

Further Insights from “Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution”:

Men Who Purchase Sex: Pornography Consumption, Sexual Abuse History and Perceptions of Prostituted Women

By: Darci Jenkins, MSW

Introduction

On any given day in the Chicago metropolitan area, it's estimated there are between 16,000 and 25,000 women and girls impacted by the sex trade industry.¹ For the vast majority of these individuals, the commercial sex industry is dangerous; most prostituted women and girls experience severe violence against them at the hands of their pimp and johns (men who purchase sex).² Furthermore, there is a direct link between human trafficking and the commercial sex trade. The federal definition of trafficking requires that an individual 18 years or older be brought into prostitution through force, fraud, or coercion, which is the lived experience for many in domestic prostitution. Consequently, women and girls become trapped in the sex trade, which has very strong and negative impact on their lives. Women and girls in prostitution suffer from high rates of mental and physical health problems such as frequent viral illness, STDs, vaginal infections, depression, eating disorders, cervical cancer, and post-traumatic stress disorder.³ Indeed, the sex industry is an urgent public health problem and a severe violation of human rights that is undeniably fueled by the demand for commercial sex.

The equation is simple: without demand there would be no supply. Until we can understand who is purchasing sex, why they are purchasing sex, where and how they are purchasing sex, whom they are purchasing sex from, and what would deter them from continuing sex trade patronage, we cannot properly address the very pervasive issue of human trafficking and prostitution. There is limited research on demand for paid sex in the United States, but there have been a few studies of interest.

¹ O'Leary, C., & Howard, O. (2001). The prostitution of women and girls in metropolitan Chicago: A preliminary prevalence report. *Center of impact research*. Retrieved from <http://www.impactresearch.org/documents/prostitutionreport.pdf>.

² Raymond, J. G., & Hughes, D. M. (2001). Sex trafficking of women in the United States. *Coalition Against Trafficking Women*. Retrieved from http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/sex_traff_us.pdf

³ Farley, M. (2004). “Bad for the body, bad for the heart”: Prostitution harms women even if legalized or decriminalized. *Violence Against Women, 10(10)*, 1087-1125. See also Farley, M., Baral, I., Kiremire, M. & Sezgin, U. (1998). Prostitution in five countries: Violence and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Feminism & Psychology, 8(4)*, 405-426.

It is estimated that 16% of men in the United States purchase sex⁴ and research shows that men first purchase sex in their early 20s.⁵ Prostitution-related arrests primarily focus on women selling sex, not the men purchasing or the pimps or traffickers. In addition to limited attention by law enforcement on the demand side, there is also very limited research on men who purchase sex – also known as johns. For those scholars who have studied men who purchase sex, there is still a strong debate as to *why* men purchase sex. Some argue that purchasing sex fulfills the man's appetite for sex, love, or romance. Conversely, some scholars argue that men who purchase sex have chauvinistic motives such as wanting to have power and control over the woman in prostitution.⁶

Pitts and colleagues surveyed 143 men who had purchased sex and were attending a commercial event in Victoria, Australia.⁷ They found that the majority (43.8%) of the men reported that the major reason they paid for sex was to satisfy their sexual needs. Additionally, 36.4 percent reported that it was less trouble to pay for sex; 35.5 % thought it would be entertaining and 20.7 % were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. A small percentage reported purchasing sex for a relationship or lack thereof, with 15.7% reporting that they purchased sex for the companionship, and 14 % reporting that they paid for sex because they wanted to avoid the possibility of a relationship.

Monto and McRee (2005)⁸ found that men who purchase sex are less likely to be married, less likely to be happily married, and more likely to report being unhappy in general than men who did not buy sex in a national samples. Furthermore, men who purchase sex were much more likely to report having watched pornographic movies or purchased adult magazines during the past year than the nationally sampled men. Another interesting finding from this study was that men who purchase sex from women in prostitution reported thinking about sex, masturbating, and feeling guilty when thinking about sex more frequently than men in the national sample.

Methods

With the goal of contributing to the research on the role of demand in the sex trade, in December of 2006 and June of 2007 the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE), Prostitution Research and Education (PRE), and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) launched a research initiative in Chicago to investigate the cognitive and behavioral patterns of men who purchase sex. A research team of 10 individuals, including three survivors of the sex trade, were trained by CAASE and PRE. In the course of four days in December of 2006 the interview team interviewed 54 men who purchase sex. Interviews were held in a public hotel lobby in order to ensure safety for the interviewer

⁴ Westerhoff, N. (2009). Why do men buy sex? *Scientific American Mind*, 20(3)

⁵ Pitts et al. (2004) & Lowman & Atchison

⁶ Westerhoff, N. (2009). Why do men buy sex? *Scientific American Mind*, 20(3)

⁷ Pitts et al. (2004)

⁸ Monto, M. & McRee, J. (2005). A comparison of the male customers of female street prostitutes with national samples of men. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 20(10), 1-25.

and to reassure interviewees that this was, in fact, a legitimate interview and not a police sting. In June of 2007 the second 59 interviews were conducted. These interviews were held in private meeting rooms of Chicago Public Libraries.

