THE SEX WORK DECRIMINALIZATION DEBATE: UNDERSTANDING MORALITY, PUBLIC OPINION, AND THE DRIVERS OF SEX WORK POLICY PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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Abstract

Amidst an expanding market of erotic products and services and broader calls for criminal justice reform in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, societal views about policing those involved in sex work are likely shifting. Recently, attempts to decriminalize sex work have becoming increasingly common, but such measures have been generally unsuccessful. While a framing battle occurs among activists and lobbyists attempting to influence policy, it is unknown how the public views sex work as a social problem within an increasingly mainstream commercial sex industry. Extant research has explored public attitudes regarding the acceptability of sex work, but there is an incomplete picture of how the public feels about decriminalization.

Given limited knowledge regarding current levels of public support for decriminalization, this dissertation investigates the contours of public opinion toward sex work and associated policy. The present study examines what the public identifies as the problems associated with sex work and whether this differs for different types of sex work. Deploying the rhetoric used in scholarship and advocacy, this research will shed light on the extent to which the public endorses various problem frames applied to sex work. It will analyze variation in public support for decriminalization by the actors involved (sex workers, clients, and third parties) and by venue (brothel, online, street). Finally, it will explore which arguments levied in this debate are considered the most convincing for decriminalization. This dissertation contributes to theoretical scholarship in this area by applying Moral Foundations Theory to investigate the role moral values in public opinion on sex work. Results suggest where the public resides in the ongoing

debate on the meaning of sex work in our society and hold implications for the future of

its regulation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Amidst an expanding market of erotic products and services (Brents & Sanders, 2010; Weitzer, 2010) and increasing recognition of the occupational hazards associated with sex work (Sakha et al., 2020), societal views about the criminalization of commercial sex are in a state of flux. Yet, we have little knowledge regarding current levels of public support for decriminalization (Mancini et al., 2020), and how such support varies across the changing landscape of commercial sex services. Indeed, increasing support for decriminalization by political candidates in presidential and high-profile senate races reinforces the notion that we are entering a new era in our orientation toward sex work (Holden & Steadman, 2019; McGrane, 2020). However, recent attempts to decriminalize sex work in places like New York, Massachusetts, and Washington D.C. have failed to pass into law (An Act Relative to Sexually Exploited Individuals, 2019; Community Safety And Health Amendment Act Of 2019, 2019).

Although people may become more accepting of sex work as it becomes increasingly commonplace (Brents & Sanders, 2010; Eriksson et al., 2021), there is a dearth of knowledge of how the public feels about decriminalization (Luo, 2020; Shdaimah et al., 2014). With a limited understanding of public opinion, the decisions of policymakers are motivated by the opinions of advocacy groups (Weitzer, 2007;

Wijkman & Kleemans, 2019). For example, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation mobilized support against the DC bill on the grounds that it would expand and authorize the sexual exploitation and trafficking of individuals (NCOSE, 2019). On the other side, Human Rights Watch joined about 60 other organizations in a joint letter to the Council of District Columbia advocating for the bill's passage because it would increase public health and safety (*Joint Letter to the Council of the District of Columbia Regarding Supporting B23-0318, the "Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019,"* 2019). Although the extent to which the public subscribes to the arguments levied by advocates on either side are unknown, it is evident in the failed attempts to decriminalize sex work and the passage of Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA)/Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA), which codified the conflation of sex work with sex trafficking, that some advocacy groups have been more successful than others in shaping the political agenda. Absent knowledge of public preferences, political influence is limited to the select interest groups who make their positions known, potentially undermining the degree to which policy is representative of constituents' interests and justice reform is attainable.

Currently, there exists an incomplete picture of how the public feels regarding sex work decriminalization as recent surveys have only scratched the surface of public opinion on the matter. For instance, a 2019 opinion poll of U.S. voters found 52% somewhat support or strongly support decriminalizing sex work, but this poll included only one question on policy preferences and only a short list of demographic covariates (Luo, 2020).

Additionally, the propagation of sex work on social media and sites like OnlyFans has transformed traditional notions of what sex work looks like (Ellis, 2018; Lines, 2020). A growing market and increased cultural tolerance necessitate public opinion research with a broader consideration of the commercial sexual services available. Although prior work finds greater acceptability of prostitution when it is less visible (Lowman & Louie, 2012), it is generally unknown how public perceptions of different types of sex work compare to one another. Moreover, there is a dearth of knowledge on how perceptions of various sex industries, as well as perceptions of sex work as a whole, relate to support for decriminalization. While perceptions of safety are pronounced in discourse on prostitution policy (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005), it is unclear how perceptions of safety are associated with policy beliefs as recent work has highlighted that the public holds complicated and contradictory positions on sex work.

For instance, a recent survey of over 2,500 males found that while most men acknowledged the coercive nature and potential harms of prostitution, most men also supported legalizing it (Mancini et al., 2020). It is unclear whether the public sees decriminalization as a way to reduce some of these harms and whether this pattern would emerge for other forms of sex work, because despite potential differences in legality and public acceptability, workers across commercial sex industries experience the stigma and collateral consequences of criminalization (Shane, 2021).

While these previous efforts offer preliminary evidence of public support for decriminalization, more research is needed to understand of the contours of public opinion as it relates to sex work. Thus, a more comprehensive survey is required to

examine which aspects of the commercial sex market the public is ready to decriminalize and why.

While extant literature is fraught with debates (Easterbrook-Smith, 2020; Hansen & Johansson, 2022), whether or how these debates play out in the public consciousness is unknown. Research examining individual attitudes toward sex work are limited, specifically when it pertains to the nature of sex work and disentangling the nuances of different types (Hansen & Johansson, 2022; Ma et al., 2018; Mancini et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2010). Though recent work has advanced scholarship through exploring people's conceptualization of sex work, this work also acknowledged it was constrained by a focus on general prostitution and proposed future research investigate public attitudes toward various types of prostitution (e.g., brothel-style, internet-facilitated, street sex work) (Mancini et al., 2020). Further, these authors recommended scholars "systematically investigate why individuals support prostitution legalization by developing vignettes" (p. 425). This dissertation contributes to extant scholarship by directly addressing the literature gaps identified by prior researchers.

Moreover, sex work is largely regarded as a moral issue (Agustín, 2008; Flanigan & Watson, 2019; Wagenaar & Altink, 2012), and thus scholarship would be well-served by examining the relationship between moral values and policy preferences. Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) is a conceptual model for organizing and explaining human morality along the dimensions of harm, fairness, authority, loyalty, and purity (Graham et al., 2013a). The application of MFT in this context makes a novel contribution to the literature from both a theoretical and practical perspective, as this provides a useful tool for elucidating the public's moral objections to decriminalized sex work.

An understanding of how the public views it as a problem and why they may be apprehensive of decriminalization can give insight into what strategies lobbyists and activists should use to effectively sway public opinion toward more humane policy. Since the perspective that sex work is inherently oppressive and it's conflation with trafficking has dominated the political debate on prostitution policy in the U.S. (Raymond, 2004a; Valine, 2019; Weitzer, 2011), the disproportionate influence of this discourse may persist without a complete picture of public attitudes toward sex work. Public opinion is vital here as justice reform will not be possible without public support. Enhanced knowledge of the public's preferences in this arena would aid in successfully passing criminal justice reform legislation that reduces the harm and collateral consequences of justice involvement that sex workers experience. Decriminalization would also allow reallocation of law enforcement and other criminal justice resources that could have substantial cost-savings benefits for the criminal justice system (Pearl, 1986).

The proposed study will extend knowledge from prior studies by conducting an in-depth investigation into the American public's opinion on contemporary sex work and the legal response to it. Specifically, it will do so by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: What does the public perceive as the negative aspects of sex work that constitute it as a social problem?

1a. In what ways does the public perceive sex work as problematic or acceptable, and to what extent do these perceptions vary across the different types of sex work?

1b. How do characterizations of sex work as a social problem vary by Moral Foundations and demographic characteristics?

RQ2: How are perceptions of sex work as a social problem related to the public's prostitution policy preferences?

2a. In what ways, or to what extent, does the public endorse a criminal justice response to sex work?

2b. Does support for decriminalization vary by the actors or venue of the proposed policy?

2c. How are Moral Foundations associated with prostitution policy preferences?

RQ3: Which arguments for sex work decriminalization do people find most convincing?

3a. Does the effect of arguments depend on whether they are in reference to decriminalizing buying sex or selling sex?

3b. Is there meaningful variation in the effect of anti-criminalization arguments across different groups of the US public?

Prior to describing the intended study, this research would benefit from an outline of the socio-legal context in which sex work-related policy has developed. This begins with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks applied by contemporary scholars to illustrate the diverging perspectives on sex work as a social problem. Subsequently, the applicability of Moral Foundations Theory to understanding positions on sex work and relevant policy is presented. The discussion proceeds with a review of the history and current state of prostitution policy in the United States and abroad. Finally, the background section concludes with a review of the literature regarding public opinion of sex work and prostitution policy.

Positionality Statement

The author recognizes prostitution research is value-laden scholarship, where data, conclusions, and ensuing public policies are skewed by ideological biases and incompatible with true objectivity (Benoit et al., 2019; Coy et al., 2019; Wagenaar, 2017; Weitzer, 2005). In this line of work, it is essential to reflect on the role of the researcher by providing a reflexivity statement acknowledging how the author's social identities, academic discipline, and prior experiences may influence the research. The author is a white, cisgender, female doctoral student with an academic background in psychology and criminology. As an applied social scientist in criminology, the author is focused on the social construction of crime and deviance and the influence that has on public policy and public safety. The goal is to examine how the American public conceptualizes sex work in modern society as a social problem, and the extent to which that understanding is associated with preferences for potential policy initiatives. Lacking any direct experience in the topic of study, the author utilized an expert advisory group composed of sex workers to inform the study's instrumentation and enhance the relevance and application of research findings.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Theoretical Positions of Sex Work as a Social Problem

The commercial sex industry involves the provision of sex-related services for compensation. This work can include 'indirect' sexual activities, such as pornography production, exotic dancing, and explicit internet performances, as well as 'direct' forms intended for sexual relief, such as prostitution (Cowen & Colosi, 2020). The term "sex work" acts as an umbrella term under which all sexual services fall, but is also used interchangeably with the term "prostitution", with some groups favoring the former as a less stigmatizing characterization (Densmore, 2021). The present dissertation will utilize both terms, however, preference will be given to "sex work" for its more agentic and inclusive characterization.

The exchange of sexual services for payment has been regarded as a complex social problem prompting heated debate around the world about its consequences and appropriate policy solutions (Benoit et al., 2019). Among scholars, politicians, and the public alike, the perceived nature of this social problem is varied, with attributions ranging from criminal deviance to systemic oppression (Gerassi, 2015). The way prostitution, or sex work more broadly, is framed influences how we understand its existence and the extent to which it is regarded as a social problem. Indeed, in the United

States, and around the world, there exists "a framing battle over the meanings attributed to sex work…situated in the larger struggle over the meaning of victimization, protection, and gender in a predominantly neoliberal society" (Jackson, 2016, p. 28)

Ideational or problem frames provide a lens for interpreting social institutions, helping "actors to understand policy problems, but they also contribute to motivating them to respond in particular ways" (Johnson & Porth, 2020, p. 234). The problem frames applied to sex work are inextricably tied to policy. Scholars and advocates use problem frames to highlight the central issue of prostitution, such as gender equality or worker safety, and then advocate for a particular policy response to address that issue. Themes of oppression and exploitation have generally dominated the discourse as concerns of human trafficking have received increasing attention by global policymakers and the general public (Jackson, 2016; Weitzer, 2007). The debate over sex work is often framed as a battle of human rights versus exploitation, but what those rights are and how they should be realized are varied, with different narratives framing it as an issue of human rights, gender rights, labor rights, social morality, government intervention, and public health (Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010; Minichiello et al., 2018; Wagenaar & Altink, 2012; Weitzer, 2019).

For instance, from a public health perspective, sex work has historically been considered to pose a physical threat to the community as it engenders the sexual transmission of disease and increased risk of rape (Flanigan & Watson, 2019; Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010), and thus it must be prohibited in society. Conversely, this public health framing has taken a different form in contemporary debates; sex work's criminal status only exacerbates vulnerabilities to violence and disease. Instead, the

modern public health approach advocates for decriminalization on the basis that it would enable workers to report to the police any violent crimes that are witnessed in their line of work without fear of arrest, revoke laws that discourage possession of condoms, and reduce the stigma that contributes to sex workers' reluctance to seek health services, thus increasing safe sex practices (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Benoit et al., 2018; Cunningham & Shah, 2018; Decker et al., 2015; McBride et al., 2021; Wurth et al., 2013).

The western world is also seeing "a growing debate about how far governments can go in terms of intruding into private lives and regulating bodily autonomy, self-determination and sexuality" (Minichiello et al., 2018, p. 731). The right to engage in sexual activity and choose one's partner is considered a basic liberty, and restrictions on the ability to do this for monetary compensation have been disputed on the basis that it constitutes an infringement of privacy, violates freedom of speech, and/or denies economic freedom in the form of occupational choice (Davis, 2015; Flanigan & Watson, 2019). However, others argue that sex workers are not exercising an occupational choice as much as being coerced by economic vulnerability (Moran & Farley, 2019).

Even interpreting sex work as an issue of gender rights evokes differing opinions among feminist scholars. While sex work is inclusive of multiple genders and orientations, societal conceptualizations of sex work often defer to arrangements in which the providers are female and the consumers are male (Kempadoo & Doezema, 2018). Because of this dynamic, some view prostitution and sex work as the institutionalization of female sexual oppression to male desire (Benoit et al., 2019; Farley, 2004). Contrarily, others believe it is actually the stigma and criminalization of sex work that exemplify patriarchal structures that repress female sexuality (Comte, 2014; Showden, 2011).

For some of the reasons mentioned above, a common framing used by sex worker activists and organizations is the human and labor rights frame. The lack of institutional protections in a criminalized setting shows how sex workers are denied the occupational health and safety protections afforded to other professions. This pinpoints criminalization as the core problem with sex work and prostitution, as it denies agency and human rights to sex workers and contributes to a culture of stigma and violence against them (Boone, 2021; Jackson, 2016; Johnson & Porth, 2020). Clearly, which frame is applied shapes how policy makers and the public perceive the problem and holds implications for the appropriate solution.

Despite the fact sex work is a complex phenomenon situated at the intersection of race, gender, and class, advocates and theoretical scholarship in this area regularly simplify the issue into binaries – agency or coercion, empowerment or exploitation, free or forced – even though this forced dichotomy does not accurately capture the experiences of all sex workers (McNeill, 2011; Sandy, 2006). Most of these theoretical frameworks derive from contemporary feminist scholarship, with two diametrically opposed orientations established regarding sex work. The first is what Weitzer (2009b) identifies as the oppression paradigm, also termed the radical feminist position or neo-abolitionism (Gerassi, 2015). This paradigm asserts that the commercial sex industry is an institutionalized form of male domination over women resulting from the patriarchal organization of society (Sanders, 2016). It adopts the essentialist claim that there is no real distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution because no one would ever willingly enter the industry; all sex workers were forced or coerced into the industry in some way (Moran & Farley, 2019; Raymond, 2004b). One form of such coercion

emerges from a political economy perspective, in which structural inequalities have restricted women's access to economic opportunities, driving women into sexual commerce (Gerassi, 2015). The oppression perspective presumes exploitation and victimization; thus, sex work constitutes a form of gendered oppression and violence against women that is intrinsic to the industry (Farley, 2004; Serughetti, 2018).

In contrast, an alternate feminist perspective is oriented in sex positivism to advocate for women's ability to choose sex work. What Weitzer (2009a) refers to as the empowerment paradigm emphasizes human agency in arguing how sexual services constitute a form of labor and can potentially empower sex workers by providing flexible and lucrative work opportunities (Berg, 2015; Flanigan & Watson, 2019; Huschke, 2017; Jones, 2016). The empowerment paradigm maintains that the commercial sex industry is not inherently harmful to women, but policy choices that criminalize and stigmatize its participants as "whores" make them vulnerable to harm. Society's aversion to sex work is the result of a patriarchal system aimed at controlling female sexuality and restricting it to a reproductive role (Comte, 2014; Kempadoo & Doezema, 2018). Participation in sex work is thus viewed as resistance to the patriarchy. Additionally, although radical feminists argue against all forms of commercial sex, including pornography and exotic dancing, sex positivists assert that women have the right to choose what acts are considered intimate.

Professions such as gynecology, nursing, and childcare may also be described as intimate. These occupations are all considered forms of "body work", which is a category of labor that "focuses directly on the bodies of others: assessing, diagnosing, handling, treating, manipulating and monitoring bodies, that thus become the object of the worker's

labour" (Twigg et al., 2011, p. 171). This can also involve emotional labor, and physical proximity and emotional aspects result in a sense of intimacy that affects the nature of interactions and contributes to gendered notions about which jobs are to be performed by men or women (Gimlin, 2007; Sanders et al., 2013). Disclosing private information to a therapist, allowing a home care provider to assist an elderly patient using the restroom, and letting a stranger into your home to clean or care for your children all encompass corporal or affective aspects associated with intimacy. Accordingly, women should be free to define intimacy for themselves and choose the work they partake in (Gerassi, 2015; Russell & Garcia, 2014).

While these opposing positions are the most prevalent theoretical frameworks, all emergent variations of these ideational frames rely on perceptions of victimization, exploitation, choice, job satisfaction, and other factors that are not constant across all forms of sex work or even individual experiences within the same sector of the commercial sex market (Weitzer, 2009b, 2019). To conceptualize this variability, Weitzer proposed a third, polymorphous paradigm. This perspective recognizes how the aforementioned variables fluctuate "between types of sex work, geographical locations, race and gender, third-party involvement, and other structural conditions" (Weitzer, 2019, p. 401). Hence, a variety of social and cultural factors play a major role in how prostitution should be understood and the extent to which it can be valued in society (Shively et al., 2012; Singh & Hart, 2007; Valine, 2019).

Consideration of how these factors can vary across types of sex work is an important acknowledgment as the tenets of the oppression paradigm have expanded from sex trafficking and prostitution to incorporate other types of commercial sex, such as

pornography and stripping (Raymond et al., 2001; Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2001; Weitzer, 2010). Since the commercial sex market has expanded and adapted with the advent of the internet, social backlash to the apparent normalization of sexual services has developed into what has been called a moral crusade (Huschke, 2017; Wagenaar, 2017; Weitzer, 2010, 2019).

Activists endorsing the oppression paradigm that previously conflated prostitution and trafficking have deployed this same discourse to pornography and exotic dancing. But the expansion of arguments levied in the prostitution debate to other forms of sex work has only intensified rival calls to adopt a labor rights perspective.

This is even reflected in the preferred terminology, with debates over use of the term "prostitution" versus "sex work" taking place as a way of redefining the concept of commercial sex (Bindman & Doezema, 1997; Hansen & Johansson, 2022; McMillan et al., 2018). Where some maintain the term "sex work" de-genders and de-sexualizes the issue while "prostitution" more accurately conveys inherent exploitation (Outshoorn, 2004), others hold the term "sex work" is less stigmatizing and reframes sexual services as a form of labor that can be done voluntarily (Densmore, 2021). This semantic debate highlights that it is *how* prostitution is constructed that critically defines our orientation toward and response to it.

The moral crusade against sex work has been successful because it has the unique ability to unite groups on opposing sides of the political spectrum – the religious right and feminists. Where these groups may diverge on most issues, they have formed a powerful coalition in lobbying against what they consider an inherently evil and exploitative industry (Rupert, 2021; Weitzer, 2007, 2019). This highlights that the issue

with prostitution and policy goes beyond the political and is grounded in a sense of morality. The issues presented in all of the problem narratives surrounding sex work can be conceptualized in terms of our moral values. For this reason, Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) is an appropriate lens through which to examine society's understanding of sex work.

Moral Foundations Theory

MFT asserts that human morality is organized along five foundations: harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity (Graham et al., 2013b). More broadly, these foundations can be characterized into individualizing (harm and fairness) and collective (loyalty, authority, purity) foundations (Napier & Luguri, 2013). Individualizing foundations are referred to as such because they are concerned with the welfare and freedom of individual people. Collective foundations emphasize the preservation of social institutions by commending group sacrifice and patriotism (in-group loyalty), respect for traditions (authority), and controlling individual urges to engage in immoral or impute activities (purity). The collective, also known as the binding, foundations embrace a collective morality that serves to bind people to social groups, like families or nations, and govern their behavior within these groups (Graham & Haidt, 2010).

Where the liberal-conservative continuum of political ideology may oversimplify political views, MFT provides insight into the mechanisms underlying attitudes toward social policies by illuminating the weight assigned to individual rights compared to social cohesion (Barnett et al., 2018). MFT has been used to conceptualize the public response to social issues like LGBTQIA+ rights (Barnett et al., 2018; Cox et al., 2022), sexual offending (Harper & Harris, 2017), and needle exchange programs (Christie et al., 2019).

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These studies have utilized MFT to clarify the nature of moral disagreements over these topics to explain attitudinal differences at both the individual and population level. Further, MFT has been recently applied to understand variation in sex buying behavior (Silver et al., 2022).

Similarly, we can attempt to simplify the constellation of perspectives on sex work through the lens of individual and collective moral concerns. The moral principles of harm and fairness are encapsulated in the individualizing foundations. In the context of sex work, such individualizing values evoke concerns about sex workers' safety and well-being. Various advocates and policy actors may argue that ensuring women in sex work are safe and protected is a priority but differ in their conceptions of what it means to actualize this priority (Davis, 2015). It is well documented that sex providers experience violence in their line of work, with estimates ranging from 50% to 100% of sex workers experiencing some form of violence (Durchslag & Goswami, 2008; Sanders & Campbell, 2007). Recognizing this harm, some maintain that individuals should not work in such an unsafe profession, and thus as a society, we should not permit people to engage in sex work for it will endanger them. Others may argue that the risk of violence is exacerbated due to the clandestine nature of the industry. Further, the rationale that dangerous jobs should be illegal is not applied to other dangerous occupations. Therefore, to promote the well-being of sex workers, the industry needs to be regulated to provide the full legal protections and health and safety regulations afforded to workers in other industries (Benoit et al., 2017; Oselin & Weitzer, 2013).

Likewise, multiple perspectives frame the issue of sex work as an issue of liberty and fairness, but with different notions of what it means to be free and fair. Feminist

discourse frequently frames involvement in sex work as the consequence of lacking options to meet one's basic needs, while other narratives argue people should be free to choose who they engage in sexual activities with and the freedom to charge money for those activities (Benoit et al., 2019; Brents & Sanders, 2010). Concerns regarding fairness are ever present in the debate on sex work as opposing sides dispute what the industry means for gender equality. Some sides will contend the commodification of sex objectifies and dehumanizes the often-female provider, putting her in a subordinate position to the male buyer (Alves & Cavalhieri, 2021; Hughes, 2008). Other sides maintain that gender inequality in sex work lies in the stigma thrust upon women, who are labeled as "whores", while promiscuous men are subjected to little societal backlash (Comte, 2014; Jackson, 2016).

Concerns regarding the problem of sex work extend beyond interests in the rights and well-being of individuals to evoke anxieties about the well-being of the community at large. This may manifest as fears that the industry will increase the spread of sexually transmitted infections or negatively impact societal norms and values. Even the effect on social norms can be further dissected. The dominant fear could be that an overly sexualized society threatens the institutions of marriage and family or that commercial sex degrades the status of all women in society, making gender egalitarianism unattainable (Coy et al., 2019; Skilbrei, 2019; Weitzer, 2010). Framing the problem along the lines of individual and collective concerns can highlight which aspects of a social issue people perceive as problematic. These various conceptualizations of the problem implicate different underlying causes, which are directly related to the desired policy response.

While MFT is an individual level theory for conceptualizing reactions to social institutions, these individual positions are not generated in a vacuum. The social forces that structure individual positions are simultaneously constituted by individual actions. This provides an example of structuration, in which individual agency is made possible by a social structure, and that structure is constituted by individual actions in the aggregate. An example is the creation and reproduction of social mores during a dinner date; certain cultural norms will initially dictate the conventions of conversation and dining, but such expectations can be modified over the course of an evening in response to whether it consists of casual banter or more formal discussion (Van Langenhove, 2017). This micro-level interaction reflects how broader social knowledge and actions are constructed and reproduced through recurrent social practices.

In the existing sex work literature, a theme emerges in which narratives that frame the issue of sex work in individualizing concerns find cause in the structural factors that give way to individual conditions. For example, when the issue is the stigmatization of sex workers, we find blame in the patriarchal chains of oppression surrounding female sexuality. When the problem is that society is restricting individual freedoms to engage in a particular type of work, the conditions responsible for this are society's stigma and the institutions that legitimize that stigma by prohibiting this line of work.

Collective concerns about society's morals or the degradation of women involved in sex work tend to attribute the cause of these social problems to individuals involved. Conservative condemnation of sex work on the grounds that it is harmful to the broader social order allude to the moral and psychological deficits of both providers and buyers (Weitzer, 2019). A feminist abolitionist framing of the social problem of sex work

suggests the (typically male) buyers are at fault, as their entitlement to women's bodies drives the demand that established the industry (Busch et al., 2002; Coy et al., 2019). MFT will naturally align more with this individual-focused perspective, although the institutional component will be addressed by incorporating a domain on the role of government modeled after previous work (Vartanova et al., 2021).

While people are generally more likely to endorse individualizing foundations, this significantly interacts with political orientation, with conservatives prioritizing binding values, such as authority and purity, and liberals prioritizing individualizing values, such as harm and fairness (Napier & Luguri, 2013). Given the divide between conservatives and liberals in American politics is becoming increasingly polarized (Bail et al., 2018), MFT is a useful tool for elucidating the public's moral objections to sex work and its possible decriminalization. Recognizing the moral arguments that appeal to various groups is essential for achieving social change.

History and Current State of Policy

Many of the theoretical frameworks place causal explanations for sex work at the structural level (Gerassi, 2015). In adopting this macro-level perspective, these frames are not just theoretical, but also political, as they implicate different social institutions as the source of the problem. But beyond this, theoretical frameworks are so often also a political framework because various problem frames are directly related to a potential policy response. Different conceptualizations of what the problem actually is will imply different solutions (Johnson & Porth, 2020). Thus, the problem frames of sex work have been strategically constructed and advocated to reach specific goals. Policy goals are the bridge between the problem and potential solutions. Regarding sex work, all policies

essentially strive for one of three goals: to prohibit, abolish, or regulate (Agustín, 2008). Certain theoretical orientations toward sex work will naturally align with certain goals over others. For instance, the radical feminist position, in which violence against women is inherent to sex work, is aligned with abolition since the solution to the problem as it is constructed here is total eradication of all forms of sex work (Comte, 2014). Whether the goal is to prohibit, abolish, or regulate sex work will direct the appropriate policy solution.

Although abolitionist goals have expanded to encompass pornography and other forms of sex work in the moral crusade, the target of policy has traditionally been prostitution (Deering et al., 2014; Monto, 2004). As previously mentioned, the terms "sex work" and "prostitution" are frequently used interchangeably, although "sex work" is sometimes preferred for its non-stigmatizing characterization (Densmore, 2021). Thus, while "sex work" and "prostitution" may be used interchangeably, it is important to note that the following discussion is explicitly referring to prostitution given its criminal status in the U.S.

There are four generally recognized policy responses regarding prostitution. **Criminalization**, in which both the buying and selling of sexual services are criminalized, has been the traditional response of governments and aligns with a prohibitionist scheme (Agustín, 2008; Benoit et al., 2017; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Criminalization may also align with abolitionist perspectives on the basis that "the only way to protect against these dangers is to stand collectively against the commercial sale of sex and to prosecute purveyors of prostitution" (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005, p. 273)

Neo-abolitionism, however, takes a different approach, arguing that to eradicate

the industry, policy efforts need to target the demand (Armstrong, 2021). This constitutes

the second type of prostitution policy of **partial decriminalization**. This is also referred

to as the Nordic model, the end-demand model, or third-party criminalization, in which

buyers and facilitators (i.e., pimps) are subject to criminal penalties while sex workers

themselves are not (Armstrong, 2021).

The goal of regulation brings us to the last two distinct, but sometimes conflated,

policy responses. **Decriminalization** removes criminal penalties for both buyers and

sellers, leaving sex work either wholly unregulated or to be regulated through non-sex-

work-specific municipal codes (Benoit et al., 2017; Brents & Hausbeck, 2005; Weitzer,

1999). **Legalization**, on the other hand, would subject sex work to state regulations such

as licensing, zoning, and occupational health and safety standards (Abel, 2014; Benoit et

al., 2017; Brents & Hausbeck, 2005).

Although criminalization has been the traditional regulatory response

(Vanwesenbeeck, 2017), alternative approaches have become increasingly popular as

activists and public opinion have shifted conceptions on the underlying issue of

commercial sex. For example, "feminist policymakers who argued that prostitution is a

form of male violence against women, that it is physically and psychologically damaging

to sell sex and that there are no women who sell sex voluntarily" successfully advocated

for partial criminalization authorized in the Swedish Sex Purchase Act of 1999 (Dodillet

& Östergren, 2011, p. 1). The partial decriminalization approach, in particular, has

become increasingly popular as the anti-trafficking movement has conflated prostitution

and trafficking in the public consciousness, prompting policy changes that center on the

victimization of sex workers (McCarthy et al., 2012; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Weitzer, 2010, 2019). This approach has proliferated across Europe and beyond, with adoption in countries such as Iceland, Norway, Finland, Ireland, France, and Canada (Armstrong, 2021; Sanders & Campbell, 2014).

Legalized prostitution, in which brothels are subject to licensing and taxation, exists in a number of countries, including the Netherlands, Germany, areas of Australia, and select counties in the state of Nevada (Hubbard & Prior, 2013; Luo, 2020). Decriminalization, however, has been decidedly less popular. In 2003, New Zealand became the first country to decriminalize sex work completely through the passage of the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) (Armstrong, 2017). This policy has also been adopted in two territories in Australia (Luo, 2020).

As mentioned previously, the opposition to sex work can be described as a moral crusade, and the presence of a strong moral discourse has been seen as a major obstacle to getting decriminalization on the policy agenda (Abel, 2014). Members of the public have expressed concerns about the negative influence sex work has on community image and values, prompting protests among neighborhood residents over the presence of prostitution activities in the community (Hubbard, 2001; Shdaimah et al., 2014). However, there does seem to be public alignment with U.S. policy trends that show increasing rehabilitative efforts to address sex work (Shdaimah et al., 2014). This shift in the U.S. likely stems from a global shift in perspective regarding sex work that is heavily influenced by the anti-trafficking movement.

The proliferation of the Nordic Model is the result of a marketing campaign that emphasized the success of the law in reducing prostitution and trafficking and deterring

clients (Dodillet & Östergren, 2011; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). But opponents of this model argue there is a "victimizing ideology embedded in end-demand legislation" (Jackson, 2016, p. 33), in which women in sex work are framed as victims in need of saving. From a worker's rights perspective, this is viewed as a paternalistic policy that disregards the decision-making abilities of sex workers and their calls for social and economic rights (Jackson, 2016; Soderlund, 2005). Activists struggle to demand improvements in their working conditions against a narrative that conflates voluntary sexual labor with trafficking.

One side argues decriminalization is necessary for the health, safety, and human rights of sex workers, while opponents argue it would make women more vulnerable and men feel entitled to use women's bodies (Armstrong, 2017; Benoit et al., 2019). This latter argument has been more successful in resonating with policymakers. Although claims made by abolitionist advocates have led to the institutionalization of a moral crusade within state politics, "little attention has been devoted to the impact of crusade claims on public perceptions of social problems or the dynamics of institutionalization in state policies" (Weitzer, 2007, p. 448). Given the growing popularity of the Nordic Model and the strength of rescue politics, it is worth examining the effect of these policies in reducing the harms of the industry.

Efficacy of Policy Models

Despite strong disagreements among scholars and activists, there is a general consensus that criminalization is harmful and unhelpful (Polaris Project, 2021; Sandler, 2022). Extant work on the effect of various policies finds criminalization drives the industry underground, hastens negotiations, and increases vulnerability to exploitation

and violence from both clients and police (Abel, 2014; Albright & D'Adamo, 2017; Luo, 2020). Criminalization can increase the risk of unsafe sex practices when police confiscate condoms as evidence or as a way to discourage them from working (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). Repressive policing of sex workers not only lead to increased arrests and criminal justice involvement, but also entail harassment and victimization. For instance, a 2016 US Department of Justice investigation found multiple officers in the Baltimore Police Department had forced sex workers to perform sexual acts in order to avoid arrest (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

For these reasons, evidence and advocates agree that criminalization of sex workers only exacerbates the harms of the industry. The contentious debate among activists then is waged over the benefits of the end demand model, or partial decriminalization, and full decriminalization, with selective presentation of evidence to favor a given proponent's side (Weitzer, 2007).

In the theoretical argument for end demand policies, it is postulated that full decriminalization will normalize the sex trade, leading to industry growth and increased exploitation (Bender et al., 2019). Thus, criminalizing clients and third parties is viewed as the ideal solution for tackling the industry. Given the prominence of concerns regarding trafficking and exploitation here, it is worth examining the effect of end demand policies on trafficking outcomes.

While official estimates suggest the Swedish law criminalizing buyers has made the market less lucrative for traffickers (Ekberg, 2004), evidence from 161 countries found those with harsher prostitution laws (i.e. full criminalization) had the lowest incidence of human trafficking (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2013). However, the difference

between countries that criminalize both buying and selling and countries that only criminalize buying was small and insignificant (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2013). In Northern Ireland, it is unclear if switching to an end-demand model of criminalizing buyers has had any effect on trafficking at all (Ellison et al., 2019). Further, it has been suggested that this regime could enable exploitation as "clients may be deterred from reporting suspected exploitation because of the fear of being arrested" (Graham, 2017, p. 215). Regardless, challenges in measuring the prevalence of human trafficking mean the impact on trafficking rates is still not well understood, and the effects observed in one country will not necessarily translate to similar outcomes in a different context like the U.S. (Burckley et al., 2023).

Yet this policy is not evaluated on its impact on trafficking alone. Where the objective is to reduce demand and industry size, this policy shows some promise. In examining the effect of the end demand law in Northern Ireland, it was found the law did lead to a temporary reduction in the size of the sex market and reduced STIs (Backus & Nguyen, 2021). While the authors also found increased reports of sexual violence, it is not clear whether this is due to an increase in actual violent incidents or an increased propensity of police to record these incidents. However, the criminalization of buyers may contribute to a more antisocial clientele base as less violent buyers leave the market following passage of the law (Backus & Nguyen, 2021; Ellison et al., 2019).

There are reports that this asymmetric criminalization amplifies risks to sex workers as police presence drives contact with clients underground and reduces bargaining power through rushed negotiations (Abel, 2014; Landsberg et al., 2017; Luo, 2020). It has been suggested that in the context of end demand laws, sex workers would

be hesitant to report incidents with clients as it risks the possibility that they would not receive any payment (Armstrong, 2017). This is supported by evidence that a Canadian bill criminalizing the purchase of sex was associated with alienation from law enforcement and health services (Densmore, 2021).

Overall, there is a general trend associating repressive policing of sex work with increased harm to sex workers in both fully criminalized and partially criminalized contexts. A systematic review by Platt et al. (2018) found that in countries with criminalization policies, including end demand policies, sex workers were more likely to experience sexual and physical violence and STI risks. This indicates sex work may actually be safer under fewer restrictions. Additional research from the Netherlands supports this claim. After legalizing street prostitution in designated areas called tipplezones, Bisschop et al. (2017) observed both short and long-term reductions in sexual assaults.

Given the United States' policy of criminalization, there is limited evidence to draw on the effects of various policies for the health and safety of sex workers here. From 2003 to 2009, a Rhode Island judge inadvertently decriminalized indoor prostitution, providing researchers a unique opportunity to examine the effects of this policy in the U.S. Cunningham and Shah (2018) observed that while decriminalization increased the size of the indoor sex market, it also reduced reported rapes by 30% and female gonorrhea incidence by 40%. There is also evidence on the effect of a regulated indoor sex market in Nevada. Brents and Hausbeck (2005) examined perceptions of and practices to mitigate risk in Nevada brothels. They found risk was framed in terms of three types of violence: interpersonal violence against prostitutes, violence against

community order, and sexually transmitted diseases as violence. According to interviews with prostitutes, brothels offered the safest environment for conducting sex work. They also found profitability relied on perceptions of health and safety and was used to justify brothels' existence.

Social Context of U.S. Prostitution Policy

The nature of sex work is changing drastically and rapidly with the advent of internet and social media (Cowen & Colosi, 2020). The commercial sex industry is becoming increasingly mainstream, with larger numbers of middle-class workers and consumers, as well as changes in perceptions of the industry (Brents & Sanders, 2010). But to counter this apparent sexualization of society, anti-pornography and anti-trafficking efforts have expanded into what some describe as a moral crusade against all sexual commerce (Weitzer, 2019).

The neo-abolitionist perspective that conceptualizes sex work as violence against women and advocates for an end-demand approach has become increasingly popular and influential in policy (Armstrong, 2021). The conception of sex work as exploitation has been institutionalized in U.S. policy through the passage of SESTA/FOSTA, which conflated sex work with trafficking. These types of policies are part of an end-demand strategy to address human trafficking by reducing the demand for all commercial sexual services and denying research funding to organizations that do not explicitly align themselves with this purpose (Jackson & Heineman, 2018).

But at the same time, the movement for decriminalization seems to be gaining traction in the U.S. The counter-narrative to sex work as exploitation, "sex work as work", is becoming more mainstream (Grant, 2021). Decriminalization bills are

becoming increasingly common, with legislation introduced in Washington D.C., New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts (Nembhard et al., 2021). There has also been a growing movement to alter criminal justice practices surrounding prostitution offenses, with prosecutors increasingly disinclined to indict low-level, nonviolent offenses in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, large cities such as Manhattan and Baltimore have announced they will halt prosecution of prostitution offenses (Bromwich, 2021; Schuppe, 2021). There have also been challenges to existing law, with a 2018 California court case challenging the state's prostitution laws on the basis of freedom of association, freedom of speech, earning income, and sexual privacy (Weitzer, 2019). Although the court rejected these claims, they are indicative of a broader effort to reconceptualize the framing of prostitution as a social problem.

Despite the fact that policy in this arena tends to focus on street-based and face-to-face sex work to the neglect of home-based and online sex work (Cowen & Colosi, 2020; Hubbard & Prior, 2013), the public is not oblivious to how sex work is conducted in today's society. Online platforms for sex work like OnlyFans have seen a boom in popularity in recent years (Boseley, 2020), accompanied by changes in perceptions of what sex work is and the types of people involved (Lines, 2020). Further, there is increasing recognition of how criminalization may be contributing to mass incarceration and harming sex workers by increasing occupational hazards and preventing the reporting of crimes that take place during these exchanges (Sakha et al., 2020). With the mainstreaming of online sex work, it is possible that greater acceptability of this type of erotic market will diffuse into other adult industries. Considering the broader calls for criminal justice reform in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement compounded

with the proliferation of commercial sex markets, societal views about policing those involved in sex work are likely shifting.

While a framing battle occurs among activists and lobbyists attempting to influence policy, the degree to which the public subscribes to the various arguments levied in this debate are unknown. It is particularly unclear how the public currently conceives of the social problems associated with sex work amidst this changing social landscape. Given the number of recent attempts to alter prostitution policy, it is an ideal time to examine the contours of public opinion surrounding sex work broadly, and the implications of these perceptions for the direction of prostitution policy in the United States.

Public Opinion

Legislation, generally, is dependent on social values and norms, but on morally contentious issues, such as prostitution, public opinion is particularly critical to a society's capacity for legislative change (Bonache et al., 2021; Mooney & Lee, 2000). How people view the sex industry more broadly can shed light on how they conceive of the problem associated with it, and thus, the appropriate policy response. Extant work in this area has varied approaches to examining public opinion on sex work, with many studies adopting some measure of the degree to which the behavior is justified, morally acceptable, or whether participants would be willing to engage in sex work. While it is difficult to establish coherent patterns of findings due to these differences in operationalization, the following will attempt to present what we have gleaned about the contours of public opinion in regard to sex work broadly and prostitution policy specifically.

Opinion on Sex Work and Sex Workers

Prior research has documented perceptions of sex work through surveys of students, the public, and sex work-involved individuals or stakeholders. Although most work in this realm focuses exclusively on prostitution, select studies have examined public views regarding other sectors of the commercial sex industry. This is an important inquiry in order to situate the potential cultural shift regarding society's view of prostitution within the context of the larger sex work industry. In assessing student knowledge of and likelihood to engage in a variety of sex work types (stripping, lap dancing, pole dancing, escorting/prostitution, Internet-based and non-Internet-based pornography), Roberts et al. (2010) found about half (50.1%) of the sample felt it was easy to understand student participation in the sex industry, but a similar proportion (51.1%) also found it unacceptable. The reported likelihood of participation also varied by the specific type of sex work, with the largest percentage (11.1%) reported for escorting/prostitution, and the lowest (3.5%) for internet pornography. Overall, 16.5% of students reported a likelihood to engage in some form of sex work to help pay for their education.

A survey by Pedersen et al. (2015) compared attitudes toward sexuality and exotic dance between college students and exotic dancers in Canada. While they found exotic dancers possessed more casual attitudes toward sexuality, there were no significant differences in the extent to which the groups perceived exotic dance as a deviant activity or as a matter of choice.

Other work has examined the individual predictors associated with attitudes towards prostitutes. A study of college students found that lower hostility toward women,

as well as knowing a sex worker, was associated with less stereotyped views of prostitutes (Long et al., 2012). Among Israeli students, there was an association between rape myth acceptance and perceptions of prostitution, where acceptance of rape myths was negatively associated with perceiving prostitution as a form of victimization (Levin & Peled, 2011). Respondents who were less accepting of rape myths were more inclined to see prostitution as a form of victimization. Similar results were observed by Litam (2019), who found endorsement of rape myths among American mental health counselors was negatively correlated with perceptions of prostitutes as victims.

To explore the distorted and stereotyped views held against sex workers, Sawyer and Metz (2009) developed the Attitudes Towards Prostitution Scale (ATPS). Using a sample of men arrested for soliciting prostitutes, they found discrepancies between social/legal support for prostitution, and acceptance of prostitution within the family, such as having a marital relationship with a sex worker, or a daughter involved in sex work. The authors suggest this pattern of support for prostitution in general but rejection of it regarding their own family suggests "a double standard (commonly observed anecdotally in this population) where a behavior is acceptable under some conditions and not acceptable under others" (p. 343).

Additional evidence supports this assertion that acceptance is conditional, with research finding that the less visible prostitution is, the more socially acceptable is it deemed to be (Lowman & Louie, 2012). Thus, there may be a tendency to accept prostitution in the abstract, but to reject it when it becomes perceptible in one's immediate life or family.

Public Attitudes Toward Prostitution Policy

The degree to which prostitution and sex work are seen as acceptable or problematic holds implications for how a community chooses to respond to it. Although evidence of public opinion in the U.S. is limited, prior work finds diversity in whether people view it as a problem and how it should be addressed. A recent poll finds 52% of American voters at least somewhat support fully decriminalizing sex work as New Zealand did, while 36% oppose (Luo, 2020). They found a similar split on ending undercover police stings to enforce prostitution law, with 49% in favor of ending the practice and 35% in opposition. Within Baltimore, Maryland, Shdaimah et al. (2014) investigated three communities to document the degree to which residents see prostitution as a problem, what their primary concerns are, and who should respond, and how, to address it. They found significant differences between neighborhoods in whether it was seen as a problem. They also observed the main concerns of community members were nuisance or disgust, fear of crime and disease, and the potential impact on children and families. Additionally, two-thirds of the sample reported it should be handled by police and the criminal justice system, with other categories suggested including social services, neighborhood watch, and former sex workers.

The concerns expressed by these neighborhood residents echo findings from a 2012 YouGov poll of the American public (Osse, 2012). The largest concern among people who support criminalization of prostitution was that it is morally wrong (44%), with the second largest concern being the spread of STIs (25%). However, the implications of attitudes toward the sex industry are complex, and do not always translate directly to the public's preferred policy response. For example, a later YouGov poll found that despite most Americans (64%) thinking it is morally wrong to solicit

prostitutes, they were fairly split on whether prostitution should be legal (44%) or illegal (46%) (Moore, 2015).

Similar discrepancies have been observed in other countries. Although about 62% of respondents in one Canadian survey thought exchanging sexual services for money was unacceptable, "that sentiment did not necessarily translate into a belief that prostitution itself should be a criminal offence", as 61% supported zoning and 63% supported licensing of prostitutes (Lowman & Louie, 2012, p. 250). In Sweden, a 2008 survey found 71% supported the Swedish law of criminalizing sex buying, while a 2009 internet poll found 63.2% thought the Swedish ban on purchasing sex should actually be abolished (Dodillet & Östergren, 2011).

The most pertinent example of this apparent contradiction was observed in a recent survey of U.S. males, the presumed consumers of commercial sex. Mancini et al. (2020) surveyed 2,525 adult males to examine how contextual beliefs about prostitution, such as perceived negative effects and voluntary entry and exit, influence policy preferences. Their operationalization of policy preference was limited to "legal", "legal with monitoring (e.g., health checks)", and "keep illegal", which had to be dichotomized due to insufficient cases in the "legal" category. Although this restricted range of options may not allow for an accurate assessment of the potential variation in policy support, they found most men supported legalizing prostitution (60%), while most (61%) also acknowledged the coercive nature and potential harms of the industry.

Further investigation reveals how perceptions of the industry predict attitudes toward prostitution law. For instance, Mancini et al. (2020) found believing prostitutes enter the trade later in life, implying greater autonomy for older individuals compared to

younger individuals, is positively associated with support for legalization. Likewise, among a sample of Canadian undergraduate students, believing that a smaller percentage of women working in indoor prostitution were doing so voluntarily was significantly associated with supporting criminalization (Morton et al., 2012). These authors also observed about half the sample believed changes should be made to current prostitution law. Among those, 42.5% felt it should be changed in the direction of increased legalization with 40% specifying laws should be changed to increase the safety of prostitutes (Morton et al., 2012). The perceived degree of autonomy or victimization of sex workers is likely particularly salient as the issue of human trafficking has gained awareness and international policy attention. In a sample of Spanish adults, Bonache et al. (2021) found an association between regulatory attitudes and whether participants see sex workers as victims, attributions of agency, and moral outrage. Specifically, higher attributions of agency were associated with greater support for decriminalization while lower attributions of agency were associated with abolitionist and prohibitionist attitudes.

The presence of these concerns is critical to understanding the relationship between perceptions of prostitution and policy preferences. For example, a potential explanation for the support for legalization coinciding with recognition of industry harms among U.S. males is "the belief that regulation would professionalize the practice, thereby mitigating the potential for juveniles to engage in prostitution, improve victim autonomy, and reduce victimization" (Mancini et al., 2020, p. 424). Yet a poll of U.S. residents found only 22% believed regulation would reduce the risks associated with prostitution, while 39% reported they thought permitting prostitution would harm more women (*Should Prostitution Be Legalized?*, 2016). This highlights the need for a deeper

understanding of the contours of public opinion on this issue beyond whether views of the industry are simply positive or negative but *why* they are so to develop an appropriate response supported by the public.

The 2015 YouGov poll mentioned previously actually assessed whether that logic is applied by the public in evaluating arguments for and against decriminalization. While "It professionalises the industry, giving prostitutes better access to pensions and employment rights" was provided as a response option, only 19% indicated this was the most persuasive argument for decriminalization. Instead, a plurality (42%) found the most persuasive argument was that consensual sex between adults should be free from state interference (Moore, 2015).

Predictors of Variation in Attitudes Toward Prostitution

Given public policy, particularly on moral issues, is heavily influenced by public opinion (Bonache et al., 2021), it is critical to understand the sources of variation in support for prostitution-related policy. Global beliefs about the sex trade and prostitution policy have been shown to vary by country, legal context, and sociodemographic characteristics, although the nature and direction of individual-level predictors vary across nations (Immordino & Russo, 2015; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017). Accounting for heterogeneity in opinion between individuals and between groups provides insight into which people may be more or less likely to support changes in the criminal justice response to sex work. The following sections will examine what the existing research has identified as societal-level and individual-level predictors of attitudes toward prostitution and related policy.

Societal-Level Predictors

The extent to which individuals find arguments for policy change persuasive likely follows from their conceptualization of sex work as a social problem. Evidence suggests that such conceptualizations are shaped by the existing legal framework in a given region. In evidence from a cross-national study, Immordino and Russo (2015) found in countries where prostitution is legal or regulated, there was greater justification of prostitution compared to countries where it was illegal, including places with end-demand models. Similar findings were reported by Jonsson and Jakobsson (2017), although their analysis was restricted to the specific act of buying sex. They found an association between laws and attitudes such that citizens in countries where the purchase of sex is criminalized are less tolerant of the behavior.

These studies are both subject to effects of endogeneity in that opinions influence the law, but the law also influences opinions. For instance, in the US, where prostitution is predominantly criminalized, the majority of US respondents in the study by Immordino and Russo (2015) reported they considered prostitution never justifiable. This may be due, in part, to an increased tendency to believe something is unacceptable if it is illegal (Lowman & Louie, 2012). To examine the effect of laws on attitudes, Kotsadam and Jakobsson (2011) used longitudinal data from Norway and Sweden. They observed the Norwegian law criminalizing the purchase of sex did not affect the extent to which respondents reported buying and selling sex as morally acceptable. However, in an experimental survey of Spanish participants, Escot et al. (2021) found that hypothetical situations in which the sex market was decriminalized increased respondents' acceptability of buying sex, highlighting the influence of the law on moral judgments.

Beyond a nation's legal approach, religious makeup also significantly influences acceptance of prostitution. The percentage of Muslim and Buddhist respondents is negatively associated with justification of prostitution, while country GDP and percentage of female population exhibit a positive association (Immordino & Russo, 2015). This supports prior work finding Catholic and Hindu countries to be more accepting of prostitution than Muslim countries (Stack et al., 2010).

Individual-Level Predictors

Generally, it has been observed that individual views on sex work and related policy vary according to gender (Hansen & Johansson, 2021; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Morton et al., 2012), race (Mancini et al., 2020; Morton et al., 2012; Weitzer, 2019), age (Kotsadam & Jakobsson, 2011; Luo, 2020), education (Digidiki et al., 2016; Immordino & Russo, 2015), socioeconomic status (Weitzer, 2019), marriage status (Immordino & Russo, 2015; Mancini et al., 2020), religion (Immordino & Russo, 2015), and political orientation (Luo, 2020).

Measures of socioeconomic status, like education and income, are positively associated with accepting views of prostitution (Immordino & Russo, 2015; Stack et al., 2010; Weitzer, 2019). Several studies find whites are more likely to support prostitution (Cao et al., 2017; Morton et al., 2012), although being Caucasian was negatively associated with support for legal prostitution in a sample of U.S. males (Mancini et al., 2020).

The country context is an important consideration when evaluating the relationship among individual predictors. For instance, some studies find conservatism is associated with greater acceptance of prostitution among Nordic countries (Hansen &

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Johansson, 2021; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017). However, this is likely due to cultural differences in ideologies, as the opposite relationship is observed in countries like the UK and the U.S. (Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Mancini et al., 2020). A similar effect has been observed with age, where older people are more accepting in some countries, but the opposite is true in other nations (Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017). Religiosity is less susceptible to variability by nation, as it is generally observed that people who are more religious hold more negative views of prostitution (Cao et al., 2017; Cao & Maguire, 2013; Chon, 2015; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Mancini et al., 2020).

One of the most commonly explored correlates of prostitution policy opinion is gender, with men generally showing greater support for commercial sex and decriminalization than women (Escot et al., 2021; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Lowman & Louie, 2012; Morton et al., 2012). In Canada, being female was the only demographic variable that significantly predicted support for criminalization of prostitution (Morton et al., 2012). Across eight European countries, Jonsson and Jakobsson (2017) found women were less accepting of the purchase of sex than men in all countries. However, other studies find only small or indirect associations of gender with prostitution acceptance (Cao et al., 2017; Cao & Maguire, 2013). In a representative sample of U.S. adults, Cao and Maguire (2013) found the significance of gender varied depending on the estimation method used. In addition, Cao et al. (2017) found the effect of gender was mediated by moral regulation variables (authoritarianism and religiosity).

Gender differences in acceptance of prostitution may also be related to beliefs about marriage, with more negative views from women who may perceive prostitution as facilitating infidelity (Cao & Maguire, 2013; Chon, 2015). Indeed, among a sample of

U.S. males, perceiving a higher proportion of prostitution clients are married was associated with greater support for legalization. Additionally, those that are unmarried or believe marriage is outdated are more likely to hold more favorable views of prostitution (Chon, 2015; Mancini et al., 2020). This finding is consistent with the concern that prostitution constitutes a threat to the institution of marriage and family values, and thus those that are married or believe in marriage may be more likely to identify with this threat.

The perceived impact of prostitution on gender relations and the broader social order supports the consistent effect of religiosity and political orientation. Religious beliefs tend to denounce commercial sex as sinful, thus those with stronger religious beliefs tend to hold more negative views of prostitution and its regulation in society (Chon, 2015; Mancini et al., 2020). The apprehension over prostitution as a source of moral decay also relates to the association between public opinion and political ideology. Political conservatism is generally associated with less acceptance and more punitive views toward prostitution (Luo, 2020; Mancini et al., 2020; Stack et al., 2010).

While political ideology and religiosity are both independently associated with regulatory attitudes toward prostitution, they are also associated with each other, highlighting their role in broader symbolic politics that emphasize moral standards and social norms (Stack et al., 2010; Weitzer, 2010). Political ideology may represent an expression of moral attitudes, with varying sensitivity to moral values shaping how individuals perceive the world (Van Leeuwen & Park, 2009). This may explain, in part, why opinions of the sex trade are associated with beliefs on immigration and gender equality and belief in immanent justice (Digidiki et al., 2016; Hansen & Johansson, 2021;

Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Tverdova, 2011). Stack et al. (2010) attempted to encompass related symbolic orientations including religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and political conservatism under a master cultural orientation of survivalism that is characterized by material security, distrust of others, and obedience to ingroup norms. They found a stronger survivalist orientation was negatively associated with accepting attitudes toward prostitution.

The application of a broader cultural theory like survivalism, or Just World Theory as applied by Digidiki et al. (2016) makes a valuable contribution to understanding attitude formation regarding commercial sex and policy preferences. However, prior theories fail to tap into the specific moral values underlying opinions on prostitution.

Given the unique ability of this social problem to unite normally opposing constituencies (Weitzer, 2010, 2019), extant work implicates morality as fundamental to expound the existing association between political ideology and opinion on prostitution. For instance, prior research has demonstrated that regulatory attitudes are indirectly associated with attributing agency to prostitutes through moral outrage (Bonache et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of moral values in individual evaluations of sex work and associated policy.

Current Study

The goal of this dissertation is to develop a more complete picture of American public opinion on sex work and relevant criminal justice policies. Deploying the rhetoric used in scholarship and advocacy, the present work will shed light on where the public

resides in the ongoing debate on the meaning of sex work in our society and the future of its regulation. To that end, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: What does the public perceive as the negative aspects of sex work that constitute it as a social problem?

> 1a. In what ways does the public perceive sex work as problematic or acceptable, and to what extent do these perceptions vary across the different types of sex work?

> 1b. How do characterizations of sex work as a social problem vary by Moral Foundations and demographic characteristics?

RQ2: How are perceptions of sex work as a social problem related to the public's prostitution policy preferences?

> 2a. In what ways, or to what extent, does the public endorse a criminal justice response to sex work?

> 2b. Does support for decriminalization vary by the actors or venue of the proposed policy?

> 2c. How are Moral Foundations associated with prostitution policy preferences?

RQ3: Which arguments for sex work decriminalization do people find most convincing?

> 3a. Does the effect of arguments depend on whether they are in reference to decriminalizing buying sex or selling sex?

> 3b. Is there meaningful variation in the effect of anti-criminalization arguments across different groups of the US public?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Sample Generation

This study employed a web-based survey of a nationally representative sample of respondents administered through the Prime Panels recruitment platform by CloudResearch, formerly known as TurkPrime. Prime Panels generates online opt-in panels of participants similar to platforms like Prolific and Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Prime Panels offers improved functionality over crowdsourcing platforms like MTurk by aggregating various online research panels and incorporating screening measures to provide higher quality and more representative samples (Chandler et al., 2019; Litman et al., 2017). With access to a pool of over 50 million participants, this platform provides representative samples, as well as targeted recruitment for hard-to-reach populations (Rosenzweig, n.d.; Sharma et al., 2022; Verma et al., 2021). Studies employing Prime Panels have been published in reputable journals in the fields of psychology (Amsalem & Martin, 2022) and criminology (Wenger et al., 2022).

A census-matched template was applied within the platform to recruit a sample that is proportional to the 2020 U.S. Census on age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Recruited participants were directed to a survey hosted in Qualtrics. Respondents were initially shown a consent form describing the purpose of the study, certifying that no personally

identifying information would be collected, and that respondents were free to exit the study at any time.

Data Quality

Participants with large quantities (>50%) of missing data or who were missing on primary dependent variables, such as prostitution policy preferences, were excluded from analysis. To ensure a high quality of response data, attention checks were included to detect respondents who are not paying attention to the survey questions.[1]

Manipulation checks were also included in the vignette portion of the survey. After presentation of each vignette, respondents answered a question on the main topic of the argument they just read. This, in part, serves as a construct validation check to see if respondents interpret the vignettes as designed (whether it is about "healthcare" as opposed to "employment rights"). While some of the choices were plausible, some response categories were more incongruent (e.g., "coffee shops", "glass blowing") to serve as an additional check on participant attention.

Given the length of the survey, it is possible that attentive participants may become fatigued and more prone to error or skipping questions. Thus, study exclusion was determined by multiple elimination criteria. Respondents failing at least two check questions in the same section were dropped. Participants were also dropped if they only

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[1]The Moral Foundations Questionnaire, which was used to assess endorsement of moral values, comes embedded with two "check" questions. Following prior research, participants were marked as failing these checks if they rated being "good at math" as "very" or "extremely" morally relevant, or disagreed with the item "it is better to do good than bad" (Clifford et al., 2015). An additional attention check was included later in the survey in which respondents were instructed to select a specific answer option ("Somewhat disagree"). This is a commonly used form of attention check in research and has demonstrated success in filtering out inattentive respondents (Kung et al., 2018).

failed one attention check, but spent less than a third of the median completion time on the survey (*Using Quality Checks to Improve Your Survey Data*, n.d.) and/or had many missing responses. People with response patterns indicating inattentive responses, such as selecting all 1's or all 7's for sections of the survey, were also removed from analysis. This resulted in a final sample of 519 participants.

Respondent demographics and extent of missingness are presented in Table 1. Although sample recruitment was census matched on age, race, gender, and ethnicity, the distributions of these variables were slightly skewed after removing participants. This is particularly so for gender, as 60.5% of the same was female. The average age of respondents was about 45 years, and the majority identified as white (69.56%) and non-Hispanic (76.49%).

Missing Data

Given the length of the survey, it is reasonable that respondents may skip some questions. As mentioned previously, responses with missing data on primary outcomes were removed. A small proportion of missing values were observed for most variables. Since the sample was requested to match the U.S. Census in terms of race, age, gender, and ethnicity, Cloud Research already had this information on respondents. For those who left one or more of these demographic items blank on the survey, the information maintained by Cloud Research was requested and replaced any missing values. Subsequently, the percent of missing cases for each variable ranged from $0 - 6.16\%$, with most missing less than 1.5%. The largest proportion of missing data was seen for political liberalism ($n = 32$, 6.17%).

Table 1

Demographics of the Sample and Extent of Missingness (N = 519)

Variable	N (%) /Mean (SD)	Missing
Gender		
Male	205 (39.50%)	
Female	314 (60.50%)	
Race		
White	361 (69.56%)	
Black	67 (12.91%)	
Other	91 (17.53%)	
Age	45.11 (16.66)	
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	122 (23.51%)	
Not Hispanic	397 (76.49%)	
Marital Status		8 (1.54%)
Never married	208 (40.70%)	
Married	190 (37.18%)	
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	113 (22.11%)	
Sexual Orientation		11 (2.12%)
Heterosexual	447 (87.99%)	
Not heterosexual	61 (12.01%)	
Education		6 (1.16%)
High school degree	165 (32.16%)	
Less than HS	13 (2.53%)	
Some college	140 (27.29%)	
2 Yr. degree	59 (11.50%)	
4 Yr. degree	91 (17.74%)	
Postgraduate degree	45 (8.77%)	
Country region		6 (1.16%)
Southeast	150 (29.24%)	
Midwest	104 (20.27%)	
Northeast	94 (18.32%)	
Southwest	78 (15.20%)	
West	87 (16.96%)	
Religion		7 (1.35%)
Christian	197 (38.48%)	
Catholic/Orthodox	96 (18.75%)	
Not religious	152 (29.69%)	
Other religion	67 (13.09%)	

Rather than remove cases that were missing on only a few variables, plausible

values were estimated through multiple imputation by chained equations using the mice

package in R (Van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). Chained equations estimates possible missing data values by employing regression with the appropriate distribution for each variable requiring imputation (i.e., OLS, predictive mean matching, logit, etc.). Ten imputed datasets were created, and one of these imputed datasets was randomly selected to be used for analysis. The pooling of estimates, while preferable to account for uncertainty in the imputations, does not allow for many of the conveniences and flexibilities in robust estimation (e.g., heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors). As such, the selection of a single imputation was chosen over pooling estimates so that robust inference could be conducted. This single imputation strategy has been used in prior research (Rydberg et al., 2018a).

Because the plausible values that replace missing data will vary from one imputation to another, estimation of models was replicated using another randomly selected imputed dataset. These model results were not significantly different from results using the first randomly chosen dataset, indicating results are consistent across different imputations.

Sex Worker Advisory Board

Historically, policy developments regarding the regulation of sex work have largely excluded the voices of those subject to these laws (Benoit et al., 2021). In order to reflect the interests and experiences of those involved in sex work, an advisory board of sex workers was assembled to inform aspects of the study design and viability of implications. Some board members were affiliated with sex worker organizations, including COYOTE RI (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) and Sacramento SWOP (Sex Worker Outreach Project), while others were independent. The advisory board consisted

of a geographically diverse group, with participants based in urban and rural areas of both the East and West Coasts.

The inclusion of community members in informing research has been particularly beneficial in operationalization and study design concerning the sex trade (Gerassi et al., 2017). All board members were contacted via email and provided an overview of the study and a draft of the survey. Feedback was given on language of the survey and additional questions were proposed. The survey was revised accordingly. For example, greater emphasis was placed on differentiating prostitution and solicitation from other crimes, and "between consenting adults" was added to all questions on support for decriminalization policies. Additionally, several draft questions were replaced with separate items proposed by advisory board members.

Following completion of data analysis, the board was contacted again with a summary of study findings and count data on policy outcomes. Employing this type of community advisory board can provide the perspective necessary to act as a broader check on the quality and authenticity of the methodology, as well as translation of study conclusions.

Chapter 4

Research Question 1

Dependent Variables

Negative Perceptions of Sex Work

To investigate how the public views sex work as a social problem, participants

rated the extent to which they attribute negative qualities or consequences to prostitution

and other forms of sex work. The goal was to gauge the ways in which various sex work

industries are considered problematic to respondents and the extent to which they are

distinct from one another.

This study utilized pre-existing measures as well as original items to assess

perceptions of various commercial sex industries. Items were developed based on prior

work of public perceptions of sex workers (Ma et al., 2018; Pedersen et al., 2015; Roberts

et al., 2010),[2] including items from the Attitudes Toward Pornography scale and work

motivations of pornography actors (Evans-DeCicco & Cowan, 2001) and the Attitudes

toward Prostitutes and Prostitution Scale (Levin & Peled, 2011). Items were altered and

additional items were added in response to feedback from the sex worker advisory panel.

This resulted in a pool of 17 items, of which 16 were utilized in the final survey.

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[2] All original survey items are included in Appendix B.

Respondents were asked to indicate the level to which they agree that various statements apply to four specific industries within the broader commercial sex market. Responses were given on 7-point bipolar agreement scales in ascending order from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, as is recommended by evidence in psychometric testing research (Hutchinson, 2021; Schenck, 2020). As opposed to a 5-point scale, a 7-point scale has been identified as a "more accurate measure of a participant's true evaluation and are more appropriate for electronically-distributed and otherwise unsupervised" questionnaires (Finstad, 2010, p. 104). The larger number of scale points provides sufficient options to accurately capture variation in opinion.

Individual items were used to create scales that intended to capture perceptions of each industry's level of *harm*, *exploitation*, *immorality*, *public health risks*, and *relation to trafficking*. Items were grouped into scales through checking scales' internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. The *public health* construct was originally intended as a separate scale in order to capture perceptions of harm sex work poses to society, particularly in terms of sexual health as this is a population often targeted for prevention initiatives (McMillan et al., 2018). However, it was found that these items did not have sufficient internal consistency to stand alone as a separate construct, illustrated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients below .70. Although *harm* was meant to capture personal physical and/or mental harm, the notion that sex work poses a harm to the larger society suggests that the public health construct could be subsumed under a broader harm category.

Additionally, there was conceptual overlap between the harm and exploitation constructs. Although exploitation was intended to gauge legitimacy of working

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conditions, one advisory board member indicated she did not see a clear distinction between these two categories as poor working conditions are also a form of harm. Consequently, the personal harms, exploitation, and public health items were combined to create one overall *harm* scale with an alpha reliability coefficient of at least 0.81 for each type of sex work. The *harm* scale consisted of 11 items reflecting possible damaging effects of sex work on society, such as "Is a form of gender-based violence" and "Often leads to serious health problems ". Reverse-coded items were also included, such as "Is a harmless activity" and "Is a legitimate form of labor". Yet item analysis showed that internal consistency reliability would improve with the removal of one item. Thus, the exploitation item "Is done by people with a lack of alternative employment opportunities", was dropped. These items were then averaged together for each sex work type, so each scale only contained responses to a specific type of sex work, with higher scores indicating greater perceptions of harm. This resulted in an alpha of 0.84 for each type of sex work.

This process was repeated for the *immorality* scale, which consisted of four items, such as "Damages society's morals". Alpha reliabilities for this scale for each type of sex work were between 0.84 and 0.85. This reliability analysis also revealed improved internal consistency with the removal of the reverse-coded item "Is empowering", despite the fact that this item was reverse scored. This resulted in final reliabilities between 0.88 and 0.89 for all sex work types.

A single item, "Contributes to human trafficking", was used to gauge the extent to which participants thought each type of sex work plays a role in human trafficking.

Sex Work Acceptability

A separate question was used to assess the perceived acceptability of each industry. This was asked separately because the level of agreement scale was not as conducive to measuring this construct. This item was modeled after the World Values Survey attitudes toward prostitution item employed by (Chon, 2015), replacing the original wording of "always be justified" or "never be justified" with "completely acceptable" and "completely unacceptable", respectively. The question read, "Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it is completely acceptable, completely unacceptable, or something in between." Responses were given on a 10-point scale where 1 = *completely unacceptable* and 10 = *completely acceptable.*

Type of Social Problem

An additional question was used to examine what kind of problem prostitution and sex work is perceived to be. The commercial sex industry is conceptualized from multiple perspectives; as a matter of gender equality, social equality, racial equality, public health, human rights, and more (Bonache et al., 2021; Jackson, 2016). A single question asked respondents to indicate what kind of issue they perceive sex work to be, with the ability to choose as many issue frames as they believe apply. Available options consisted of racial justice, labor rights, gender rights, public health, human rights, privacy rights, family rights, sexuality rights, immigration, other, and none of the above.

A latent class analysis was attempted for dimensionality reduction in order to identify groups of respondents with similar perceptions, potentially representing types of voters that require different strategies of persuasion toward decriminalization. A latent class analysis using a 3-step approach to class identification based on modal probabilities revealed four groups: 1) people with a high probability of selecting all problem types, 2)

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people with a low probability of selecting any of the problem types, 3) those in the middle primarily choosing human rights and sexuality rights, 4) and those choosing "none of the above". While the analysis revealed there is some heterogeneity, contrary to expectations, there did not appear to be a pattern according to *which* problem types they selected, but rather by *how many* they selected. Given the limited utility of this finding, a logistic principal components analysis was attempted. Examination of the PCA revealed poor component loadings across all items, suggesting these responses do not load into meaningful clusters of response patterns. The intent was to explore if the multiple responses to this question could be described using a few principal components representing people who view sex work as belonging to distinct classes of rights. When it was clear that both the LCA and PCA were untenable, a more suitable compromise that could still be meaningful toward addressing the substantive objectives of the research (under which types of rights issues do people classify sex work) was chosen.

Aside from respondents who selected "none of the above", the probabilities of selecting human rights issue and sexuality rights issue were generally high. Thus, social problem type was instead operationalized as two variables. Separate dummy variables indicate whether participants see sex work as a *human rights issue* (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) or a *sexuality rights issue* (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).

Independent Variables

Sex Work Industry

Given sex work can come in many forms, it is useful to keep categories broad and restrict the list to more well-known occupations (Barrett-Ibarria, 2020; Brents & Sanders, 2010). Perceptions of sex work were collected for four industries, consisting of web

camming, stripping, pornography, and prostitution. As there are a variety of sex work types that vary by worksite, mode of solicitation, and sexual practices (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005), the types used here were selected to capture variation on these dimensions while keeping the number of industries to a minimum.

Moral Foundations Questionnaire

Given the central role of moral arguments in the prostitution debate, applying Moral Foundations Theory to this issue will provide a greater understanding of how sex work is seen as a social problem, and which moral foundations are most relevant to these concerns. The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) was used to gauge the importance of moral foundations in terms of individualizing (harm, fairness) and collective foundations (loyalty, authority, and purity). Individualizing values emphasize personal rights and freedom while collective values govern behavior in groups. This method of analyzing the MFQ in terms of individualizing and collective or binding foundations has been employed in prior research (Barnett & Hilz, 2018; Strupp-Levitsky et al., 2020). Originally consisting of 30 items, the 20-item version of the MFQ was used here due to constraints of survey length. The scales for individualizing and collective foundations both demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$).

Freedom of choice has also played a prominent role in this debate and has been called "the new moral principle of our age" (Brents & Sanders, 2010, p. 46). Liberty has been proposed as an additional moral foundation, although it has not been officially incorporated into the MFQ. For this study, items developed by Iyer et al. (2012) were included to capture the liberty construct. These items consist of economic/government liberty and lifestyle liberty subscales.

Control and Confounding Variables

Sexual Liberalism. There is some preliminary evidence to suggest attitudes toward may commercial sex reflect a more liberal orientation toward sexuality generally (Hansen & Johansson, 2021; Pedersen et al., 2015). Sexual liberalism is comprised of attitudes and tolerance toward non-traditional sexual activities, as well as respect for sexual autonomy and sexual expression (Guerra et al., 2012; Guerra & Gouveia, 2007; Swami et al., 2017). Positive attitudes toward liberal or unconventional sexual practices are relevant when considering attitudes toward prostitution (Chon, 2015). Those low on sexual liberalism are likely to view sexual practices outside heteronormative relationships negatively, and thus disapprove of decriminalization (Bonache et al., 2021).

In order to examine differences in support for decriminalization, it is necessary to control for sexual liberalism. This was done with a 26-item version of the Rye et al. (2015) Sexual Liberalism Scale as used by Swami et al. (2017), consisting of subscales for General Sexual Liberalism and Technology Liberalism. The General Sexual Liberalism subscale assesses respondents' predilection for a number of behaviors including casual sex, multiple sex partners, and hiring or engaging with a sex worker. Specifically, three items measure the degree to which respondents find hiring or engaging with a sex worker to be personally arousing. Inclusion of these items is important here, as experience as a client of the sex industry has been associated with attitudes toward prostitution (Digidiki et al., 2016; Farley et al., 2017), making this scale an ideal choice over other sexual liberalism measures. The Technical Liberalism scale covers technology-related subjects, such as cybersex, webcams, and sex toys. This is a relevant inclusion given the growing popularity of internet-based sex work.

Economic Liberalism. Economic liberalism is theorized to relate to attitudes toward prostitution in that people high in economic liberalism should view prostitution as any other economic activity, necessitating minimal government intervention. As prior research finds economic liberalism is indeed related to greater acceptance of buying sex (Escot et al., 2021), it was included in the present study. This was measured with a single item, "To what degree are you against the state putting limits on markets; that is, what can you buy or sell for money?". Responses were given on a 10-point scale where 0 = *totally in favor of the state putting limits on what can be bought or sold* and 10 = *totally against the state putting limits on what can be bought or sold*, as used by Escot et al. (2021).

Punitiveness Index. In some cases, strong opposition to removing criminal penalties may reflect a more general punitive orientation toward crime and deviance rather than a reaction to the specific issue of commercial sex. Likewise, those that are opposed to incarceration and harsh criminal penalties may support policies that eliminate criminal penalties for non-violent crimes regardless of the specific offense. In other words, survey responses may not be a reaction to the specific policy question, but a reflection of an individual's general orientation toward crime and punishment. Thus, a punitiveness index developed by Chiricos et al. (2004) was employed here to control for punitiveness toward criminals. This scale originally consisted of eight items in which participants rate their level of support for each item on a scale of 0 = "Not at all supportive" to 10 = "Very supportive". One item regarding support for chain gangs was removed because this practice is outdated. Responses are then aggregated into an index. Example items include "Making sentences more severe for all crimes" and "Locking up

more juvenile offenders". The scale has demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .88$) and has been utilized in other public opinion studies (Pickett et al., 2014).

Confidence in Legal System. Whether participants believe commercial sex activities should be handled by the criminal justice system may depend, in part, on their confidence in this system overall. A single item from the General Social Survey was included to control for this. The item reads, "How much confidence do you have in courts and the legal system?", with responses provided on a 5-point scale from 1 = *No confidence at all* to 5 = *Complete confidence*.

Concerns About Trafficking. Concerns about trafficking feature prominently in discussions of prostitution policy, where anti-trafficking discourse is used to justify anti-prostitution policies (Jackson & Heineman, 2018). A key objective of the anti-trafficking movement has been to raise awareness and public concern to justify punitive criminal justice measures through sensationalized and inflated claims about the scale of the problem. Specifically, overestimates of the magnitude of the trafficking problem evoke public alarm and action from government officials (Marcus et al., 2011; Weitzer, 2007). The literature on general crime has already observed perceptions of crime levels to be one of the strongest predictors of punitive attitudes (Adriaenssen & Aertsen, 2015; Spiranovic et al., 2012). In addition to evidence that perceptions of human trafficking influence views of prostitution and related policy (Digidiki et al., 2016; Tverdova, 2011), there is a clear need to control for the extent to which individuals are concerned about trafficking through the perceived scope of the problem. Thus, when perceived contribution to trafficking is the dependent variable, concerns about sex trafficking were included as controls.

This was done using two questions on the perceived magnitude of the trafficking problem in the United States. These items were modeled from general measures on the fear of crime. One question asked, "How big of a problem do you think sex trafficking is in the United States?", with categorical responses indicating "A very big problem", "A moderately big problem", or "A small problem/not a problem at all". The second question read, "Do you think sex trafficking in the United States is…" with answer options of "Increasing", "Decreasing", "Staying the same", or "Don't Know". Due to low frequencies in most of these categories, responses were dichotomized to indicate whether participants believe trafficking to be increasing.

Sociodemographic Characteristics. Several social and demographic characteristics were included to control for variation in policy support among different subgroups of the population. Demographic factors consisted of age, sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, and socioeconomic status. *Age* was continuous variable that ranged from 18 to 87 years. Participant sex was initially collected as gender, allowing respondents to select between several gender identities including non-binary and transgender. However, to resolve the issue of missing data and low cell counts in some categories, this variable was reclassified as *sex*. Using participant information from Cloud Research where necessary, this variable indicates if the respondent is a man or a woman. *Race* was categorized into "White", "Black", and "Other", while *ethnicity* was a binary indicator for whether or not the respondent was Hispanic.

Sexual orientation was collected as a multi-category variable where respondents could select their preferred sexual orientation or decline to respond. Due to low frequency

of response categories, this was recoded into a binary indicator for whether or not the respondent identified as heterosexual.

Socioeconomic status was assessed using the respondents' *highest degree of education*, with categories ranging from "Less than high school" to "postgraduate degree". Political ideology was measured by asking respondents identify where they fall on a 7-point scale from 1 = *extremely conservative* to 7 = *extremely liberal*, thus measuring the respondent's *liberalism*. Information was also collected on the respondent's religious denomination and religiosity. *Religion* asked respondents to indicate their religious affiliation. Responses were categorized into *Christian*, *Catholic/Orthodox*, *other religion*, or *not religious*, with *Christian* serving as the reference group. *Religious attendance* was measured with a single item asking how frequently the respondent attends religious services, with responses ranging from 0 = *Never* to 8 = *Several times a week.* Subsequent analyses treat this variable as continuous.

Analysis

The proposed analysis to address RQ1 proceeded in several steps. First, univariate descriptive statistics of negative perceptions and acceptability were calculated for each of type of sex work. Second, bivariate statistics highlight if perceptions significantly differ by type of sex work. To accomplish this, the data were transformed to longform to account for multiple responses within individuals and separate scale scores from the type of sex work. In this structure, each respondent has four rows of data with each row representing their response to one type of sex work. Bivariate hypothesis tests were conducted via one-way random effects ANOVAs to indicate if participants perceive some forms of sex work differently from others in terms of *harm*, *immorality*, *relation to*

trafficking and *acceptability*. This allows us to compare whether the degree of immorality or harm ascribed to prostitution differs from the degree to which those characteristics are attributed to pornography, stripping, or webcamming.

Finally, multiple regressions with Gaussian likelihoods examined differences in perceptions across industries, controlling for respondent characteristics. This was estimated via multilevel models with random intercepts to account for repeated measures within respondents. The estimation of full multilevel models was preceded by estimating the unconditional means model for each outcome and calculating the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). The ICC is a measure of data dependency that represents the proportion of between-person variance over total variance. Large ICC values indicate high data dependency which violates the assumption of independence of observations and thus necessitates the need for a multilevel model in order to ensure the error term is appropriately parsed into within- and between- subject components. Full models were then estimated using additional predictors controlled for in the multiple regression framework. Across all models, the outcome variables for negative perceptions were standardized, as well as the independent variables for moral foundations and sexual liberalism.

For outcomes on type of social problem, logistic regression models were estimated to model the probability of classifying sex work as a *human rights issue* or a *sexuality rights issue*. To account for negative perceptions as a predictor of type of social problem, negative perception scores were averaged across the four types of sex work so each respondent had one harm score, one immorality score, one contribution to trafficking score, and one sex work acceptability score. Since the outcome here asks how

participants view sex work, in general, as a social problem, this question applies to all

types of sex work and thus it is appropriate to average scores across the different types.

Grouping items together by construct for different types of sex work showed high

internal consistency reliability (see last row of Table 2).

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Table 2

Mean Perception Scores by Type of Sex Work and Overall

	Mean (SD)			
	Harm	Immorality	Contributes to trafficking	Acceptability
Webcamming	3.79 (1.2)	4.21 (1.74)	4.15 (1.92)	5.75 (3.11)
Stripping	3.85 (1.21)	4.27 (1.71)	4.33 (1.86)	5.84 (3.08)
Porn	4.12 (1.19)	4.48 (1.73)	4.59 (1.84)	5.32 (3.13)
Prostitution	4.41 (1.19)	4.60 (1.73)	5.10 (1.74)	4.87 (3.06)
Average	4.05 (1.22)	4.39 (1.73)	5.54 (1.87)	5.44 (3.12)
Cronbach's Alpha	0.96	0.98	0.91	0.95

Note: Alphas in the final row refer to the scales averaged across each dimension.

Descriptive statistics for the negative perceptions and acceptability outcomes are

shown in Table 2. The final row of the table shows internal consistency reliability

estimates for each construct when scale items were averaged across types of sex work.

Perceptions of Sex Work by Type

Perceptions of Harm. A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the effect

of sex work type on perceptions of harm. Random effects for each respondent were

included to account for dependency of responses within individuals. The analysis

revealed there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions of harm between at

least two types of sex work ($F(3, 1554) = 212.2$, $p < 0.000$). A post-hoc test using Holm's

correction for multiple comparisons shows that there is a statistically significant

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difference in perceptions of harm between all types except between webcamming and stripping. There was no significant difference in perceptions of harm for stripping compared to webcamming.

A multilevel multiple regression was estimated to examine differences in perceptions of harm across industries while controlling for additional respondent characteristics. An unconditional multilevel model produced an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.81, indicating over 80% of variance is between-person variation. This high degree of between-person variation suggests each respondent has fairly consistent attitudes towards each type of sex work. A hierarchical linear model enables accounting for this data dependency in the analysis.

The full model, including type of sex work, moral foundations, and control variables, is shown in Table 3. The results show that all forms of sex work are perceived as significantly less harmful, relative to prostitution. For webcamming compared to prostitution, the mean level of perceptions of harm decreases by half a standard deviation (-0.50). Pornography, compared to prostitution, only shifts the mean level of perceptions of harm by -0.23 standard deviations, which is the smallest effect of the types of sex work.

Regarding moral foundations, we do not find a significant effect of individualizing foundations on perceptions of harm in sex work, despite harm being one of the constituent moral values of this foundation. The liberty foundation, however, was associated with lower perceptions of harm, such that a standard deviation increase in the mean liberty foundation score decreased the predicted mean of harm perceptions by 0.07 standard deviations. Conversely, a higher score on collective foundations did

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significantly predict greater perceptions of harm, where a standard deviation increase in collective foundations increased the mean level of harm perceptions by 0.18 standard deviations.

In terms of demographic factors, sex, ethnicity, and political orientation had a significant effect on perceptions of harm. On average, women rated sex work as more harmful than men ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). Compared to people who did not identify as Hispanic, Hispanic respondents were also more likely to report greater perceptions of harm ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.02$). Lastly, being more politically liberal decreased predicted mean ratings of harm perceptions ($\beta = -0.07$, $p < 0.01$).

Perceptions of Immorality. A one-way random effects ANOVA found that perceptions of immorality significantly differed by type of sex work ($F(3, 1554) = 61.71$, $p < 0.000$). Post-hoc analysis revealed the mean value of perceptions of immorality was significantly different between webcamming and prostitution ($p < 0.01$), between stripping and prostitution ($p < 0.05$), and between webcamming and porn ($p < 0.05$). There were no significant differences in perceptions of immorality between webcamming and stripping ($p = 0.56$), between stripping and pornography ($p = 0.16$), or between pornography and prostitution ($p = 0.56$).

An unconditional multilevel model returned an ICC of 0.90, indicating high data dependency within individuals where about 90% of total variance is between-person variation. As the Immorality model shows in Table 3, similar to perceptions of harm, all forms of sex work have lower perceptions of immorality compared to prostitution, even while controlling for additional attitudinal scales and demographics. As with the previous outcome, the effect for webcamming ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$) is the largest of the types of

sex work, suggesting it is perceived as the least immoral. Conversely, stripping compared to prostitution decreases the mean immorality rating by 0.19 standard deviations, while pornography only decreases the mean level of immorality by 0.07 standard deviations.

As with the perceptions of harm outcome, individualizing foundations are not significantly associated with perceptions of immorality, but collective foundations are a significant predictor. A standard deviation increase in collective foundations increases the mean level of immorality by 0.23 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$), while the liberty foundation had no significant effect. Demographic predictors related to this outcome include religious attendance, political liberalism, and marital status. Greater religious attendance is associated with greater perceptions of immorality ($\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.02$), while higher levels of political liberalism are associated with lower perceptions of immorality ($\beta = -0.05$, $p = 0.03$). Relative to those that have never married, being married is predicted to shift the mean level of immorality by 0.24 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$).

Perceptions of Sex Work Contributing to Trafficking. Similar results were observed when examining perceptions concerning the extent to which different types of sex work contribute to trafficking. The ANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean perceptions of contribution to trafficking between the types of sex work. Post-hoc analysis with Holm's correction for multiple comparisons found that the outcome significantly differed between all types of sex work except for webcamming and stripping ($p = 0.11$). However, the difference between perceptions of contribution to trafficking between stripping and pornography narrowly reaches significance, with a p-value that actually rounds up to exactly 0.05 when rounding to the

hundredth decimal place. Thus, the conclusion that perceptions of contribution to trafficking differ between stripping and pornography should be taken cautiously.

Multilevel regression found the unconditional model had an ICC of 0.69, indicating about 69% of variation comes from the between-person level. This is a lower level of data dependency than observed for the harm and immorality outcomes, suggesting there is greater within-person variation for this outcome. In the model results shown in Table 3, webcamming, compared to prostitution, decreased the mean level of contribution to trafficking perceptions by 0.51 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$). Stripping decreased the mean level of this outcome by slightly less, -0.41 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$), and the effect was even smaller for pornography ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.01$).

Both individualizing ($\beta = -0.01$, $p = 0.88$) and liberty foundations ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.06$) were not observed to significantly predict perceptions of sex work contributing to trafficking. Collective foundations, however, were a positive predictor of these perceptions. A standard deviation increase in collective foundations is predicted to increase the mean perception that sex work contributes to trafficking by 0.17 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, controls for trafficking concerns were also relevant here. The belief that sex trafficking in the U.S. is increasing, or that it is a very big problem compared to small problem or not a problem, are both positively associated with perceptions that sex work contributes to trafficking. This means that moral foundations had an effect on perceptions of trafficking above and beyond individual concerns for trafficking levels in the U.S.

Perceptions of Acceptability. When examining perceptions of acceptability, a one-way ANOVA found acceptability ratings significantly differed by type of sex work

($p < 0.01$). Post-hoc analysis showed perceptions of acceptability were significantly different between webcamming and prostitution ($p < 0.01$), between stripping and prostitution ($p < 0.01$), and between stripping and pornography ($p < 0.05$). Acceptability ratings did not significantly differ between webcamming and stripping ($p > 0.05$), between webcamming and pornography ($p > 0.05$), or between pornography and prostitution ($p > 0.05$). While webcamming and pornography significantly differed on all previous negative perceptions, perhaps this finding that they are on average rated equally acceptable could be attributed to the role of technology present in both types.

The ICC for the unconditional multilevel model indicated about 80% of variance at the between-person level. Full model results are shown in the final columns of Table 3. Again, all forms of sex work were significantly associated with perceptions of acceptability. However, contrary to prior outcomes, which were all measures of negative perceptions, higher values here indicate more positive views in the form of greater acceptability. In all previous models, webcamming had the largest coefficient, indicating that it was viewed least negatively. Yet here, we observe stripping to have the largest coefficient ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$), so it is not only seen as significantly more acceptable than prostitution, but this effect is larger than the effect of webcamming on perceptions of acceptability compared to prostitution. Yet still, both webcamming ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and pornography ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$), were rated as more acceptable than prostitution.

Table 3

Multilevel Regression predicting Perceptions of Sex Work by Work Type and Moral

Foundations

Predictors	Harm		Immorality		Trafficking		Acceptability	
	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*
Intercept	0.51	**<0.01**	0.37	**0.05**	0.27	0.18	-0.29	0.10
Webcamming	-0.50	**<0.01**	-0.23	**<0.01**	-0.51	**<0.01**	0.28	**<0.01**
Stripping	-0.46	**<0.01**	-0.19	**<0.01**	-0.41	**<0.01**	0.31	**<0.01**
Pornography	-0.23	**<0.01**	-0.07	**<0.01**	-0.27	**<0.01**	0.15	**<0.01**
Individualizing Foundations	-0.07	0.06	-0.06	0.16	-0.01	0.88	0.10	**0.01**
Collective Foundations	0.18	**<0.01**	0.23	**<0.01**	0.17	**<0.01**	-0.20	**<0.01**
Liberty	-0.07	**0.04**	-0.04	0.34	-0.07	0.06	0.07	0.08
Random Effects								
σ^2 Level 1 Variance	0.13		0.09		0.26		0.18	
τ_{00} Level 2 Variance	0.39		0.48		0.42		0.40	
ICC	0.75		0.84		0.62		0.69	
N	519		519		519		519	
Observations	2076		2076		2076		2076	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.475 / 0.867		0.431 / 0.908		0.317 / 0.738		0.416 / 0.820	

Note: Controls included in model estimation but omitted from results table for brevity.

In terms of moral foundations, we see individualizing foundations are positively

associated with perceptions of acceptability while collective foundations are negatively

associated with acceptability. A standard deviation increase in a respondent's average

individualizing foundations score is predicted to increase the mean acceptability rating by

0.10 standard deviations. The effect is twice as large and negative for collective

foundations, where a standard deviation increase in this foundation is predicted to

decrease mean acceptability of sex work by 0.20 standard deviations. We find no effect of the liberty foundation on perceptions of sex work acceptability ($p > 0.05$).

Type of Social Problem

Figure 1

Proportion of Respondents Selecting Each Problem Type Category
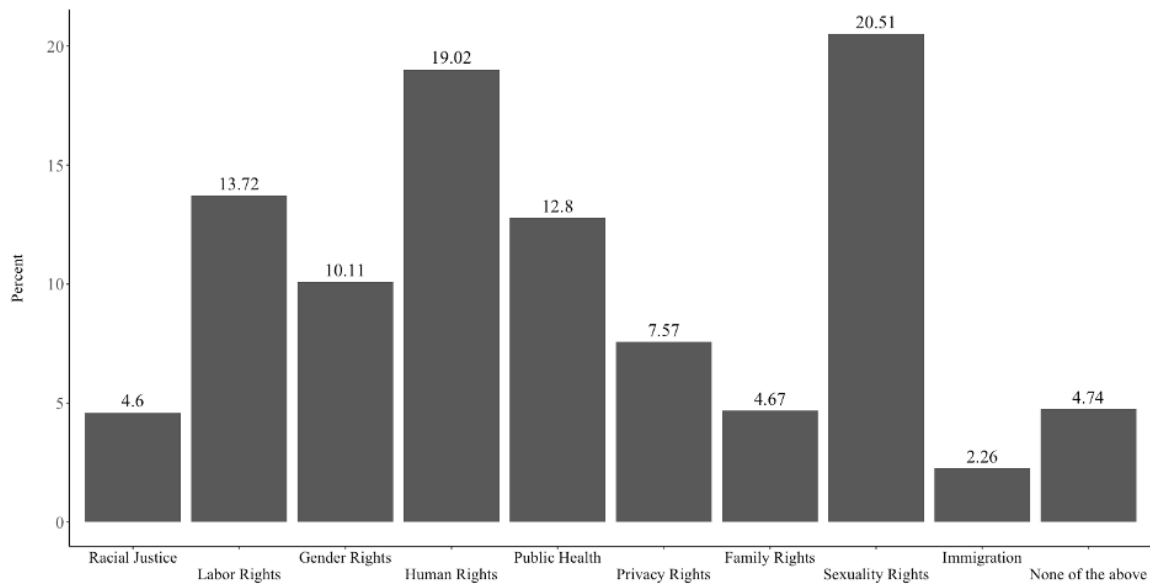
For how respondents would classify sex work as a social problem, first, descriptive statistics were calculated to observe the proportion of the sample that selected each problem type option. Given respondents could select multiple, percentages may not add up to 100%. The distribution of problem types chosen is shown in Figure 1. As shown in the figure, the most common response options were sexuality rights and human rights. Just over 20% of the sample indicated thinking of sex work as a sexuality rights issue, while about 19% reported seeing it as a human rights issue. The third most common problem type chosen was labor rights issue (13.72%). Sex work was least commonly considered an issue of immigration rights, with only 2.26% of the sample selecting this option.

As mentioned in the description of variables, these responses could not be grouped into meaningful clusters. Thus, as a compromise, this outcome was operationalized as two dummy variables indicating whether or not participants see sex work as a human rights issue or a sexuality rights issue. Binary logistic regression examined the effect of perceptions of sex work, moral foundations, and individual factors on the probability of viewing sex work as either of these issue types. These results are shown in Table 4. In the human rights issue model, the results show that considerations of harm, immorality, contribution to trafficking, and acceptability are not significantly related to this outcome. Instead, only four variables significantly predict the probability of conceptualizing sex work as a human rights issue. A standard deviation increase in collective foundations reduces the odds of viewing sex work as a human rights problem by 23%, while the same increase in the liberty foundation increases these odds by 31%. Likewise, greater sexual liberalism increases the odds of thinking sex work to be a human rights issue. Lastly, only one demographic factor had any influence here. People identifying as not religious are significantly less likely than those identifying as Christian to view sex work as a human rights issue ($OR = 0.49$, $p < 0.05$).

The second model of Table 4 shows results of the logistic regression on the probability of viewing sex work as a sexuality rights issue. This was the most frequently chosen problem type within the sample. Again, perceptions of harm, immorality, contribution to trafficking, and acceptability of sex work were not related to the probability of selecting this problem type. As the table shows, only individualizing foundations are significantly associated with this problem conceptualization. Greater mean scores on individualizing foundations increases the odds of selecting sexuality

rights issue by about 34%. No other variables in the model were identified as significant predictors of this outcome.

Table 4

Multilevel Regression on Probability of Viewing Sex Work as a Human or Sexuality Rights Issue

	Human Rights Issue			**Sexuality Rights Issue**		
Predictors	*OR*	*SE*	*p*	*OR*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	0.71	0.39	0.526	0.92	0.52	0.880
SW Harm	1.02	0.21	0.933	0.67	0.15	0.066
SW Immorality	0.88	0.15	0.456	0.83	0.15	0.319
SW Contribution to Trafficking	1.04	0.15	0.782	1.02	0.15	0.906
SW Acceptability	1.04	0.16	0.794	1.31	0.20	0.084
Individualizing Foundations	1.14	0.14	0.288	1.34	0.17	**0.018**
Collective Foundations	0.77	0.10	**0.043**	0.93	0.13	0.584
Liberty	1.31	0.16	**0.022**	1.11	0.14	0.380
Observations		519			519	
R^2 Tjur		0.111			0.165	

Note: Controls included in model estimation but omitted from results table for brevity.

Discussion

Perceptions of Types of Sex Work

Findings from this chapter shed light on how the public conceptualizes sex work as a social problem, and how perceptions of this problem vary across different types of sex work. Specifically, it examined how perceptions differ between webcamming, stripping, pornography, and prostitution. Respondents' perceptions were characterized in terms of *harm*, *immorality*, the extent to which sex work is perceived to *contribute to sex trafficking*, and *acceptability*. In terms of the negative perceptions, webcamming was perceived as the least harmful, least immoral, and contributed the least to trafficking,

while prostitution was rated the highest on these dimensions. The sequence in which types of sex work were rated negatively also appeared to align with the continuum of increasing genital contact (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). Given webcamming was rated the lowest of the sex work types on all the negative scales, we might expect that it would be rated the most acceptable. However, this was not the case, as stripping was actually rated the most acceptable. Although pairwise comparisons showed that the mean acceptability of stripping did not significantly differ from the mean acceptability of webcamming, it is still interesting to note that the type of sex work considered the "least bad" does not necessarily mean it is also the most acceptable.

It is possible that because stripping is a more longstanding profession and has even been welcomed as an aerobic hobby (Pedersen et al., 2015), it is more familiar and thus perceived as the most acceptable, whereas the use of webcams for adult entertainment is a relatively new development that is constantly evolving with changing technology and is largely unregulated (Bleakley, 2014; Stegeman, 2021). However, it is also possible that the observed difference in mean ratings between stripping and webcamming would change with a different sample of respondents.

Regarding the effects of moral foundations, collective foundations were the only moral foundation that significantly predicted attitudes across all perception categories of sex work. Individualizing foundations were only significantly associated with acceptability, while the liberty foundation was associated with perceptions of harm. In each of these models, the effects of these foundations were countered by a stronger, opposing effect of collective foundations. Where individualizing foundations were positively associated with acceptability, collective foundations were negatively

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associated. Likewise, liberty's negative relationship with perceptions of harm was offset by the stronger positive effect of collective foundations. This suggests that strong adherence to moral values rooted in the collective overshadows the effect of individualizing or liberty foundations with regard to differences in perceptions of the problematic attributes of sex work.

Given collective foundations includes purity, it makes sense that greater endorsement of collective foundations would be related to higher ratings of immorality. Previous research has shown ratings of impurity are associated with judgements of immorality (Gray & Keeney, 2015). With regard to another profession, a prior study showed that scientists, compared to control targets, were perceived as more immoral because of perceived violations of binding foundations, especially purity violations (Rutjens & Heine, 2016). These violations may be particularly salient in the context of sex work, where hostility toward the industry has been historically motivated by concerns of moral decay and the spread of venereal disease (Cooke, 2020; Graham, 2017; Weitzer, 2019). Indeed, zero tolerance policing of sex work in Europe has previously been "bolstered by a rhetoric of spatial cleansing and purification" (Hubbard, 2004, p. 1688).

Conversely, although harm is one of the core values making up the individualizing foundations, individualizing foundations were not related to perceptions of sex work harms in this study. This is surprising, as prior work suggests that endorsement of individualizing foundations should "directly challenge institutionalized injustice and exploitation in society" (Strupp-Levitsky et al., 2020, p. 7). The shorter version of the MFQ was used in the present study, and because of this, items like "Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights" were not included. This type of

item would be a useful measure for tapping into the exploitation-based items in the present study's sex work harm scale. It is recommended to use the full 30-item version of the MFQ, as it is difficult to get good measurement with only four items per foundation. It is possible that utilizing the full battery of MFQ questions could yield different results. Additionally, some have argued the individualizing moral foundations can be multidimensional, with the fairness component being perceived as equality or equity (Graham et al., 2018), so it is possible that the fairness aspect of the individualizing foundations could be confounded by the liberty foundation. Future research could explore this relationship further by disaggregating each foundation and using the full battery of items.

Classifying Sex Work as a Social Problem

Lastly, this chapter also attempted to examine how attitudes toward various types of sex work explain how people classify sex work, broadly speaking, into overarching problem frames. Despite prior theoretical discussion and public opinion literature framing sex work regulation as a matter of privacy (Davis, 2015; Moore, 2015; Weitzer, 2019), only 7.6% of respondents in the present study categorized sex work as adhering to this type of issue.

As alluded to earlier, I had initially proposed some form of dimensionality reduction on the problem type question, given participants could select as many problem frames as they felt applied. A latent class analysis was performed to identify groups of respondents with similar perceptions, potentially representing types of voters that require different strategies of persuasion toward decriminalization. Unfortunately, responses to

this multiple response question did not yield a pattern indicative of distinct meaningful groups.

This could be the result of allowing participants to select all that apply. An exploratory class analysis suggested that some respondents had a high likelihood of selecting all options, while others had a low probability of selecting any. Although most respondents chose three or fewer options, over a quarter (27.17%) chose four or more, with some even selecting all nine options. Restricting the response options could have potentially aided in the dimensionality reduction. In future research, it may prove more useful to restrict the number of responses people can choose to two or three, or to allow for rank choice.

Yet the results did show that sex work was predominantly seen as a sexuality rights and human rights issue. The greater weight someone attributed to the liberty foundation, the more likely they were to view sex work as a human rights issue. This positive association was also observed between individualizing foundations and sexuality rights issue. This relationship between the foundations and issue types is intriguing because we might expect the reverse; that the harm and fairness components of the individualizing foundation would demonstrate greater predictability for the human rights issue category (Stolerman & Lagnado, 2020), whereas liberty could be seen as relating more to a sexuality rights issue, where people are not granted full sexual liberty (Davis, 2015).

Additionally, these rights issue categorizations were unrelated to considerations of harm, immorality, contribution to trafficking, or acceptability averaged across different types of sex work. In other words, this analysis observed that perceiving sex work as

harmful, immoral, acceptable, or supportive of trafficking was unrelated to whether or not they considered sex work a human rights or sexuality rights issue. The conversation around sex work generally rests on an assumption that there is something more troubling about it than other forms of women's work (Overall, 1992), and this study sought to investigate *what* it is exactly that is wrong with it. Yet the characteristics that render sex work problematic did not explain variation in how respondents classify this problem.

While sex worker rights activists have advanced the message linking occupational safety and public health to human rights through slogans like "sex workers rights are human rights", this exact framing is still in conflict with the view "that sex work is itself a violation of rights and human dignity and cannot therefore be regarded by law as a legitimate occupation" (Overs & Hawkins, 2011, p. 8). Thus, while this analysis shows that people do indeed view sex work as a human rights issue, future work might further disentangle this perception by investigating whether people align with this classification from a sex worker rights activists' perspective or a radical feminist perspective (Rupert, 2021). This might be a good question to explore through qualitative methods, either providing an opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their choices within the survey, or through a larger discussion taking place within a focus group.

Chapter 5

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 had several objectives related to expanding knowledge on public attitudes toward criminal justice policies surrounding sex work. The task was to utilize how the social problem framework applied to sex work broadly was associated with the goal of prostitution as well as decriminalization preferences. Additionally, this chapter applied the theoretical perspectives proposed by Weitzer (2009b) and Moral Foundations Theory to examine how the frameworks used by prostitution scholars and the role of moral values manifest in the public's consideration of these policies. Specifically, the research questions addressed were:

RQ2: How are perceptions of sex work as a social problem related to the public's prostitution policy preferences?

> 2a. In what ways, or to what extent, does the public endorse a criminal justice response to sex work?
>
> 2b. Does support for decriminalization vary by the actors or venue of the proposed policy?
>
> 2c. How are Moral Foundations associated with prostitution policy preferences?

Dependent Variables

Goal of Prostitution Policy

An item indicating *policy goal* was used to assess whether respondents believe the goal of prostitution policy should be prohibition, abolition, or harm reduction. This was a categorical question in which respondents select one of the three choices. After adjustments from the advisory panel, the final question read, "Regarding the goal of public policy on prostitution, which of the following comes closest to your view?". Response options consisted of "We should prohibit commercial sex and punish those who engage in it", "We should reduce the demand for sexual services and rescue prostitutes", and "We should reduce unsafe working conditions and give prostitutes labor rights". These options are labeled as Prohibition, Demand Reduction, and Harm Reduction, respectively.

Decriminalization Preferences

Policy preferences assessed participants' views on various potential policies regarding prostitution. Respondents were informed that items in this section applied specifically to prostitution and were provided a definition. It was also specified that all questions referred to situations involving consenting adults and excluding other crimes like child sex trafficking or sexual assault. This section was also prefaced with a statement informing respondents of the current legal approach to prostitution in the United States. This is necessary as there is evidence that the legal approach in a country influences the public's opinion on an issue (Escot et al., 2021; Immordino & Russo, 2015), but also that the public may lack a full understanding of what is and is not legal (Lowman & Louie, 2012).

Preferences on decriminalization were gauged using several statements in order to isolate specific aspects of regulation approaches, as recommended by prior research

(Bonache et al., 2021). This section first examined the extent to which the public identifies prostitution as something to be handled by the criminal justice system. Respondents indicated their level of support for two different kinds of responses to prostitution offenses, *jail* or *social services*. Here, participants responded to two questions indicating the extent to which they agree people should be arrested and go to jail for prostitution offenses, and whether they should receive social services instead of jail for such offenses.

Several questions on decriminalization preferences were asked to separate support for a policy by the intended target population and for separate venues. Support for decriminalization by the policy's target population were assessed with three questions using a common question stem in which participants indicated how much they support decriminalizing *buying* sex between consenting adults, *selling* sex between consenting adults, and decriminalizing *third parties* in commercial sex transactions. An additional question was used to examine public support for the Nordic model, in which selling sex is decriminalized, but buying sex remains illegal. The influence of question order on participants' interpretation of subsequent questions is known as priming (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To control for potential priming effects, the survey counterbalanced the presentation of decriminalization policy support questions by randomizing the order of items. All responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly oppose* to *Strongly support*.

Research has found differential support for decriminalization of prostitution by the visibility of the venue in other countries (Lowman & Louie, 2012). To examine whether this is the case in the U.S., respondents were asked to rate their level of support

for decriminalization for brothel prostitution, independent-online prostitution, and street prostitution. The "independent-online" category is meant to portray situations where workers operate independently by using online platforms to advertise and arrange meetings with clients. This is to signify the greater autonomy of independent workers over those working in managed settings, such as with an agency, that may also utilize online platforms (Pitcher, 2015). Participants were given a definition for each type and responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly oppose* to *Strongly support*. The presentation order of these items was also randomized to counter potential order effects.

Advisory Board Suggested Outcomes

Beyond adjustments to existing survey items, the advisory board made a number of recommendations for alternative public opinion questions. While not all could be incorporated due to survey length, several additional questions on policy preferences proposed by the sex worker advisory panel were included in the study. One item assessed whether respondents think prostitution regulations should be created by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors. A single item measured whether participants think possession of condoms should constitute evidence for engaging in prostitution. A third item measured support for sex workers ability to report crimes like rape or sex trafficking without fear of arrest for prostitution. Responses for these three items were given on 7-point scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. An additional policy item targeted police sexual contact with sex workers during stings. Participants were provided a description of sting operations, and then asked their level of support for police being

allowed to engage sexually with sex workers during these stings. Responses were given on a 7-point scale from *Strongly oppose* to *Strongly support.*

Following the recommendations from the advisory panel, two questions were used to measure attitudes and beliefs regarding criminalization. The first assessed whether respondents believe criminalization is an effective way to address exploitation, while the second assessed whether they believe criminalization keeps sex workers safe. These items were measured on 7-point scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*

Independent Variables

Sex Work Ideology

The debate on sex work in both academia and policy is heavily polarized along two primary perspectives: sex work as violence against women and sex work as work (Showden, 2011; Weitzer, 2009b). These opposing positions can be viewed as representing distinct conceptualizations of sex work as a social problem. Likewise, these two camps envision different outcomes from the same policy. For example, the "sex work as violence" position argues that decriminalization would legitimize male entitlement to women and increase objectification and harassment of women outside of the sex industry (Coy et al., 2011; Macleod et al., 2008; Monto & Julka, 2009; Monto & McRee, 2005), while the sexual labor position maintains decriminalization would professionalize the industry, reducing vulnerability to violence and enhancing sexual freedom for all women (Comte, 2014).

To examine the extent to which the public adheres to these ideological orientations toward the commercial sex industry, respondents rated their level of

agreement with statements corresponding to these dominant but opposing theoretical positions. This was guided by Weitzer's (2009a) conceptualization of the oppression, empowerment, and polymorphous paradigms. For example, items assessed the degree to which participants view sex work as objectifying (oppressive), or as sexually liberating (empowering). This also included statements on perceptions of the potential effects of decriminalization.

Instead of developing separate scales for each paradigm, to minimize survey length, the items were presented as semantic differentials with the oppressive position on one end and the empowering position on the other. This approach has been applied similarly to examine philosophical positions toward science (Leach et al., 2000). The response scale consisted of 7 points, with a neutral middle point. Ideally, this middle point would have its own corresponding neutral statement relevant to the statements shown on each end of the spectrum, but the survey software did not make this possible in such a way that it would still be readable to respondents. Thus, the only points labeled on the scale were the anchors.

Certain items were reverse scored so that higher scores are indicative of an empowerment orientation. The internal consistency of the scale was evaluated using Cohen's alpha reliability coefficient. The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.78$). These items were then averaged to create a single score ranging from 1 to 7. In order to achieve consistency with how Weitzer characterizes these paradigms, this average score was broken up into a categorical variable to represent the three perspectives. Average values on the lower end of the scale (3 or less) were coded as falling into the oppressive paradigm. Respondents with average values on the upper end

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(5 and above) were coded into the empowerment paradigm category. Participants with an average score between 3 and 5 were categorized as falling into the polymorphous paradigm. Just under 60% of the sample were coded into this third category.

Type of Social Problem

Dummy variables indicating whether or not respondents perceived sex work as a *human rights issue* or as a *sexuality rights issue* will be included as predictors.

Policy Goal

Where the outcome is support for decriminalization by target population or by venue, a categorical variable indicating the respondents' chosen policy goal will be included as an independent variable. Regression coefficients will report the mean difference of the given policy goal when compared to the reference category, Prohibition.

Moral Foundations

The moral foundations described previously will also be used to examine the relationship between moral foundations and preferences regarding prostitution policy.

Control Variables

The following control variables detailed in the previous chapter will also be included in subsequent analyses: punitiveness, sexual liberalism, confidence in legal system, economic liberalism, age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, religion, religious attendance, political liberalism, country region, marital status, sexual orientation, and concerns about trafficking.

Analysis

RQ2 seeks to understand how perceptions of sex work, moral foundations, and ideological orientation toward sex work are associated with policy preferences. The

analyses were conducted in the following manner. First, descriptive statistics for the sample were generated on all policy-related survey items. Second, the mean level of support for decriminalization was compared across the different population-based and venue-based policies.

Third, several generalized linear models predicting support for various policies related to prostitution were estimated. A multinomial logit regression was used to estimate the effects of *moral foundations*, *sex work ideology*, *human rights issue*, and *sexuality rights issue* on respondents' preferred *policy goal*. This analysis essentially performs two binary logit regressions in which the prohibition goal serves as the reference category to compare to the other two levels of the outcome. This was done using the multinom function from the "nnet" package in R (Venables & Ripley, 2002).

Continuous outcomes were examined via ordinary least squares regressions with robust standard errors. Model diagnostics indicated heteroscedasticity for almost all policy outcomes. Inspection of the residual distribution indicated a pattern between the fitted and residual values, which is a natural extension of the discrete nature of the Likert response scale. Breusch-Pagan Non-Constant Variance Test also indicated heteroscedasticity, indicating the potential for underestimated standard errors and increased likelihood of Type 1 error. Thus, robust linear models with HC3 robust standard errors were estimated using the lm_robust function from the "estimatr" package in R (Blair et al., 2022). The robust standard errors correct for the effect of heteroscedasticity. This type of model was estimated for all outcomes in this section with the exception of policy goal.

Additional model diagnostics were assessed. For all continuous policy outcomes, models were first estimated using only the moral foundations scales as predictors. Then, one at a time, models were run with a quadratic term for each moral foundation. Model specification tests indicated a non-linear relationship between certain moral foundations and outcomes. