to create an illusion of ‘falling in love’ with clients in order to keep business going.

Doing sex work therefore does not necessarily destroy sex workers’ bodies and self as Pateman (1988) suggested. On the contrary, as Chapkis (1997) argues, the ability to perform emotional labour makes sex workers able to differentiate their self in work from their sense of self in private life. Here Goffman’s performance theory and his concept of ‘role distance’ are helpful in explaining a complex situation. As Goffman argued:

one can afford to try to fit into the situation as an act that can be styled to show that one is somewhat out of place. One enters the situation to the degree that one can demonstrate that one does not belong. (1961: 109)
Treating emotional labour as an alienated labour, Hochschild argues that workers may lose their ‘authenticity’. However, as workers are consciously aware that they are performing femininity and/or emotional work, they are clearly able to differentiate the ‘back stage’ from the ‘front stage’. For example, many interviewees reported: ‘I’m a totally different person when I’m not working.’ Sitting in the common room (the ‘back stage’) of Pretty Girls, I found girls put their legs on tables, made ungraceful noises when eating noodle soup, chatted and yelled loudly when playing cards. They were neither sexy, nor feminine. One way to exercise role distance to differentiate work self from their sense of self is to carefully manage the boundary between sex as sex and sex as work.

**Negotiating the boundary between sex as sex and sex as work: the ‘boyfriend narrative’**

It is widely claimed that prostitutes are badly damaged by their jobs and thus become sexually frigid or indifferent to sex (Davis 1937). Savitz and Rosen’s (1988) research on the sexual enjoyment of 46 American prostitutes found that respondents’ professional experiences did not appear to interfere with their enjoyment of private sex. Moreover, they claimed that ‘the higher the sexual enjoyment in the prostitutes’ private sex life, the greater the erotic pleasure reported in their professional realm’ (1988: 205). In my study, interviewees hardly ever reported that they ‘enjoy’ sex during work. They tended to compare their sex with clients and with boyfriends, and differentiate sex as sex and sex as work in what I call the ‘boyfriend narrative’. Chen-chen talked about the comparison between sex with clients and with her boyfriend:

> You have more . . . sensual feeling. Having sex with clients . . . it’s simply doing work. Job done after you finished it. You have more sensual feeling when you are with your boyfriend. You did it with feeling, so it’s much more comfortable. You willingly did it with your boyfriend. *The other is that you feel a bit like you go to make money, you know. Yeah, tan xia zha mou [whore], you feel like that.* (Chen-chen, 17, casual call girl, my emphasis)

This narrative is indeed typical among interviewees. They used phrases such as ‘more interesting’ and ‘feels much better’ to describe
their private sexual activities, but used ‘annoying’, ‘dirty’ and ‘wish it would finish quickly’ to refer to sex with clients. The importance of the distinction to some extent relates to respondents’ (hetero)sexual intimacy and their sense of self. Pan-pan, the only lesbian in this study, reported that doing commercial sex with men ‘isn’t a big deal, because I have no feeling about men!’ Conversely, she felt very ‘shy’ when seeing female clients, because:

It’s a bit similar to a male and a female [encounter]. Yeah, like, I’m a boy, and she’s a girl. You more or less would feel a bit . . . shy . . . Umm, [I] felt a bit shy. I mean, she’s a girl after all, and it’s the first time to do it with her. If you have that kind of [sexual] contact for two or three times [with her], you would feel . . . natural or at ease. (Pan-pan, 18, six months as a bar girl and independent call girl)

Feeling shy suggests that Pan-pan saw these sexual encounters as involving her own sexuality. As Morgan (1988: 27), a lesbian sex worker, describes, performing a strip show for lesbians is both ‘performing and playing with parts of our sexualities’ (emphasis in original). Pan-pan enjoyed sexual encounters with female clients; in fact, she only met two female clients and eventually both of them became her girlfriends. I am of course not suggesting that it is easier for lesbians to perform sex work. My point here is to stress the ways in which workers’ sexual and gender identities shape their different understandings and experiences of commercial sex, and to highlight the importance of ‘boyfriend narrative’ in maintaining the boundary between sex and work.

**Techniques of boundary management**

*Marking out the bodily boundary of sex/work*

Western literature details many sex workers’ taboos in performing sex work – no kissing, no anal sex, no cunnilingus, no penetration without a condom, and so on (see Hoigård and Finstad 1992). Ho (2000, 2001) goes further to argue that sex workers use these rituals to mark out the time and space for their work. I would like to add that the organization of sex work might influence the ways sex workers mark out these temporal and spatial boundaries.

Chen-chen, who worked in a call-girl station that demanded
workers provide standardized services to clients (for example, taking a shower, licking his chest, oral sex and intercourse), reported that I perform a set of services to clients, and do it differently with my boyfriend.' Ping-ping independently solicited on street corners and usually turned tricks in the room she rented from a hotel. As the room was both for work and her private place, she usually used different bedding to differentiate between her work and her private life. It seems to me that every interviewee, even in the 'body-selling' sector, had an imaginary map of the bodily boundary of sex/work; once clients crossed the border, they might encounter serious resistance. Xin-xin angrily talked about the ways in which she reacted to clients' transgression:

Some troublesome clients want to kiss you, ask you to lick their penises, or let him to do cunnilingus. Yeah, otherwise they asked for anal sex. . . . Why should we lick him or let him lick us? I think it's very disgusting. Yeah, why should women in this job need to be licked by clients? It's enough to let him penetrate with a condom, isn't it? (Xin-xin, 16, casual call girl)

Many interviewees, just like Xin-xin, tried to maintain the boundaries of their bodies, sexuality and sense of self as a whole in commercial sex; nonetheless, their bargaining power was highly affected by the ways in which their work was organized: for example, call girls and bar girls whose work is controlled by a third party have less bargaining power.

Mobilizing social skills

Marking out the bodily boundary of sex and work is common and helpful in the body-selling sector, but does not work in the pleasure-selling sector. As bar girls commonly argued, it is impossible to tell clients that 'Hey, you cannot touch here or there!' Even in bars that advertise themselves as 'high-class' or 'more stylish', the sexualized bodies of the workers are the main attraction and are available to be touched and fondled as clients please. Fung-fung reported that she had been 'kissed to throw up', and that the vagina of one of her colleagues had been badly hurt by a client. Bar girls frequently reported that sometimes even touching and hugging could be unbearable.

Mobilizing *shou wan* to manage clients was therefore considered the most important technique in pleasure-selling sectors. Women
in the pleasure-selling sector tended to see workers who are only able to make money by selling sex and do not have showu wan as unprofessional. When asked to describe showu wan, they frequently spoke of how to read clients’ minds through their words and behaviour, how to let clients feel respected and save face – skills similar to those found in many modern service occupations (see Black 2004, for example). The timing of or occasions on which workers were keen to mobilize showu wan were mainly related to avoiding ‘doing S’ (offering commercial sex), and to resisting various unpleasant bodily contacts. Usually, bar girls would try everything to keep clients busy and prevent their touching them, such as inviting clients to sing, dance, drink and play all kinds of (sexual) games. In order to avoid unbearable bodily contacts, some women tended to take the lead to ‘handle’ clients’ sexual desire (offering oral sex, for example). Fung-fung talked about why she chose to take the initiative to ‘handle’ clients:

If you don’t [take the initiative], you will probably get two situations. One is that you will be dismissed. The other is that he will . . . come to touch you. He will then . . . touch you all over, kiss you, suck [your tits], and even dig [your vagina]. He will do everything! In that case, we would prefer to . . . ‘handle’ him than to be insulted.

Here Fung-fung does not see offering sexual acts to clients as her sex(uality), but as a way to avoid unwanted body-to-body contacts. It is one of the available techniques or strategies that bar girls use to manage the integrity of their bodies, sexuality and sense of self. However, the images of playing, drinking with and offering sex to clients are widely misrepresented in the media as evidence of badly damaged prostitutes.

**Dirt management**

Performing sex acts is different from other performances partly because it entails body-to-body contact and exchanging bodily fluids, which is considered polluting or dangerous in many cultures (Douglas 2002 [1966]). Dirt management therefore appears to be one of the major themes in sex workers’ daily routines. Workers in both body-selling and pleasure-selling sectors make an effort to maintain the boundary between the clean self and the dirty other.

Two interviewees who reported being seduced and trafficked into this job (Yi-ling and Xiao-fan) repeatedly emphasized that they
Sex and Work

were not ‘willing to do it’. The lack of ‘free consent’ makes them constantly report that ‘[I]t’s dirty!’ and that they felt ‘spoiled’ by clients.

I felt that I didn’t want my body to be touched. . . . It’s very dirty. It made me feel very dirty. . . . I felt I was very dirty because . . . too many people touch me. (Xiao-fan, 17, casual call girl)

Similarly, Yi-ling also reported that ‘[I]f you put it in a more positive way, you are doing sex. But, it’s dirty!’

Mary Douglas (2002 [1966]) argues that the dirt is not dirty in itself, but because it transgresses social order. Symbolically, having sex with a boyfriend is pleasurable because it is celebrated by heteronormativity; conversely, doing commercial sex is criminalized and stigmatized. The dirt, nonetheless, is also very much related to hygiene. Former licensed sex workers reported that they tried to avoid exchanging bodily fluids with clients, because that might be the origin of sexually transmitted diseases. As Bai-lan put it:

Men’s dicks are damn foul and you have no idea whether they are healthy or not. To be honest, I was forced to do it [oral sex] when I was trafficked into an illegal brothel. I didn’t do it after my graduation [when she was freed from trafficking], no matter how much money clients offered to pay for it. . . . Neither do I want to be kissed. Some men have halitosis. They smelled awful. . . . If clients wanted to do cunnilingus, you better reject them because there are so many germs in people’s mouths. (Bai-lan, 41, ex-licensed brothel worker, in prostitution for 18 years)

In the dominant discourse prostitutes are stigmatized as the origin of sexually transmitted diseases, and clients are seen as pure and clean victims. Ironically, clients were considered as the dirty other by many of my interviewees. Their saliva and sperm were treated as potential sources of sexually transmitted diseases that might blur the boundary between healthy self and dirty other. Dirt management, in this sense, highlights sex workers’ daily life. The ways interviewees managed the dirt differed according to the diverse organization of sex work. Bai-lan was forced to perform all kinds of sex acts when she was trafficked, but could control what kind of sex she provided as a licensed sex worker. Xiao-van and Yi-ling dealt with the dirt by spending ‘more than an hour’ to shower or ‘using shower gel to brush [my] whole body’ after
turning a trick. Deep cleaning in a way functions as a ritual to get rid of external dirt or pollution, and reclaim the integrity of the self.

Condoms, of course, create a clear boundary between sex workers and clients, and protect the clean self from the dirty other. Condom usage is widely represented as a way to differentiate sex workers’ sexual intimacy from sex work. For younger interviewees, however, using condoms was centred on the very practical concern of avoiding pregnancy. Clients’ sperm therefore is considered as both dirty and destructive.

**Falling in love with ‘real human beings’**

Seidman (1991) argues that, in the West, there has been a ‘sexualization of love’ and ‘eroticization of sex’ from the nineteenth century onward. Similarly, in Taiwan, having sex in intimate relationships is taken for granted as the best way to express love. It is not surprising that most young girls in this study reported that they avoid having sex with their boyfriends and felt that they had betrayed their boyfriends. Yet sex, for some sex workers, is hardly considered as an indicator of love, given that it can be contracted out so easily. The ways Bai-lan talked about the similarities between having sex with clients and her boyfriend shows us a different relationship between sex and intimacy:

Nothing different, you still got a dick. . . . Gee, sometime he [boyfriend] was fucking me, but I was sleeping. Yes, I did [giggles]. I was very tired, you know. So I had him do it by himself. . . . Of course, we love each other, but it doesn’t mean that we should do that thing [sex]. Do you understand? It’s not necessary to do that. It’s good to respect and take care of each other. It’s all right for me that he seeks for a sexual outlet [outside]. Just let him have fun. . . . I was always sloppily dressed, but men still came to see me, you know. They are cheap animals! (Bai-lan, 41, ex-licensed brothel worker, in prostitution for 18 years)

Sex, for Bai-lan, represents a natural drive shared by all kinds of ‘cheap animals’, it does not even qualify as an expression of love. Thinking in this way, Bai-lan was thus freed from the obsession of sex, and does not bother to monitor her lover’s sexual activities. In contrast, mutual respect and care, for Bai-lan, are understood as love or as cornerstones of intimacy. Love is, therefore, desexualized.
The phenomenon of the desexualization of love is quite notable in some interviewees' narratives of how they felt attracted to and even fell in love with some specific clients. It is not difficult to understand that mutual respect and care are so important given that many interviewees reported that they were not respected at all in their job. Indeed, many respondents spent quite a long time describing how 'horrible clients' humiliated them, bargained for a better price, tried to take all kinds of advantage, demanded undesirable sexual services, used verbal and physical violence, and so on. Tolerating or handling 'horrible clients' is an unpleasant daily routine for many interviewees. Therefore, once clients show their respect to sex workers it is very likely that these clients are considered as 'real human beings', rather than 'cheap animals'. It therefore is possible and/or worth it for sex workers to invest emotions in them. In a conversation Fung-fung and Yo-yo discussed how their clients turned out to be their lovers:

Fung-fung: [Laughs] . . . Usually our boyfriends once were our clients. . . .

