

## Choice-Makers and Risk-Takers in Neo-Liberal Liquid Modernity: The Contradiction of the “Entrepreneurial” Sex Worker

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### Abstract

The transformation from a welfare-based to a neo-liberal society, from a solid to liquid (post) modernity, has reconfigured the social category of the individual into one that is highly individualized, fragmented, commercialized and entangled in consumer culture. In this society individuals are conceptualized as being rational choice-makers and entrepreneurs – sifting through the multiple options available in order to appropriate the identity(ies)/role that will maximize benefits and minimize harms. Some identities, however, are still solid, unable to escape stigmatization and exclusion. Using the image of ‘the sex worker’, this paper aims to deconstruct this contradiction questioning why, under a socio-political system that values individuals who become entrepreneurs and take advantage of consumerism in a manner which maximizes financial benefits and minimizes risks, have sex workers not been redefined in this context? Rather, extending from Bauman’s (2007a) characterization of consumerism’s collateral casualties, they have come to be seen as ‘inconspicuous’ non-consumers.

### Introduction

The figure of ‘the sex worker’ is a malleable cultural symbol, used to simultaneously address social fears and desires (O’Neill 2000). Historical and global representations of the sex worker have facilitated the understanding of societal attitudes towards female sexuality, mobility and emancipation. In this respect, three distinct feminist discourses organizing the experiences of the sex worker and the relationship to gender and society, have emerged: pro-positive sex feminism, anti-sex feminism and sex radical feminism (Chapkis 1997). While anti-sex feminists commence from the position that sex work is the ultimate form of patriarchy imposing itself upon females, sex radical feminists assert that sex work affirms the right of a woman to regain control of her body (Chapkis 1997; O’Neill 2000). Rather than conceptualizing female sex workers as passive victims of sexual oppression, they are seen as symbols of women’s sexual authority and a threat to patriarchy. Pro-positive feminists have aimed to further redefine the sex worker identity by seeing her as a *worker*, “a labour[er] in a society permeated by class, gender, and racial inequalities” (Brock 2000: 79).

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Also referred to as the sex *as* work discourse, the pro-positive feminist view positions sex workers as exercising an opportunity for profitable employment and work, “a profession [in which] a woman can enter out of free will” (Outshoorn 2001: 478). Sex *workers*, are constructed as rational economic agents, entrepreneurs, performing a job and getting paid for it (Bruckert 2002; Chapkis 1997; O’Connell Davidson 1998; Sanders 2005). Current understandings of the sex worker purport that (s)he<sup>i</sup> is making a *rational choice*, and that s(he) is being *enterprising* within a constraint of choices and opportunities. The sex worker carefully chooses and constructs specific personas and identities to maximize financial benefits while simultaneously engaging in behaviours to minimize work-related danger (Sanders 2001).

Beck (2003: 23) states that “the contemporary individual... is characterized by choice, where previous generations had no such choices.” This surplus of choice is evident in many spheres of social life, commencing with the production of individual identities themselves. Identity formation, in this society, is no longer only a social accomplishment, the establishment of a self that can be made known and recognizable to self and others, but identities have become reified as separate commodities, external to oneself, that can be purchased, possessed and discarded.

These entities appear as complete and whole identities, each with a particular persona, style of dress, mannerisms and aesthetic quality. Our very individuality, our identity, has become uncertain, but those willing to purchase the appropriate accoutrements are able to defer that uncertainty, and if the risks of ‘wearing’ a particular identity become too great, or the benefits of ‘wearing’ a particular identity become too small, entangled in a culture of consumerism, we may simply purchase a new identity. Individuals in this society are responsabilized as being enterprising (Rose 1999), making rational and calculated decisions, even with respect to what identity(ies) they choose to possess. A paradox emerges, however, when applying this rationale of the calculated risk-taker and the rational choice-making entrepreneur to the sex worker.

The sex worker, it would appear, should be regarded as an enterprising individual, however, is not. Rather (s)he is seen as engaging in a risky lifestyle and therefore held morally culpable. Using the image of ‘the sex worker’, this paper aims to deconstruct this contradiction questioning why, under a socio-political system that values individuals who become entrepreneurs and take advantage of consumerism in a manner which maximizes financial benefits and minimizes risks, have sex workers not been redefined in this context? Rather, extending from Bauman’s (2007a) characterization of consumerism’s collateral casualties, they have come to be seen as ‘inconspicuous’ non-consumers. What is it about sex work, and the labour of sex workers, that precludes them from entering into the category of the entrepreneur rather than that of the imprudent risk-taker? In this paper, the shift towards the erosion of the solid to a liquid modernity will be highlighted, paying particular attention to the implication for the fragmentation of gendered identities<sup>ii</sup> as well as to the emergence of the risk discourse as an individualizing technique of governance.

### **From a Solid to a Liquid Modernity**

At the turn of the twenty-first century, we are living through a period of intense and profound social change, characterized by many theorists as the shift from modernity to postmodernity. We have moved away from a heavy/solid modernity represented by the idea of a ‘job for life’ and fixed definitions of the social, to a light/fluid modernity characterized by uncertainty, risk, the belief in experts, flexible forms of work and the fragmentation of the social network (Bauman 2000a). This transformation from a welfare-based society to a neo-liberal society, from a solid to a liquid modernity, has reconfigured the individual into one that is highly individualized, fragmented, commercialized and entangled in consumer culture. Simultaneously, methods of governance have increasingly been focused on the individual, with the

government of crime, social problems and social life being “reshaped around techniques and models of risk management” (O’Malley 2002: 17).

With the advent of neo-liberalism, actuarial technologies, such as the identification, reduction and management of risk, have played an increasingly larger role in the calculated governance of self and society (Rose 1999). Such techniques are highly individualized, in that each person becomes responsible for managing risk in his/her life in order to not only avoid danger but to ensure the greatest possible accrued benefits of taking particular risks. Not only are individuals entrusted with managing risk, they must do so within a constraint of infinite choices, infinite possibilities and infinite consequences (Bauman 2000a). Characterized as a risk society, the neo-liberal, liquid modern society, draws attention to the surplus of potential dangers, or risks, and how these dangers have come to shape institutional governing practices and individual identity (Chan and Rigakos 2002: 744). As Comack (2006: 45) explains “under neo-liberalism, the ideals of social citizenship are replaced by the market-based, self-reliant, and privatizing ideals of the new order.” Valuing “individualism, freedom of choice, market dominance, and minimal state involvement in the economy” (Comack 2006: 44) neo-liberalism ushered in new modes of governing and thinking about individuals and social life.

Untying individuals from the shackles of the solid, liquid modernity has ushered in an era of manifold options and possibilities, rendering the future for individuals open for those who are able to economically grasp it. The human condition has become “unstuck – bare, unprotected, unarmed and exposed, impotent to resist the business-inspired rules of action and business-shaped criteria of rationality” (Bauman 2000a: 4). Simultaneously, the market economy began to play a larger role in individual lives, leading to the characterization of liquid modernity as the culture of consumption. As individual ties to the community ‘melt’, life in liquid modernity becomes fragmented and uncertain. The market and consumer economy predicates that jobs are temporary and uncertain, enabling individuals to move from one enterprise to the next. These options and choices available to be made are not confined to the economic or social sphere, but also within the lives of individuals, with the possibility of acquiring multiple and various identities.

### **The Fragmentation of Gendered Identity(ies)**

With the shift towards liquid modernity (Bauman 2000a; 2000b) being increasingly characterized by neo-liberal market principles, identity(ies) have also become even more unstable and fragmented, and have also become objects of consumption. In the liquid modern (or postmodern) consumer society, we are defined, and come to define ourselves, by our power to consume; we are “seduc[ed] with the promise that we can become ‘anybody we like’” (Rutherford 2007: 10), and that this unidentified ‘anybody’ can be purchased. We become recognized primarily as economic agents, not as sexual/gendered individuals. To use Bauman’s language, these commercialized identities are fixed in character but liquid in form, able to flow from one body to the next, be consumed and consumable, and then discarded, always maintaining their fixed character.

Bauman (2000a; 2004) describes identity, and the formation of identities, as being in a state of unstoppable and constant experimentation. In liquid modern consumer society, individuals can

try one identity at a time, but so many others, as yet untried, wait round the corner for you to pick them up. Many more undreamt-of identities are still to be invented and coveted in your lifetime. You’ll never know for sure whether the identity you are currently parading is the best you can get and the one most likely to give you the most satisfaction. (Bauman 2004: 85)

Bauman highlights both the performativity/parading of identity, the infinite options of identities available, and the infinite choices to be made. Giddens (1991) also argues that identity is not inherited or static;

rather it becomes a reflexive project – an endeavour that is actively worked on and reflected upon. He writes (1991: 54), that “identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going.” Similar to Goffman (1959) and Bauman (2000a; 2004), for Giddens identity(ies) are constructed through the process of interaction and “cannot be wholly fictive. [Individuals] must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self” (1991: 54).

While Goffman (1959) made the distinction between public and private identities, no such distinction is made by Bauman. Although it can be argued that the identities that Bauman speaks towards are public identities, those that are on display, this demarcation is arbitrary as the audience that an individual performs their private identities for is themselves. Can the individual him/herself be lead to believe in the impressions fostered by their public identities, thus shaping their private identity? While the implications of this question are interesting with respect to their implications in the neo-liberal liquid modern society, for the purposes of this paper, it will be assumed that the identities on display are public identities.

Gender, a component of identity, has also been framed as a performance, constructed through “the repeated stylization of the body” (Butler 1990: 33). The male or female performance is aligned with the repetition of an accepted set of behaviors and actions, thus appearing to be ‘fixed’ or ‘solid’. However, Butler (1990: 25) argues that “there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very *expressions* that are said to be its results”. As performances, identity in general, and gender specifically, do not have a fixed substance, rather, meaning is attributed to them through the enactment of socially approved expressions of gender.

Gender identities also appear as illogical and without any categorical significance in the market society, as “neo-liberalism is rhetorically gender-neutral. The individual has no gender, and the market delivers advantages to the smartest entrepreneur, not to men and women as such” (Connell 2005: 254). Gender exists, that is the categories of men and women are still constituted, but in the liquid modern society, they are just men and women, not masculine or feminine -- these conceptions of gender play no role in the construction of entrepreneurs, which are the key agents in neo-liberal consumer society. However, it is important note that while neo-liberalism constructs individuals as consumers, in order to operate; the market needs to locate mechanisms by which to target those consumers. To access consumers and entice/persuade them to consume and to be entrepreneurial in their consumption, gender is often taken into account. This is commonly aligned with the adage ‘sex sells, however, consumers may also be targeted through age, ethnicity or occupation.

Governments are now directed “to empowering the entrepreneurial subjects of choice in their quest for self-realization” with entrepreneurs conceived as active agents, individuals who “mak[e] choices in order to further their own interest and those of their family ... [and are] active in their own government” (Rose 1999: 142). Individuals are reconfigured as rational choice makers that are responsabilized for their own well-being. However, simultaneously neo-liberalism gives rise to the market state which develops techniques, both direct and indirect, for “leading and controlling individuals without at the same time being responsible for them” (Rutherford 2007: 25).

What of the aims and successes of gender rights movements, which Bauman (2000a) would likely argue were a product of solid modernity’s focus on collective identities, if gender itself is unimportant to neo-liberal consumer principles? Rutherford (2007: 11) states

Today the languages and practices are no longer associated with the emancipatory struggle for political agency and interdependent individuality. The political expression of association has given way to the commercial market value of individual rationalized choice.

Gender identities, that are the product of gender struggle, have become appropriated for commercial aims in the name of individual consumer choice. Not only are they used as a mechanism by which to entice consumers to purchase commodities, but it can be argued that gendered identities have become commodities themselves, although they do not necessarily only exist in a commodified form. The metrosexual man, the dominatrix, the gay man, or the lesbian woman for instance, has become identifiable personas in consumer society; they have been inscribed with aesthetic meaning.

An entrepreneur who rationally chooses to perform a certain gendered identity, has a ready visible image of what this identity looks like - - it is provided by and available on the market. As long as an individual has the monetary means to purchase the “obligatory paraphernalia” (Bauman 2004: 84) associated with the alternative identities of your choice, selecting *who* you want to be is a viable option.<sup>iii</sup> Bauman reiterates that “there is some gear waiting for you in the shops that will transform you in no time into the character you want to be, want to be seen being and want to be recognized as being” (2004: 84). These commodified identities are aesthetic in the sense that related accoutrements can be bought and affiliation with these identities is superficial (i.e., one can purchase and display rainbow pride paraphernalia and not personally identify as homosexual, but can purchase the identity and thus be socially identified as such).

Speaking toward the implicit, although rhetorically absent, role of gender, Connell (2005) notes that the type of entrepreneurialism required from neo-liberal consumer societies functions within new forms of masculinities and emergent patterns of hegemony, as the market “does not valorize the family or the husband/father position for men” (2005: 256). In assessing the role or importance of gender in the work environment, Connell (2005) writes that “it is therefore not surprising that the homophobia so prominent in older hegemonic masculinities is reduced, even absent. It is now possible for gay men to be ‘out’ and still function as multi-national managers, in a way inconceivable in big business one or two generations ago” (256). One’s gender or sexuality is not of importance to the market, as long as individuals are able to successfully operate within its constraints. For the entrepreneur, selecting the appropriate gender performance is instrumental for economic and career success; however, gender affiliation itself is not significant to market ideology as long as it conforms to those identities already commodified.