Participants for this study were recruited by an advertisement that was published weekly in the Chicago Reader and Chicago After Dark (free news publications). The advertisement was also run daily in the “Erotic Services” section of Craigslist. Craigslist is a community website where people can find jobs, locate roommates, sell furniture, etc. It is also a website where people were able to advertise “erotic services,” which was mostly code for prostitution.

In total, the research team interviewed 113 men who buy sex. Participants were given two self-administered surveys and then asked 83 questions in person, several of which had multiple parts to the question.

In 2008, CAASE released *Deconstructing The Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights From Interviews With Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex*.⁹ This report is meant to be the first in a series of addendums meant to give additional insights into sex trade patrons.

Results

Frequency of purchasing sex

Participants reported a spectrum of frequency in purchasing overall. Twenty percent of the men reported buying sex several times a month while 20% of other men reported buying sex a couple of times a year. When asked how often men purchased sex of any kind (e.g. hand release, oral sex, intercourse) in the past year, the majority (43%) reported once or twice. Twenty-four percent reported purchasing sex of any kind about once a month over the past year.

Pornography

The act of consuming pornography was not included in statistics about buying sex. However, researchers asked questions about pornography consumption from men who also bought sex. Overall, viewing pornographic images on the internet was the primary type of pornographic consumption by interviewees, with 27% viewing images more than once per week. Forty-six percent of men reported never patronizing adult book stores, 63% reported never going to sex-oriented massage parlors, and 76% reported never calling phone sex lines. (See Figure 1)

⁹ Durchslag, R. & Goswami, S. (2008). Deconstructing the demand for prostitution: Preliminary insights from interviews with Chicago men who purchase sex. Available May 17, 2010 from: <http://caase.org/resources.html>

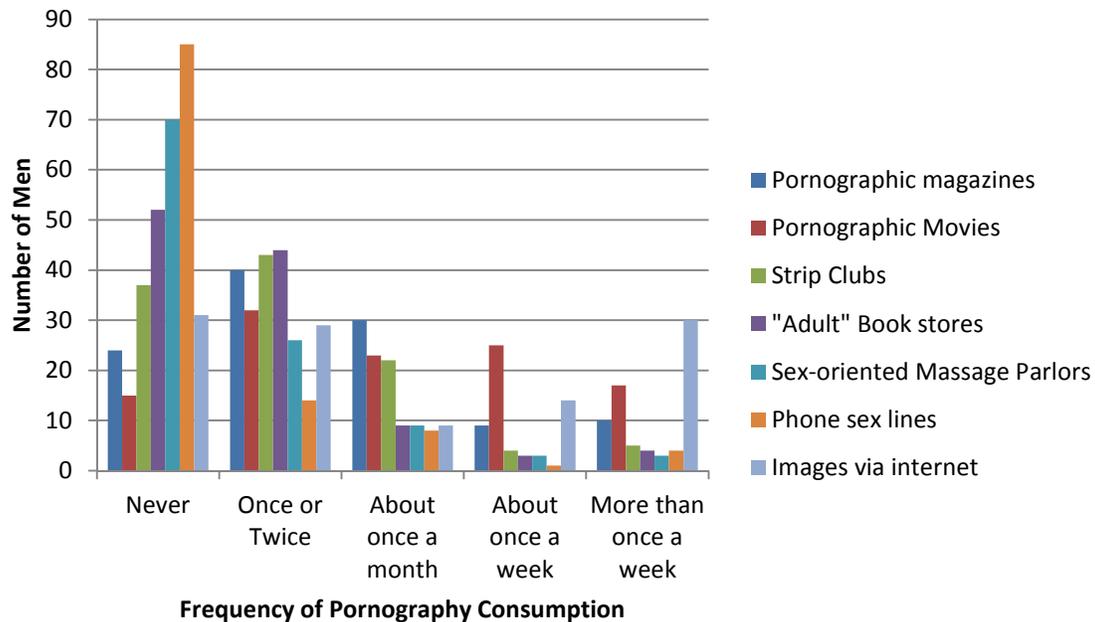


Figure 1: Pornography Tendencies Among Men who Purchase Sex

Sexual Abuse

Fifteen percent of the men reported being touched in a sexual way as a child. There was no statistically significant correlation between men who were sexually abused as a child and their pornographic consumption.

Confidence

On a scale of social confidence from 0% to 100%, men reported that they felt, on average, 85% socially confident with women who are not in prostitution. There was a statistically significant relationship between the amount of social confidence a participant reported and the number of times he views pornographic images via the internet. Men who felt 100% socially confident viewed pornographic images more than those who felt less confident. (See Figure 2) There were no statistically significant relationships between pornographic consumption and sexual confidence when out with women.

Feelings Before, During, and After Buying Sex with a Woman in Prostitution

The participants were asked to provide five feeling words describing how they felt before, during and after purchasing sex. Before buying sex, most men felt negative feelings (58%) compared to 42% who felt positive feelings. During the sex act, however, the majority felt negative feelings (65%) compared to 35% who felt positive feelings. After the session, the majority again felt negative feelings (61%) compared to 39% that felt positive feelings. The men were also asked to

Figure 2: Amount of Social Confidence and Number of Times Men View Pornographic Images via the Internet

describe how they thought the woman in prostitution felt during the session. The majority thought she felt negative feelings (62%). (See Table 1)

Table 1: Men’s Feelings Before, During, and After the session with a woman in prostitution

Feeling	Before % (n)	During % (n)	After % (n)	Men’s Perception of the Woman in Prostitution’s Feelings % (n)
Positive	42% (47)	65% (74)	39% (44)	38% (43)
Negative	58% (66)	35% (39)	61% (68)	62% (70)

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare feelings before, during, and after the session. There was a statistically significant difference in the change in feelings from before ($M=.42$ $SD=.50$)¹⁰, and during ($M=.65$, $SD=.48$) the sex act; $t(112)=-4.12$, $p=.0001$. There is no significant difference between their feelings before the session and after the session. There was a highly statistically significant difference in the change in feelings from during ($M=.66$, $SD=.48$) and after ($M=.39$, $SD=.05$) the sex act, $t(111)=4.98$, $p=.000$.

A Fischer’s Exact Test was conducted to determine the relationship between those who reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching as a child and feelings they felt before, during, and after the session with the women in prostitution. There is no significant relationship between how he felt before the session and whether he was sexually touched as a child. However, there is a statistically significant relationship between how he felt during the sex act and whether he was sexually touched as a child ($p=.03$). For those who were sexually abused, the majority ($n=10$) felt generally negative feelings during the sex act compared to the majority of those who were not sexually abused who generally felt positive feelings ($n=65$) during the sex act. There is also a significant relationship between how the participants felt after the session and whether they were sexually touched as a child ($p=.012$). The large majority of those who reported sexual abuse felt negative feelings after ($n=15$) which increased from before ($n=9$) and during ($n=10$). Still, those who were not sexually abused reported negative feelings the majority of the time as well ($n=52$). Finally, there is a significant relationship between how participants believed the woman in prostitution felt during the session and whether he was sexually abused or not ($p=.016$). The majority ($n=15$) of those who were sexually abused thought she felt negative feelings.

¹⁰ Positive was coded as ‘1,’ Negative was coded as ‘0,’ and neutral was coded as ‘2’

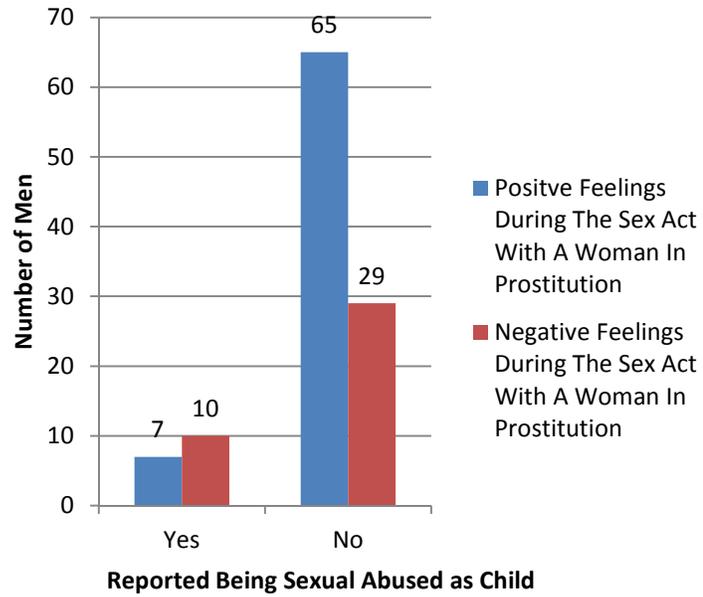


Figure 3: Feelings DURING the session for participants who reported being sexually touched as child

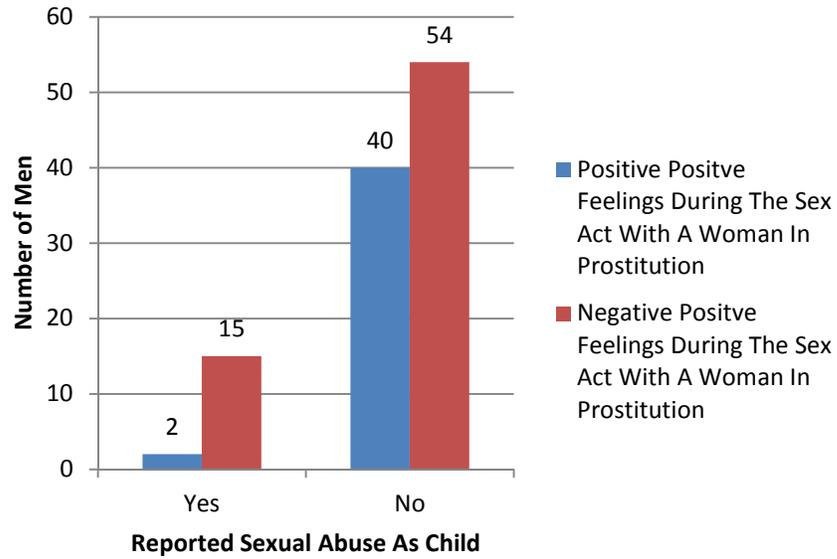


Figure 4: Feelings AFTER the session for participants who reported being sexually touched as child

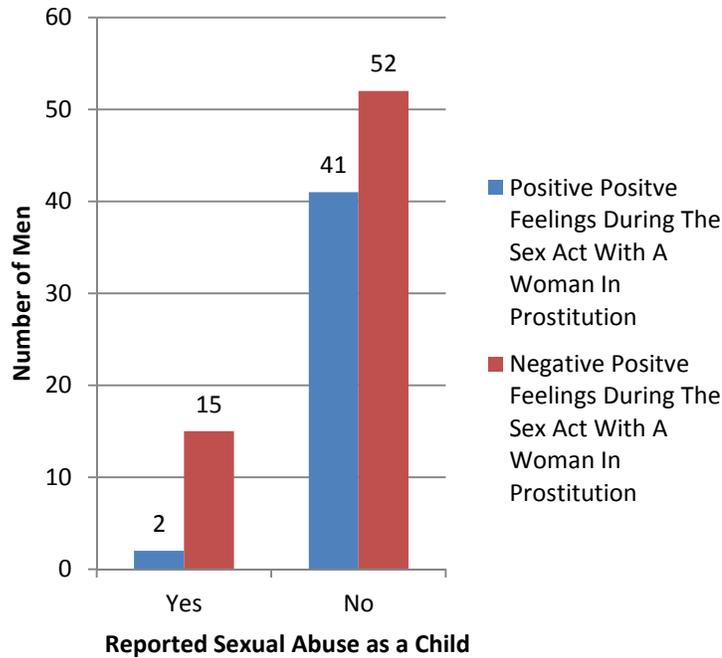


Figure 5: Men who reported sexual abuse as a child and how they think the woman in prostitution felt during the sexual act

These results are also summarized in Table 2 to demonstrate the change in feelings for those who reported sexual abuse as a child. The majority of men who reported being sexually touched as a child felt negative feelings before, during, and after their session with the woman in prostitution. The majority of negative feelings were felt after the session with 88% reporting negative feelings.

Table 2: Summary of Feelings felt by men before, during, and after the session who reported sexual abuse as a child (n=17)

BEFORE % (n)		During % (n)		AFTER % (n)	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
47.06%	52.94%	41.18%	58.82%	11.76%	88.24%
(8)	(9)	(7)	(10)	(2)	(15)

Prostitution’s Effects on the Woman and the Community

When comparing how a participant felt *before, during, and after* the session with how negative he thought the effects of prostitution are on the community, there is no significant relationship. However, descriptively, the results are interesting. For those who thought prostitution has a *very negative effect* (n=33), the majority felt negative feelings before (61%) and after (70%). Still, during they mostly felt positive feelings (61%). For those men who believe prostitution has an extremely negative effect (n=17), the majority felt positive before (58.82%) but negative during (52.94%) and after (70.59%). (Table 3)

Table 3: Feelings before, during and after the session based on how negative an effect participant's believe prostitution has on the community

Men's responses to whether prostitution has a negative effect on the community	BEFORE % (n)		DURING % (n)		AFTER % (n)	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
NO NEGATIVE EFFECT	46% (10)	55% (12)	82% (18)	18% (4)	64% (14)	36% (8)
SLIGHTLY NEGATIVE EFFECT	44% (17)	56% (22)	72% (28)	28% (11)	38% (15)	62% (24)
VERY NEGATIVE EFFECT	39% (13)	61% (20)	62% (20)	39% (13)	30% (10)	70% (23)
EXTREMELY NEGATIVE EFFECT	59% (10)	41% (7)	47% (8)	53% (9)	29% (5)	71% (12)

Men were also asked “How positive do you think the effects of prostitution are on the prostitute?” Almost half (48%) thought prostitution has a slightly positive effect on the woman in prostitution. Only 3% thought prostitution has an extremely positive effect on the woman in prostitution. A Fisher's Exact test was run to determine if there is a significant relationship between how positive a man thinks the effects of prostitution are on the woman and how he felt before the session ($p=.003$). Out of the majority who thought prostitution has a slightly positive effect on the woman, 67% felt negative feelings and 32% felt positive feelings. (Figure 6). There was no statistically significant relationship for how the man felt during and after the session.

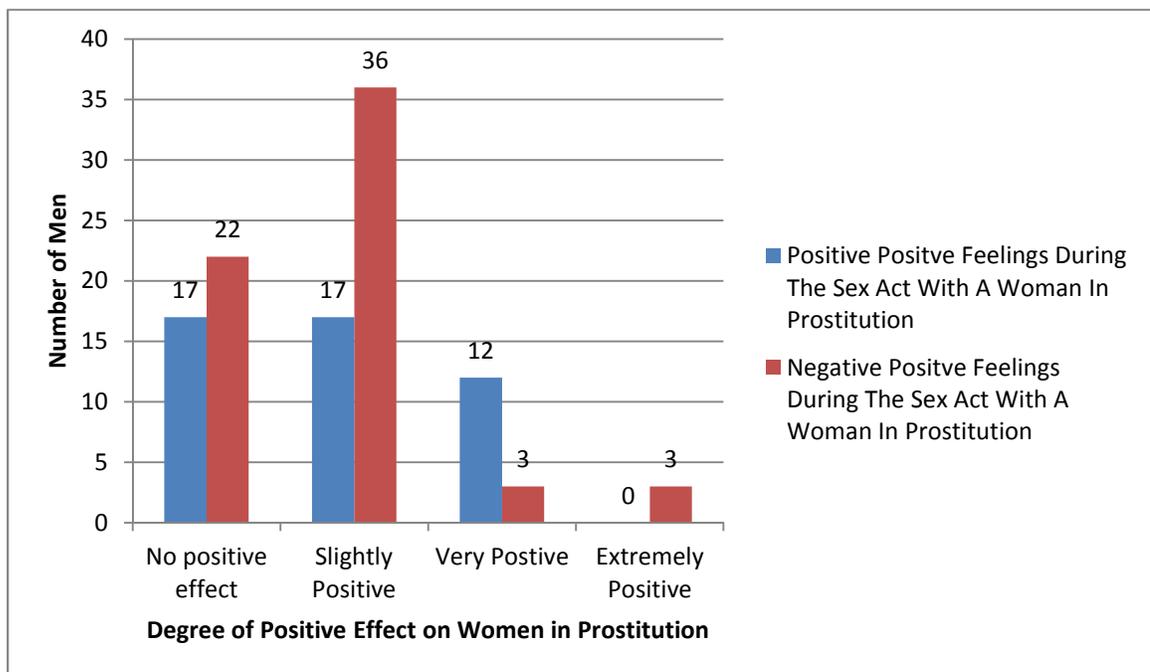


Figure 6: How Positive of an Effect Prostitution has on the Woman and Feelings BEFORE the session

Men's beliefs about prostitution negatively affecting the community were compared with their beliefs about the positive effects of prostitution on women with whom they bought sex. There is a highly significant relationship between these two beliefs ($p=.000$). As expected, for those who thought prostitution has an extremely negative effect on the community ($n=13$), none thought that prostitution has an extremely positive effect on the woman in prostitution. For those who thought that prostitution has no negative effect on the community ($n=20$), 30% think that prostitution has a slightly positive effect on the woman and 30% think that prostitution has a very positive effect on the woman in prostitution.

Beliefs about Women in Prostitution

Men were asked three questions about what they knew about women in prostitution: (1) What percent of prostitutes do you think entered prostitution before the age of 18? (2) What percent of prostitutes do you think were abused as children? (3) What percent of prostitutes do you think are homeless? (Figure 7) The majority of men (18%) think that 50% of women entered prostitution under the age of 18 and the majority (21%) think that 50% of women in prostitution were abused as children. Lastly, the majority (17%) think that only 20% of women in prostitution are homeless.

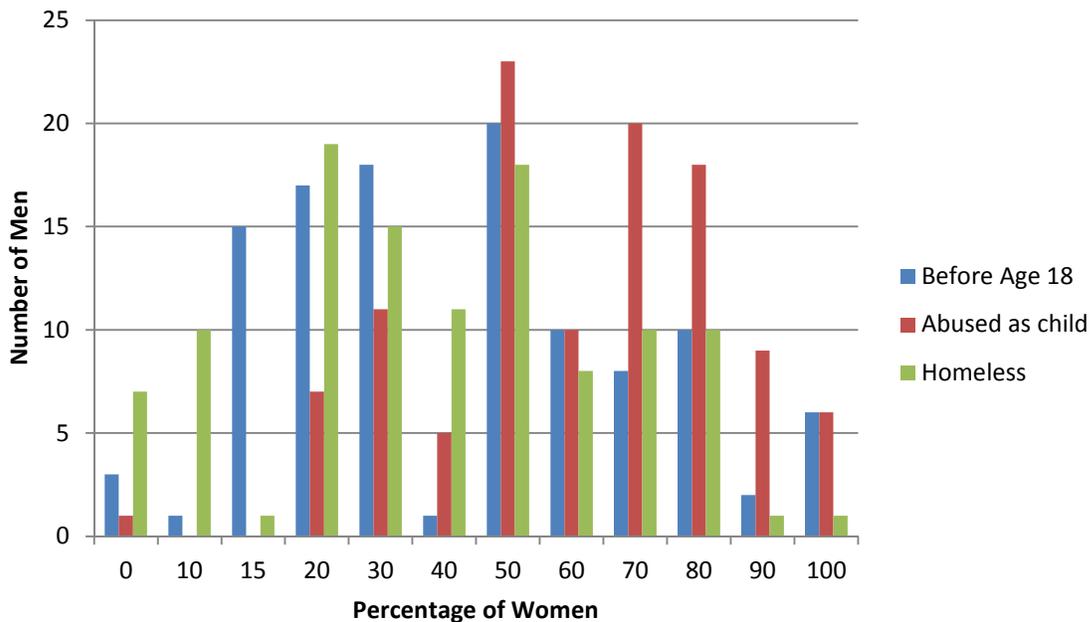


Figure 7: Beliefs about women in prostitution

The men were also asked whether they agree that women in prostitution are different from other women. A simple logistic regression showed that there is no significant relationship between whether they agree that women in prostitution are different than other woman and how they felt *before* and *after* the session. However, there was a statistically significant relationship between whether he agrees that women in prostitution are different than other women and how

he felt *during* the session ($p=.01$). There was no significant relationship between whether he agrees that women in prostitution are different than other women and how he thought she felt during the session with him. Despite the lack of significance, the descriptive statistics are still telling. (Table 4) Those who highly agree (agreed 70 to 100 %) that women in prostitution are different than other women felt mostly negative feelings before the session. Overall, the majority (59%) felt negative feelings regardless of how much or little they agree that woman in prostitution are different from other women. On the other hand, the majority (66%) felt positive feelings during the session. After the session, however, the men mostly felt negative feelings again (61%).

Table 4: Percentage of Men Who Agree that Women in Prostitution are Different From Other Women and Feelings before, during and after the session with the woman in prostitution

Percentage of Men Who Agree Women in Prostitution Are Different From Other Women	Before % (n)		During % (n)		After % (n)	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
100%	40% (6)	60% (9)	67% (10)	33% (5)	33% (5)	67% (10)
90%	20% (1)	80% (4)	80% (4)	20% (1)	60% (3)	40% (2)
80%	25% (2)	75% (6)	63% (5)	38% (3)	38% (3)	63% (5)
70%	31% (4)	69.23% (9)	69% (9)	31% (4)	46% (6)	54% (7)
60%	33% (1)	66.67% (2)	67% (2)	33% (1)	67% (2)	33% (1)
50%	53% (9)	47.06% (8)	47% (8)	53% (9)	29% (5)	71% (12)
40%	50% (3)	50% (3)	50% (3)	50% (3)	67% (4)	33% (2)
30%	50% (3)	50% (3)	100% (6)	---	50% (3)	50% (3)
20%	80% (4)	20% (1)	100% (5)	---	40% (2)	60% (3)
10%	40% (2)	60% (3)	60% (3)	40% (2)	20% (1)	80% (4)
0%	39% (11)	60.71% (17)	64% (18)	36% (10)	33% (9)	67% (18)
TOTAL	41% (46)	59% (65)	66% (73)	34% (38)	39% (43)	61% (67)

Prostitution Myth Acceptance

Prostitution myths are commonly held attitudes about the sex trade industry (such as that most people enter as adults) but are predominantly false beliefs. Interviewees were presented with statements (prostitution myths) such as “Most prostitutes make a lot of money” and were then asked to what degree they agreed with the statement. Seventy-three percent of men had high rates of prostitution myth acceptance such as believing that prostitution is always a choice. Thirty-one of the men (27%) did not agree with prostitution myths. The men were also asked to

report how much they agree with the following statement: “When you are with a prostitute, you are basically entitled to do anything you want.” Interestingly, the majority (28%) did not agree with the statement at all, however, a close minority (26%) agreed with the statement 100%. On average, the men agreed with the statement 48% of the time. There is no significant relationship between how much men agree with prostitution myths and their sense of entitlement while with a woman in prostitution.

There is no significant relationship between believing there are positive effects that prostitution has on the woman and how much the men agreed with prostitution myths. However, the descriptive statistics are interesting. Again, the majority of the interviewees agreed with prostitution myths. Out of these 79 men who agreed, the majority (48%) think that prostitution has a slightly positive effect on the woman in prostitution. Similarly, however, 32% think that prostitution has no positive effect on woman in prostitution. On the other hand, 27% (n=31) of the interviewees disagreed with prostitution myths. Out of these men, 48% think that prostitution has a slightly positive effect on the woman and 45% percent think that prostitution has no positive effect at all.

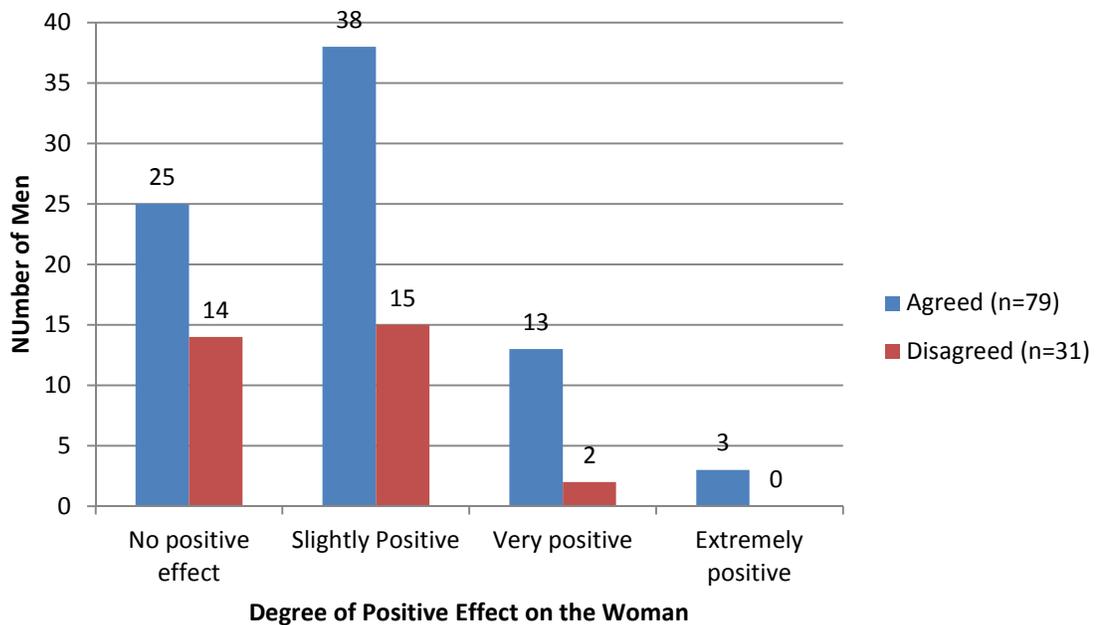


Figure 8: Prostitution Myth Acceptance and How Positive Prostitution is on the Woman

There is no significant relationship between prostitution myth acceptance and how the participants reportedly felt before, during, and after buying sex. Still, for those who agreed with prostitution myths, the majority felt negative feelings before (61%), positive feelings during (70%), and negative feelings after (57%). Out of the 73% of men who agreed with prostitution myths, 66% thought the woman in prostitution felt negative feelings during the session.

Rape Myth Acceptance

Unlike prostitution myth acceptance, the large majority of men generally disagreed with rape myth acceptance questions (97%). For example, men were asked how much they agree with the statement: “A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex”. Only three men out of 113 generally agreed with rape myths. To analyze the participant’s rape myths acceptance further, we compared rape myth acceptance to what percentage of the time the men reported the woman in prostitution being drunk. This is important because any individual who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol cannot legally consent to sex. Overall, 8% reported that she was drunk 100 percent of the time and 24% reported that she was never drunk. For those who disagreed with rape myths (n=110), the majority reported (n=27) that she was drunk 0% of the time. However, 17% of the men who disagreed with rape myths reported that she was drunk 50% of the time. The relationship, however, was not significant. These findings tell us that men reported that they disagree with rape myths but have had sex with a woman in prostitution while she was intoxicated 50% of the time, meaning that he has raped a woman. The contradiction is striking and implies that men are not completely educated on what rape and consent are and how their behaviors relate.

Survivors of Sexual Trauma

A Fischer’s Exact Test was conducted to determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between men who reported being sexually touched as a child and the amount of negative impact they believe prostitution has on the community. There is a significant relationship ($p=.023$). Out of the 17 men who reported sexual abuse as a child, the majority think that prostitution has a very negative effect (41%) on the community and 35% think that it has an extremely negative effect. For those who did not report being sexually abused as a child (n=92), the majority (38%) think that prostitution has a slightly negative effect on the community.

The majority of men (59%) who were sexually abused as a child felt 100% socially confident with women who are not in prostitution. Similarly, roughly 53% of men who were sexually abused as a child felt 100% sexually confident when with women who are not in prostitution.

Conclusions

The beliefs and personal experiences of men undeniably influence their purchasing sex behaviors. Around 15% of the men in this study reported being sexually touched as a child. The

majority of these men felt negative feelings before, during and after the session with the woman in prostitution yet most feel 100% socially and sexually confident when with women who are not in prostitution.

Overall, men felt negative feelings before and after buying sex but felt positive feelings while engaged in the sex act. It is not surprising that they reported positive feelings during the sex act, as it can be a physically arousing and gratifying act. On the contrary, men reported that they thought the woman in prostitution felt mostly negative feelings during the sex act. Surprisingly, however, most men reported that they think prostitution has a slightly *positive* effect on the woman.

Still, the majority of men thought that prostitution has a slightly negative to very negative effect on the community. For these men, the majority also reported negative feelings before and after the session. Despite recognizing the negative effects and having negative feelings, men still purchase sex. In the past year previous to the research, 43 percent of men purchased some kind of sex (e.g. hand release, oral sex, intercourse) once or twice. Twenty-four percent purchased some kind of sex at least once a month over the past year, and 10 percent purchased some kind of sex about once a week over the past year.

Furthermore, most men had high rates of prostitution myth acceptance. Also, 48% of men agreed that they are entitled to do anything they want to a woman in prostitution. Even though the interviewees generally agreed with prostitution myths (e.g. women in prostitution keep all the money they make) they still felt generally negative feelings before and after the sex act. These findings suggest that many men are not aware of the common harms experienced by prostituted individuals such as the high rates of physical and psychological violence inherent in the sex industry. Instead, they have been engrained in a culture that boasts prostitution misconceptions such as only adults being in prostitution or that there is always consent..

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample size is very small with only 113 participants. Indeed, the small sample size impacted the minimal number of significant findings. With that being said, the descriptive statistics in many areas were both interesting and telling. Second, the men were only from Chicago. Although the commercial sex trade is in every corner of the United States – rural, suburban, and urban – these findings cannot be generalized to all men who purchase sex. Lastly, these men were self-reporting to an interviewer who was not known to them. Self-reports are not the most reliable measurement tools, however, for the purposes of this study, it is important to ask the men questions directly. There may be cases of over reporting or under reporting depending on the nature of the question. This is unknown to the researchers.

Despite these limitations, this study has several implications for policy and future research. First and foremost, there are hundreds of studies looking at women in prostitution but very little research focusing on men who purchase sex. Again, this is not surprising given that

men are frequently not willing to come forward and discuss purchasing sex acts. This study should be replicated in several areas within the country to get a clearer idea of who is purchasing sex and why. The demand for commercial sex fuels the sex industry. We must understand the demand in order to address the issue of human trafficking and prostitution.

One striking finding of the original study is that the majority of men who purchased sex think that prostitution has a slightly positive effect on women in prostitution. Many individuals involved in the sex trade in the United States are victims of trafficking¹¹. The federal definition of trafficking is anyone who is brought into the commercial sex trade by force, fraud, or coercion. It is important to note that the majority of women enter the sex trade as minors, and under federal and Illinois law, any minor in the sex trade does not have to prove force, fraud, or coercion – they are automatically considered victims of trafficking. Additionally, majority of women experience extreme violence while in the sex trade at the hands of their customers as well as pimps and traffickers.¹² Men are frequently not aware of this as evinced by these findings. Therefore, men should be educated on the detrimental impacts prostitution has on women. Since the majority of interviewees purchased sex for the first time between the ages of 18-23, prevention education is needed for high school males to deter potential young men from sex trade patronage.

Based on research, we have a pretty good idea of *why* and *how* women and girls enter prostitution, but we know very little about the men who purchase sex. The male demand for commercial sex is the most immediate source of sustainability for the sex trade. Without this demand, it would not be profitable for pimps and traffickers to seek out a supply of women. Though this research provides preliminary insights into the demand side of the sex trade, more research is needed since in order to curb the demand, we must properly understand how and why it exists.

¹¹ Polaris Project. (2009). *Common myths and misconceptions about human trafficking in the U.S.* Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://nhtrc.polarisproject.org/materials/Common-Myths-and-Misconceptions-about-Human-Trafficking-in-the-US.pdf>

¹² Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D.L. (2002). *Sister speak out: The lives and needs of prostituted women in Chicago*. Center for Impact Research.