Yo-yo: Basically, men who turned out to be your boyfriends definitely won't touch you. You would feel that . . . He is a real human being. They are human beings; others are animals!

Fung-fung: Yeah, yeah . . . [laughs].

Yo-yo: Yes, at least, you need to feel that he is a human being, you know. If a man touched you all over your body, how could you think that he sincerely likes you? In addition, they make us feel that we are respectable. Then we could treat them as friends.

Phoenix's (1999) research on British sex workers also reports that punters are commonly represented as bastards and animals. Here, the metaphor of 'cheap animals' indicates that sex workers are treated badly, simply as a whore, in sexual encounters. 'Cheap animals' only seek sexual satisfaction, thus foreclosing other possibilities, while 'human beings' respect sex workers as persons and, therefore, open up the possibility of creating other intimate relationships – as regular clients, old friends, and even lovers – which are only possible when both parties are treated as equal human beings. In a way, feeling respected as human beings, sex workers might 'feel right' in crossing the boundary and falling in love with their clients.
Conclusion

I have argued that the tendency to frame prostitution either as 'just sex' or as 'just work' is misleading and fails to theorize prostitution adequately. Carefully examining the labour process of sex work, this chapter goes beyond the either-sex-or-work debate. It not only recognizes sex work as work or labour, but also analyses the ways in which sexualization, stigmatization and criminalization of sex work make it impossible for it to be 'just' like some other jobs. In many cases, the stigmatization and criminalization of sex work put sex workers in a risky working situation that makes sex work very different from other work. In terms of sexualization, I argue that Taiwanese sex workers are expected to perform aesthetic labour, alienated sexual labour and embodied emotional labour to different degrees reflecting the diverse ways in which sex work is organized. Furthermore, as the labour demanded in sex work is sexualized to the extent that it is so similar to workers' private sex, interviewees tend to develop different strategies, very much embedded in diverse working settings, to manage the boundary between their sense of self and their work self, and the boundary between sex as sex and sex as work. Hence, sex work is just 'work'; nonetheless, once the boundary is collapsed, it turns out to be 'sex'. Therefore, we should abandon the 'either-sex-or-work' approach and carefully examine when the balance of sex work inclines to sex or work.

Nonetheless, as an instance of feminized work, sex work shares some similarities with other service occupations, such as flight attendants, Taiwanese betel-nut beauties and female clerks in department stores (see Lan 1998). In order to transform workers' labour power into labour, the employers in the service sector design work regimes that demand female workers perform sexualized femininity and embodied emotional labour. With rapid sexualization of female service occupations, analysis of sex work might help us to rethink these female jobs. In fact, it might be interesting to note that sex and work are not exclusive of each other in women’s daily lives – as empirical research has shown, heterosexual women are expected to fake orgasms in daily lives. It is thus important for feminists not only to consider the particularity of sex work, but also to examine the ways in which it is related to women’s other paid and unpaid labour both in public and private.
120 Sex and Work

Notes

1 The Taiwanese government issued licences to brothels and to prostitutes after 1956. However, licensed prostitution was abolished in September 1997 when Taipei city government decided to criminalize all kinds of commercial sex. This abolition caused 128 former Taipei licensed prostitutes to organize themselves to demand their rights to sex work.

2 These included those who worked as independent call girls and those who worked in organized call-girl centres, those who worked in high-class bars and in lower-class karaoke bars, in tearooms or on the streets, as well as formerly licensed prostitutes (see note 1 above).

3 Betel-nut beauties are young women, often scantily dressed, who sell betel-nut in kiosks by the roadside. They are a common sight on the streets of Taiwan.

References


——— (2001) 自我培力與專業操演：與台灣性工作者的對話 ['Self-empowerment and professional performativity: conversations with Taiwanese sex...
Negotiating Sex and Work among Taiwanese Sex Workers 121


My work is my dignity: sex work is work in Josephine Ho (ed.), *Sex Work: Prostitutes' Rights in Perspective*. Chungli, Taiwan: 中央性/別研究室 [Center for the Study of Sexualities Press].