### **The Emergence of Risk Society and the “Entrepreneur”**

Characterized by the fragmentation of those categories considered to be ‘solid’ such as identity (both public and private), labour and even society, liquid modern society has ushered in an era of, what appears to be, infinite choices. However, along with these multifarious choices and options available, risk discourses, those “calculative approaches to uncertainty” (Hunt 2003: 165), have simultaneously escalated. The idea that “a risk-based society is emerging and that the governance of individuals and populations increasingly relies on actuarial techniques of risk management,” (Hannah-Moffat 1999: 72), has become popularized by governmentality and criminology literature. Such techniques are highly individualized, in that people themselves become responsible for managing risk in their lives, and become increasingly progressive in making decisions to best manage these risks (Rose 1999). Hunt (2003: 166) speaks towards the “risk discourses of everyday life” in detailing how discourses of risk pervade every aspect of human decision-making and a wide array of social behaviours. Risk in this sense is categorized broadly. It is not merely the criminological risk of victimization, but rather the risk that arises from daily living. Risk refers to the continuous sense of uncertainty, the unsettling knowledge that there were/are better options to take; the feeling that had one made a different decision, chosen a different avenue, life would be better and more success would be had. In the liquid modern society, risk discourses are not external to the infinite choices that abound; they are internal to the choices as every option available has

an equal potential to not lead to the desired outcome, as the outcomes themselves are uncertain. Risk is “the effect of a combination of abstract factors” (Castel 1991: 287), which may render the potentiality of undesirable effects.

In welfarism, the onus was on the state to protect citizens in instances where they made the wrong choices, and where the risks of those wrong choices were so great as to constitute harm to themselves, through the creation of a social safety net (e.g., welfare assistance, social housing). However, with the advent of neo-liberalism, this process becomes individualized; the state is no longer responsible for the protection of its citizens. The social ‘safety-net’ once available to those who made the wrong decision, walked down the uncertain path or who were so immobilized as to make decisions, is no longer available. Individuals and communities are increasingly urged to “*take upon themselves* the responsibility for the security of their property and their persons, and that of their own families,” (Rose 1999: 247). Risks continue to be a product of the social environment, it is only the management of risk, and the responsibility of the consequences, that are individualized (Bauman 2000a). The discourse of risk is considered to be an embedded component of modern society (Lupton 1999), and as such, is an intrinsic part of post-modern life which guide’s individual actions operating against a “backdrop of fabricated insecurities and uncertainties” (Beck 2000: 72).

Rose (1999) suggests that risk can be governed through the regulated choices of individuals and families. Centred in the actuarial calculations of what Castel (1991) refers to as ‘abstract mutualities’, this method of governing is based on the capacity to predict behaviours. The individual is assumed to be rational; weighing the costs and benefits of any action and of all the intended and unintended consequences of that action. Risk management, as a tool of control, does not govern the behaviours and activities of the present but rather those that may take place in the future (Moore 2000; Scott 2003).

The central theme evident in governing through risk is the notion that individuals are to make an “enterprise of their lives” (O’Malley 2002: 26). Individuals now must become their own risk managers, rationally assessing the outcomes of making particular choices (Moore 2000, O’Malley 2002). This is in contrast to the nature of risk under the welfare state, which was seen as a problem that the state had to protect its citizens from (O’Malley 2002; Rigakos and Hadden 2001). Risk now is the solution to problems, providing alternatives and opportunities to choose from. Individuals in the risk society are consumers (Bauman 2000a), with multiple venues, experts and options from which to choose. Under the auspices of the neo-liberal liquid modern society, individuals are required to become entrepreneurial and are assumed to rationally assess the cost and benefits of choosing certain options or taking certain risks. These are the individuals that are seen successful -- the model entrepreneur.

### **Sex Work in the Neo-Liberal Liquid Modern Context**

Identity has been established as crucial to work and organizational dynamics (Halford and Leonard 2006), particularly in a time when both identity and labour have become fluid, fragmentary and flexible. While organizational social practice and relationships are generally understood to rest on gendered assumptions (Halford and Leonard 2006), sex work provides the most visible example of highly sexualized labour which relies on the performance of gendered identities. Not only does the sex worker display a hyper-idealized gendered image, but there is general consensus in the literature that sex workers employ or adopt manufactured identities, or work personas, both simultaneously and consecutively in order to satisfy the fantasies and expectations of customers for economic gain (Bruckert 2002; Chapkis 1997; Frank 1998; Sanders 2005). This dynamic has been theorized using Hochschild’s notion of emotional labour and the concepts of real and manufactured selves (Bruckert 2002; Chapkis 1997; Deshotels and Forsyth 2006).

With the progression of postmodernity, the idea of fixed identities, both of the individual and the worker, is no longer tenable as they are considered to be more fragmentary and fluid, and representations of various layers of a 'true' and 'real' self are not as distinct as previous research suggests. However, this does not preclude the fact that emotional labour and 'acting' is involved in sex work, and other types of service labour. Studying phone sex workers, Flowers (1998) illustrated how work personas blur the boundaries of reality and fantasy. Work personas, for Flowers (1998), are not complete fictions, materializing from 'thin air', they are drawn from aspects of the workers biography, which are selected and idealized in a manner that supports the desired performance. While emotional labour is involved in sex work, and other service occupations, it can be viewed as an active engagement with one's various different selves and the different selves available for purchase on the market. Engagement with emotional labour does not only occur when there is a disjunction between an authentic and a manufactured self -- a process that does not necessary exclude or distance the worker from their labour, but it is relied upon continuously, making the individual an active and entrepreneurial agent of their labour.

In opposition to Hochschild's alienated service workers who experience a disjuncture between their authentic selves and their manufactured personas, sex workers can be viewed as entrepreneurs, similar to artisans, or actors, who maintain creative control over the product of their labour and who actively create their self image as well as those of their customers (Godwyn 2006). However, crafting an analytic frame that takes into account the larger economic state structure extends beyond oversimplified binaries of personal and work personas, even when such personas are said to be blurred and blended.

Gendered identities in the neo-liberal society are meant to be used and employed, and do not necessarily emerge from an individual biography, but rather have been "co-opted by the commercial market value of individual, rational choice" (Rutherford 2007: 19). That is, identities are no longer necessarily an intrinsic part of an individual, something that arises from within them. Identities are mutable and flexible and can be called upon from outside an individual, to be used by that individual for specific aims. Gender identities have subsumed a new function. They are not the site of historic political struggles, as the issue is no longer "how to obtain the identities of their choice and how to have them recognized by people around" or "how to find a place inside a solid frame of social class or category" (Bauman 2001: 147), but how to employ gender in a manner consistent with economic and personal gain.

Bauman (2001) states that the problem of identity for entrepreneurial agents is one of "*which* identity to choose and how to keep alert and vigilant so that *another* choice can be made in case the previously chosen identity is withdrawn from the market or stripped of its seductive powers" (147). The gender presupposed by neo-liberal society is one that is to be used and employed by rational decision makers who are cognizant of when to apply certain gendered identities for particular aims, and when such identities need to be discarded, placed back on the shelf until they are called upon. In this respect, sex workers may be seen as the quintessential entrepreneur, as their career focuses centrally on the deployment of gendered and sexualized identities. Furthermore, the sex worker can be viewed as being perceptive and knowledgeable of the demands of the market, able to assess gaps in services offered, intervening through strategic use of gendered identities to fill that need, or to prevent new disparities in services available from emerging. Retaining within their repertoire multifarious identities that can be 'put on', enables the worker to "produce the desired response in the client who wants to buy into particular notions of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality" (Sanders 2005: 333). Because gender is external from individuals, and individuals are re-conceptualized as entrepreneurs, the sex worker is not alienated from these identities that (s)he puts on. These gendered performances are commercial transactions in a market economy -- gender is bought and sold, 'put on' and exchanged.

Clients of sex workers, also active agents, are cognizant that they purchase a particular identity, or gendered fantasy, and not the sex worker him or herself as an individual, but as a commodity (Campbell 1998, Frank 2002). Commodified identities materialized within the neo-liberal market are available to be bought and sold. Recognizing the economic benefits to be made in the production and sale

of gender, the sex worker should be identified as the quintessential entrepreneur in neo-liberal society, but is not. A contradiction becomes evident when sex work is assessed against the central tenets of neo-liberal market principles and the liquid modern focus on the availability and consumerism of multifarious choices and possibilities. While the sex worker engages in the market economy, making rational choices to best maximize the financial benefits of their labour (Weatherall and Priestley 2001), (s)he is not conceptualized as a rational choice-making entrepreneur. Where does this contradiction emerge? What underlies the definition of a choice-maker and an entrepreneur that effectively excludes sex work from being placed within this framework?

### **Moralizing Risks: “Prudentialism”**

Governing choice-making through risk does not necessarily leave individuals free to choose any option they desire. Choice, and subsequently risk, also involves the responsabilization of individuals (Hannah-Moffat 1999; O’Malley 1992). Labelled as ‘prudentialism’ (O’Malley 1992), this dual nature of the risk society is a “construct of governance which removes the key conception of regulating individuals by collective risk management, and throws back upon the individual the responsibility for managing risk,” (O’Malley 1992: 261). Prudentialism encourages individuals and families to take an active part in securing themselves against the inherent uncertainties and dangers present in the risk society; expecting individuals to be prudent in their decision-making and self-governance, by avoiding situations or behaviours that are deemed to involve high, or undefined risks (Hannah-Moffat 1999). Those who do not do so, are labelled as imprudent, effectively creating two classes of choice-makers. Here, it can be argued that there exists a continuum of risk and responsibility/culpability, in which risk exists on a moral basis not just economic or physical. With respect to the moral issue tied to sex and the risks of sex, the continuum comprises various different points ranging from: ‘innocent and not culpable’ (i.e., the child rape victim) on one end, ‘not so innocent but no so culpable’ (i.e., the woman who gets drunk at a party and unknowingly engages in sexual behaviours) in the centre, and ‘guilty and culpable’ (i.e., the woman who knowingly has multiple sex partners in non-committed relationships).

Rose (1999) notes that the idea of prudentialism is not new or specific to neo-liberal liquid modern society, but was also valued in the late nineteenth century, a time when respectable working-class men were urged to be prudent, in order to protect themselves and their families against misfortune. The current socio-political context, however, requires a return to the ideals of sensible, careful and economical decision-making, as individuals are forced to sift through the multiple options and offers available, without the comfort of knowing the effects of choosing one option or mode of behaviour over another. Faced with an infinite amount of choices and the, seemingly unparelled, freedom to choose, individuals are constrained in their options; as it is now not only up to individuals to choose but also to choose wisely and prudently. In effect, the freedom to choose is not free, and appears to rely on a form of regulation. For, it is those individuals that are prudent who become defined as free choice-making entrepreneurs. Discourses of risk embedded in choice, ensure that individuals ‘freely’ choose the options that are aligned with regulatory desires of the state to ensure the reproduction of productive citizens (Rose 1999).

While the risk discourse purports to be rational and calculative, moral discourses are embedded in technologies/discourses of risk and are evident in systems of risk management (Hannah-Moffat 1999; Hunt 2003). Thus citizens in the risk society are not only entrepreneurs and enterprising, they are also moralised according to the decisions they make. Embedded within the notion of prudential decision-making is a moral discourse. Hunt (2003: 165) argues that the “increasing prominence of risk analysis has generated an expansion and intensification of such moralization [the moralization of everyday life].” Every decision that is to be made in liquid modern society is bound by notions of morality; of the ‘right’ choice or thing to do. Choices cannot be made outside of these bounds. The moral discourse underlying

neo-liberal conceptualizations of risk arise in tandem with the re-emergence of neo-conservatism. Alongside with the subjection of “the economy to market forces and cutting back on social welfare,” leaving people to “fend for themselves, without the benefit of a social safety net” (Comack 2006: 45), there has been a movement in favour of conservative approaches towards politics, economy and society, premised on notions of culture, tradition, order, hierarchy and authority (Comack 2006). With the rise is societal anxiety over risk that is “easily translated into fear of crime – especially in those groups and individuals left less fortunate by virtue of the economic transformations. Calls for more law and order [have] become louder” (Comack 2006: 45). This has resulted in zero-tolerance policies and approaches geared at ‘getting tough’ on crime in order to protect the prudent entrepreneurs from the ‘Other’.

The application of O’Malley’s prudentialism to sex work is quite evident both in academic literature and governmental discourse, which frequently polarizes sex work into that of forced or voluntary (Chapkis 1997; Davidson 1995; Doezema 2003). Those sex workers placed within the realm of ‘forced’ sex work are afforded legal and social protections, as they are believed to be ‘innocent’ victims, exploited against their own will (Davidson 1995). On the other hand, sex workers who voluntarily choose to enter sex work, aware of the risks involved, are neither afforded these protections nor are they defined as choice-making entrepreneurs. However, is the notion of prudentialism what hinders the inclusion of sex workers into the discourse of rational choice-making entrepreneurs? I would argue that the answer is ‘no’, as it is generally accepted by sex work activists and allied academics that most sex workers are prudent in the exercise of their labour.

Literature on sex work highlights the many risk-minimizing strategies sex workers employ throughout the course of their work (Brents and Hausbeck 2005; O’Connell Davidson 1995, 1998; Sanders 2001). These range from the avoidance of dimly lit and secluded environments that are away from public spaces (O’Neill and Barbaret 2000; Sanders 2001), or not in locations that they are familiar with. The diligent use of condoms and other safe-sex practices (O’Connell Davidson 1998; O’Neill 2000) and only working while sober ensures that they are aware of their surroundings, screening clients and are able to escape if the situation became dangerous (McKeganey and Barnard 1996; Nixon et. al. 2002). Sex workers themselves also cite ‘rules’ that serve as protective strategies, such as employing the “buddy system” (Brents and Hausbeck 2005: 282), not getting into vans, or into cars in which there is more than one man inside, and ensuring that they or a friend record license plate numbers (Nixon et. al. 2002). In off-street sex work, safety is increased by arranging the client to meet at a building that has hired maid-staff or protection services (Whittaker and Hart 1996). The negotiation process itself and maintaining control over the contracted services was also cited as a protectionist strategy (Brents and Hausbeck 2005; Saunders 2001). Saunders (2001:14) notes that “building up regular clients was reported as the most successful protection strategy” among the female street sex workers she interviewed. These only account for some of the risk-minimizing strategies employed by sex workers. The issue then appears to not be the imprudence in the choice-making, but perhaps in the choice-maker. Is it of any relevance that sex workers are implicitly female both on a practical and a discursive level? Gender is said to not be of importance to neo-liberal market principles, except as a vehicle through which the market is able to access consumers, however, as Connell (2005) argues, gender is embedded in the larger social order.

### **A Moralized and Gendered Risk Discourse**

There has been much attention devoted to the analysis of risk, and its implications for women. Feminists have long contended that risk is gendered, and that not only are women and men subject to different types of risk, but they are differentially treated based on their negotiation of risk-taking activities (Chan and Rigakos 2002: 743). This has resulted, Walklate (1997: 39) states, in a “masculinist interpretation of what counts as risky behaviour,” in which male behaviours are deemed acceptably risky, whereas female

behaviours are not (Walklate 1997: 37). Walklate (1997), for instance, notes that for women, risk is typically associated with sexual activities with men, whereas engaging in multi-partner sexual relations is generally seen as an acceptable male behaviour. What occurs when moral discourses underlying prudentialism are combined with the gendered discourses underlying risk, is the negative consequence of not only reifying or institutionalizing the 'prudent/imprudent' dichotomy, but the 'prudent (good) girl/imprudent (bad) girl' dichotomy. However, in the case of sex workers, they are already discursively identified as imprudent (bad) girls -- even those that engage in prudent choice-making and behaviour.

Protecting oneself against the risk of crime, either through the use of security measures, such as alarms, or by physically excluding oneself from risky situations, becomes one of the responsibilities of each individual (Rose 1999: 247). Using a gendered lens, avoiding victimization relies on the proactive approaches taken by the *Good Woman* (Stanko 1997: 486). The *Good Woman*, Stanko proposes, abides by the standards addressed by Rose (1999), in that she is "law-abiding, middle-class, sensible, modest, risk-adverse, will not walk down dimly lit alleyways ... and will hide her jewellery in public" (Stanko 1997: 486). This woman, prudent in her risk taking, will be able to avoid much victimization. Even if she does become victimized, the prudent woman is not blamed; as she did everything she could to avoid the potential of harm. Good women, it is assumed, will use the police, the courts and community resources if they do fall prey to victimization (Stanko 1997). While the potential offender, may wish to attack any woman, avoidance is more likely successful for the prudent woman (Stanko 1997), as she minimizes all opportunities of being in risk-averse situations. What feminists have the most contention with is the essentialist portrayal of 'woman' as a category in crime prevention literature. Representing women as either a type of prudent woman who deserves protection from the state or as an imprudent woman, who is easy prey for willing offenders (Stanko 1997), this literature always speaks of risk as something that women must avoid, but that men can pursue. Imprudent women, according to this same literature, are those women who willingly engage in risky behaviour, and as such are often not entitled to protection. However, this relates to the morality tied to sex, in that the victimization of a woman who is not sexually prudent is regarded differently than that of a sex worker -- the sex worker is conceptualized as less victimized.

Categorizations of good/bad and victims/guilty and punishable women, are not new or specific to the neo-liberal liquid modern society, rather, they reproduce discourses surrounding women evident since the 1920's (Sangster 2001), when sexual desire in women was deemed as pathological (McLaughlin 1991). In Ontario, for instance, the Female Refuges Act of 1919 controlled 'errant' sexuality, constructing the "erring female's sexuality by equating categories of idleness and dissoluteness with promiscuity and lax working-morals" (Minaker 2006: 91). Any woman who has sex outside of marriage, or a relationship, with multiple partners was, and arguable still is, considered to be a 'slut', that is, promiscuous and unmanageable, with the onus placed on the woman to prove the contrary (Minaker 2006; Sangster 2001). Sex workers, particularly prostitutes, were defined as the epitome of the incorrigible woman and sexual villain; she was the "fallen woman who had succumbed to temptation and could not return to respectable society" (McLaughlin 1991: 251). Constructed as sexually deviant, the prostitute was cast against "virtuous female figures" and "associated with, and made responsible for, danger, death, drugs, or disease" (McLaughlin 1991: 257). Sangster (2001) notes that the rejection of Victorian ideas of purity during the interwar period lead to a decline in social interest in prostitutes and prostitution as "white slavery" (92), instead, prostitution was viewed as a symptom of other social ills. However, the binary of good/bad woman remains, as Stanko (1997) reminds us, leading to the reinforcement of different responsabilization discourses accorded to each category of the binary.

This notion that prudent women are not blamed for their victimization is not applicable to sex workers, particularly those who made a rational choice to enter the industry.<sup>iv</sup> As previously discussed, sex workers who are actively prudent in their decision making, employing risk minimizing strategies throughout the course of their work, are not the ones who are offered legal and social protections against

victimization, they are the ones responsabilized (O'Connell Davidson 1998). However, the sex worker who is seen as being coerced into the industry via a third party, and perhaps does not prudently manage risks as (s)he does not perceive themselves to be engaged in labour, is not responsabilized in the same manner. The issue appears not to be in the content of the decision (the entrepreneurialism), the intent of the act (prudent choice-making), nor the corporeal significance of the body (the gendered risk-taker), but perhaps, it resides in the identity itself.

### **Defining Who Becomes Labelled a Choice-Making Entrepreneur**

While not the focus of this paper, the above discussion on risk as a moralized and gendered discourse, spoke about risk in the criminological sense of the risk of victimization. It was important, however, to veer in this direction in order to highlight the discontinuities and tensions when attempting to negotiate the identity(ies) of sex workers into a neo-liberal social order that insists on reforming the individual into an entrepreneur, while ignoring, what this paper argues could be seen as, the quintessential entrepreneur. One cannot argue that sex workers do not rationally make decisions in order to maximize financial gains and minimize risks, nor can it be argued that sex workers are imprudent in their decision-making. However, when compared against the discourses of moralized and gendered risk as applied to the human condition in general, the model falters when it attempts to explain why sex workers, while included within its dimensions, are not defined in this manner.

While discourses of gender and the notion of prudential behaviour appear in this instance to provide an entry into why sex work has not been defined as a site of legitimate labour in which rational, prudent, choice-making entrepreneurs are employed, this entry is too simplistic to account for the multifarious, complex and interconnected tensions that arise when such an attempt is made. This explanation is further complexified when one questions: (a) how to account for the existence of male and transgender/transsexual sex workers which are not easily reconciled within gendered and dichotomous conceptions of acceptable sexual behaviour; (b) the legal codification of prostitution and other forms of sex work, that act as markers of truth (see Smart 1989); and most importantly, (c) that in neo-liberal liquid modern societies, gendered identities, and identities in general, are said to be fragmented and flexible, without a solid core or reality, that are simultaneously consumed and consumers, that is, individuals are simultaneously the promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote (Bauman 2007b). While answers to the first two questions are beyond the scope of this paper, they figure prominently when looking towards the role (whether it be discursive or actual) of the current social and political environment in delineating who becomes defined as a productive entrepreneur.

As previously outlined, the liquefaction of ties to the community, the family and the social that has characterized liquid modernity, have served to individualize and separate individuals from each other. While Connell (2005) argues that modern capitalist society is not concerned with issues of gender, Bauman (2000a) highlights that this society is "inhospitable to morality" (84). The reasons for this indifference are two-fold

One and most frequently quoted was the ideology of personal enrichment and the happiness to be attained through acquisition and possession of goods, related to the *capitalist*, or "bourgeois" character of modern society. And another: the instrumental-rational mentality, related to the *modern* character of the capitalist version of bourgeois society. The ideology was charged with promoting preoccupation with self-interest and cast the other selves as, primarily, so many threats to that interest and potential competitors in the pursuit of happiness... (Bauman 2000b: 84)

In the liquid modern society, individuals are left alone with themselves, charged with the task of becoming entrepreneurs and acquiring material goods in their pursuit of a solitary happiness. As Bauman (2000a) alludes to, individuals, in this commercial quest, become self-absorbed and concerned only with themselves, as other individuals become the proverbial ‘other’-- those individuals that we need to be weary of; that become unnecessary and unwelcome obstacles. Not only are individuals separated from each other during their pursuit of commodified happiness, but are also left alone and separated with respect to responsibility. In our search to “locate the right shop, find the right shelf, and reach for the right box or tube in the dazzling and confusing display” we are reminded that “‘It is all up to you’” (Bauman 2000b: 90). Yet, what neo-liberal liquid modernity fails to tell us is that there are things, or elements, crucial to the shaping of human lives that are not ‘up to us’ (Bauman 2000a); that we cannot purchase nor that can be altered, but that are bestowed upon certain individuals, dictating where they fall within the social order.

### *The ‘Underclass’ as Collateral Damage of Consumerism*

Although neo-liberal market principles seduce us with the idea that everyone can become whoever they want to be, that identities can be purchased, and that total happiness, new lives and destiny’s can be forged through the power of consumption and consumerism, this is not true for all individuals in society. Arguably, in practice, this is not true for any individual in society. Often touted as the “great equalizer, market seduction is also a uniquely, incomparably effective divider” (Bauman 2007a: 36). In rendering human relations and individual identities “fragmentary and discontinuous” (Bauman 1995: 100), individuals turn against themselves, in that they are not longer concerned with long-lasting societal consequences, but rather in short-term material benefits and relationships with no strings attached. In this sense, other individuals become ‘Others’, not only on an individual level (i.e., an ‘Other’ to my own self) but on a societal level as well. Consumerism and the liquefaction of social bonds facilitates the exclusion of certain individuals, what Bauman (2007a, 2007b) terms the ‘collateral casualties of consumerism,’ that is, those “‘flawed consumers’ – lacking resources that socially approved consumer activity requires” (25). Thus, while all individuals have the potential to be consumers, as choices and options are available to them to become consumers, if their consumer activity is not socially approved, or does not coincide with the “way the properly seduced are expected to act” (Bauman 2007a: 36), they fail to obtain the status of a rational-choice making entrepreneurial consumer.

As a Marxist, Bauman speaks towards the role that social classes continue to play in society, even in a neo-liberal society, which claims to obliterate ‘class’ as a social category. Bauman (1998: 61) notes that “the welfare state ... did produce a large enough generation of well educated, healthy, self-assured, self-reliant, self-confident people, jealous of their freshly acquired independence, to cut the ground from beneath the popular support for the idea that it is the duty of those who have succeeded to assist those who continue to fail”. The poor of neo-liberal consumer society are “socially defined, and self-defined, first and foremost as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient – in other words, inadequate – consumers” (Bauman 1998: 38). Highlighting how categories of people have become redefined, follows from Bauman’s (2000a) metaphor of the *melting* of a solid to a liquid modernity. It was not meant to indicate that solid modernity has been completely replaced and eradicated, but rather that it has just shifted -- remnants of solid modernity still exist floating within the liquid. In a similar manner, the notion of class still exists in neo-liberal society; it just has been reconfigured and labelled in a different manner. The ‘poor’, in the Marxist sense, are redefined as the inadequate, or the flawed consumers (Bauman 2007a, 2007b) -- the collateral damage of consumerism.

Those individuals seen to be the collateral damage of consumerism often occupy the social position of the underclass (Bauman 2007a, 2007b). What unites this diverse group of people is that “others see no good reason for their existence and may imagine themselves much better off if they were not around. People get cast in the underclass because they are seen as totally useless” (Bauman 1998: 66). These are those individuals -- the poor, the alcohol and drug abuser, the panhandlers, the criminal -- that are excluded, feared and pushed to the margins of society. These individuals, the underclass, “can be visualized as forming a meaningful and integrated totality... filed and listed together thanks to similarity of their conduct” (Bauman 2007a: 31). The image and identity of the underclass coincides with liquid modernity, in that this definition is flexible and easily fragmented, not in the sense that individuals can easily move out of the categorization of the underclass, but rather that this category is easily expandable -- any individual can easily move into this social position if they do not chose wisely and are not prudent in their choice-making. The image of the underclass is also co-terminus with the tenets of neo-liberalism. Entering into the underclass is seen as a choice, as something individuals can be responsabilized for. In a society of free and rational-thinking consumers, it is the individual’s failure to properly engage in consumer behaviour that leads to their fall into the underclass. Bauman (2007a: 42) states that

The underclass status was a choice, even if a person fell into the underclass status simply because he or she failed to do or was lazy to do what they could and was obliged and expected to do in order to stave off the falling. Choosing not to do what was needed to attain a certain goal, in a country of free choosers, is almost automatically, without a second through, interpreted as choosing something else instead; in the case of the underclass the unsocial behaviour was chosen.

According to the values and tenets of the neo-liberal liquid modern society, falling into the underclass is an exercise of freedom.

What does this mean for members of the underclass? If we regard their social status as a product of freedom and free-choice, does this not preclude them from being viewed as victims of life-circumstance? By viewing an individual as a victim, I do not mean to speak of victims in the sense that one is a passive and lacking agency in their lives. Rather the ‘victim’ is used in terms of highlighting the access to rights and protections afforded in society to entrepreneurial consumers; the refusal to grant the underclass “the right to press charges and ‘claim damages’ by presenting themselves as victims...of societal malfunction or wrongdoing” (Bauman 2007a: 43). What is the relationship of the underclass to neo-liberal liquid modern society and to the individuals who ‘properly engage in consumer behaviour’? Speaking towards the individuating characteristic of postmodern society, Bauman (1995) argues that this has lead to a version of “adiaphorization – the stopping of human relationships of their moral significance, exempting them from moral evaluation, and rendering them ‘morally irrelevant’” (133). What occurs in neo-liberal liquid modern society, is that a “moral indifference to the suffering of excluded populations” (Pemberton 2004: 82) as a result of individual capitalist pursuits. This indifference is not passive, it is choice, an active rejection, “ethical un-concern” (Bauman 2000b: 92) of what happens to these individuals.

The underclass, or the ‘Other’, is not only excluded from being seen as entrepreneurs, but also from being seen as prudent choice-makers, that is they are excluded from moral obligations and from engagement with morality -- society just does not care about them; they become indifferent. They are viewed as ‘unable to act’ as consumers as a result of their moral exclusion. The ‘Other’, seen as individuals who freely chose to “curtail other people’s freedoms, by begging, pestering or threatening, fun-spoiling, burdening consciences and otherwise making lives of other people uncomfortable” (Bauman 2007a: 42), is pushed to the margins of society “removed from the streets and other public places used by us, the legitimate residents of the brave consumerist world” (Bauman 2007a: 34). We are told to keep our distance from them; using them as a reminder of the negative repercussions of not abiding to the tenets of

prudent choice-making. The underclass, although freely choosing to enter the underclass, are stripped of moral responsibility -- their decisions made as members of the underclass do not count in consumer society, even if they are prudent and rationally made. The underclass is no longer entrusted with the capacity to make moral judgments, that is, they are incapable of bearing a moral responsibility. As a result, this responsibility becomes expropriated to the community, to “the self-proclaimed wardens of its purity, who draw the boundaries of moral obligations, divide good from evil, and for better or worse dictate the definition of moral conduct ...to keep the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ watertight” (Bauman 1994: 2). The ‘Other’ is re-cast as the “object of aesthetic, not moral evaluation: as a matter of taste not responsibility” (Bauman 1995: 100). They are part of the scenery of consumerism -- the ‘collateral damage’ that no longer counts, no longer playing a viable role in society.

Thus the issue is not whether or not an individual is a rational and prudent choice-maker, or an entrepreneur reaping the benefits of capitalism; once labelled as a member of the underclass, these categorizations no longer apply. The sex worker, although making informed and calculated decisions about what gendered identity to display to maximize financial gains, has not been re-conceptualized as a prudent, moral entrepreneur because the very fact that s(he) freely made the decision to become a sex worker excludes him/her from the potentiality of making any further rational decisions -- they lose their capacity for making moral judgements, by making one ‘wrong’ judgment. While we are seduced with an infinite amount of choices and options detailing who and what we can be, the freedom of choice is there as is uncertainty, or risk, of choosing the wrong one. Within this context, the sex worker *can* be seen as part of the underclass; a ‘flawed consumer’ who made one wrong decision -- the collateral casualty of consumerism. However, this distinction would not accurately reflect the social position that sex workers occupy, as sex workers are not socially recognized as consumers, ‘flawed’ or otherwise, but rather as ‘flawed citizens’.

### *The Underclass as the ‘Visible’ Other?*

One cannot uncritically accept that Bauman’s (2007a, 2007b) conceptualization of the underclass, or the flawed consumers, easily extends itself to all individuals in society. Viewing individuals as either consumers or flawed consumers creates a rather inadequate binary to account for all individuals. This binary, a product of the neo-liberal marketization of life, rests on the principle of visibility, something that Bauman does not speak to. Individuals are defined as consumers or flawed consumers because they are visible as such, that is, they occupy social positions that can be observed; we see the homeless beggar on the street as much as we see the wealthy homeowner. What occurs to those individuals that are not detectable? To those that live their lives imperceptible to the social gaze? Whose existence is only noticeable when they are thrust into the social limelight as a result of a significant event? The alcohol and drug addicted, the youth gang member and the homeless street beggar visibly comprise the underclass, however, where does the individual operating a marijuana grow-operation out of their home, the adult motorcycle gang member, and those residing in low-income housing fall? These individuals, not under the constant social gaze, are easily forgotten until society is reminded of their presence. Neglecting to speak towards the notion of visibility, Bauman’s conceptualization fails to account for those individuals that may be discreditable but not completely discredited. As long as these individuals remain unnoticeable, they are neither visible as consumers nor flawed consumers, and as a result, are not defined as such.

Using this frame, I contend that sex workers appear to occupy the space of ‘inconspicuous’ consumers. There a general societal silence surrounding sex work; it is not spoken or thought about unless it becomes the focus of media attention, for instance, as a result of massive police raids in strip clubs or the mass murder of sex workers, such as the Robert Picton case in Vancouver, British Columbia. This silence could be the result of the moral exclusion sex workers face (i.e., ‘we don’t like what you do and

we don't care about you' or 'we fear and are disgusted by who you are and what you do'), and their degree of invisibility (i.e., 'out of sight out of mind'), however, a contradiction arises in that there is a silence over sex work in practice, but not on a discursive level. In practice, even the most visible sex workers are not spoken about unless they obstruct the consumerist lives of true entrepreneurial individuals. Even when they are spoken about, it is not on an individual level targeting only the visible workers, but on a discursive level, targeting all sex workers -- all sex workers become problematic and defined as part of the underclass. Furthermore, it can be noted that the most visible sex workers, street prostitutes, generally are not conceptualized as entrepreneurs but as survivors; evading these categories altogether, as they are neither consumers, flawed consumers, nor inconspicuous consumers. Where, then, do these individuals fall in the neo-liberal liquid modern society?

To categorize all sex workers as part of the underclass would be erroneous. While all sex workers are 'othered', excluded on the moral basis that is associated with their work to a certain extent, it is not applied equally across all sex workers (Chapkis 1997). While on a discursive level, all sex workers are excluded and stigmatized, generally, sex workers who are the most publicly visible, 'go all the way' and have sexual intercourse face more stigma than those sex workers who engage in 'artistic' labour, such as exotic dancers, telephone sex workers and erotic masseuses; labour that may involve sexual touching but not the actual sex act. This discourse is evident within sex work itself, as exotic dancers and escorts distance themselves from, stigmatize and 'other', street prostitutes (Bruckert 2002, Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2005), often referring to themselves as 'performers' rather than sex workers. Demonstrating that not only are street sex workers conceptualized as part of the underclass within dominant discourse, but also by other sex workers.

### Conclusion

This paper concerned itself with identities in the postmodern form; not the identities that are the project of individual people; those in a state of flux, constantly negotiated and renegotiated within social interactions, and that are never near completion. Rather, the identities spoken to in this paper are those that are displayed on the neo-liberal market platform, to be purchased and sold by entrepreneurial and autonomous individuals, the beneficiaries of the market economy. Furthermore, this paper was about how particular identities become defined as entrepreneurial and autonomous, and why this definition is extended to some identities but not to others. How is it that in a society in which *all* identities are seen as fragmented, flexible and fluid, identities still appear to be bound by fixed notions of gender and morality? It was not my attempt here to provide a conclusive answer, but rather to underscore the myriad of contradictions embedded within this question. As a result, this paper brought up more questions than answers; questions that are perhaps unanswerable.

While sex work was used as the main example to illustrate this contradiction in neo-liberal liquid modern society, this paper was not meant to be one solely about sex work per se. Rather this paper aims to highlight the tensions in the negotiation of criminalized identities, in this society, more broadly, and can be extended to include other 'Othered' identities and to explain how consumerism and notions of fragmented selves and social bonds facilitates the exclusion and apathy of certain individuals.

According to Giddens, "we live in a world of manufactured uncertainty," (1994: 78). Due to the infinite possibilities and opportunities, the risk regime necessitates constant decision making (Bauman 2000a) and self-reflection. Through prudent decision-making, individuals increasingly become recognized as entrepreneurs who are instructed to make enterprises of their lives. However, as has been noted, some individuals are excluded from the category of rational choice-making moral entrepreneurs. They are not only excluded from been seen as moral entrepreneurs, but also from the realm of morality itself. Cast to the margins of society, the underclass are responsabilized for choosing to enter the

underclass but then stripped of any moral responsibility. Despite the fact that many choices made by such individuals can be regarded as prudent and calculated, as is the case for sex workers, they are not recognized as such. Stripped of moral judgement, the underclass appears to lose a fundamental aspect of their humanity -- the ability to have their choices recognized as legitimate choices. The underclass is neither responsabilized nor un-responsibilized, they just are not accounted for -- neo-liberal liquid modern society is morally indifferent to them.

Is this to imply that sex workers, and other 'Othered' identities can never re-enter the realm of responsible consumer/entrepreneur? Does making one socially unapproved decision permanently banish individuals to the margins of society? The above discussion appears to indicate that this is an inevitable consequence/risk of living in modern society. Although Bauman's (2007a, 2000a, 2000b) vision of the social appears to be pessimistic, he refers to the optimism of Mead stating that "all things considered ... *we* are decent, responsible people, we offer the poor opportunities ... *they* indecently refuse to take them" (Bauman 2007a: 44-5). The underclass is not condemned to a life of physical and mental exclusion, as long as they take the help offered to them to exit from the underclass. As long as sex workers, for instance, accept the offer of assistance via social programming or criminal sanctions that are intended to deter sex workers from entering and/or remaining in the sex industry, they can be included back into 'legitimate' consumerist society, in practice. However, this is merely in principle, as one can question how the acceptance of sex workers back into society would differ from the acceptance of any other 'Other'. Perhaps research should be conducted on the re-integration of sex workers into the community. What happens to those sex workers that take part in social programming and exit the industry? Is their former career erased from their history? Are they afforded all the social benefits given to legitimate entrepreneurs? While such a study would be beneficial, what would occur to the sex worker who chooses to remain in the sex industry if the results of this study demonstrated that sex workers could be fully and completely reintegrated?

Conducting research on the re-integration of former sex workers into society assumes that sex workers need to be re-integrated and that what they are doing is socially unacceptable and that they are not rational and prudent entrepreneurs. Such research would undermine the work that sex workers do, or the advances of the sex worker's rights movement in legitimating sex work as work. Perhaps it is the notion of exclusion that needs further theorizing, such as that done by Sibley (1995), specifically the forms that exclusion takes in neo-liberal liquid modern society. Furthermore, the role of laws and the criminal codification of sex work need to be assessed in terms of the function it plays in dictating who is excluded. If, as Bauman outlines, the social and the self are in a state of fragmentation and fluidity, why are some identities still solid, unable to escape stigmatization and exclusion? In highlighting the contradictions inherent in constructing sex workers as moral and prudent entrepreneurs, this is the main question that needs answering.

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## Endnotes

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While this paper aims to speak towards sex work and sex workers more broadly, by attempting to use both the feminine and masculine pronouns, it is generally accepted through dominant discourse that sex workers are women and sex work is a female job.

ii The focus on "gendered" identities is a pragmatic one, as while one can attempt to speak of sex work on an abstract level as being devoid of gender, on a discursive level, the sex worker is always implicitly female.

iii It should be noted that while any identity is viable, in practice, some identities are not socially desired or accepted in the community (i.e., pedophile identity). However, as a result of the Internet, 'communities' have

become broadly defined, enabling one to access groups in which such undesired identities are accepted, and required for group membership (i.e., North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA)).

<sup>iv</sup> The notion of 'freely chosen' sex work is highly contested. Some authors do not recognize that working in the sex industry can be a choice that is freely made by the sex worker (c.f. Dworkin 1981; Farley & Kelly 2000; Farley 2003, 2004)

<sup>v</sup> The argument has been made that by unequivocally accepting sex work as work also brings with it "an acceptance of what in other context would be described as sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, or sexual abuse" (Farley and Kelly 2000:52; Weatherall and Priestly 2001), because they have made a vocational choice. Thus, highlighting the need to retain the notion of 'victimization' within sex work as work in order to enable the access to rights, services and societal compassion.

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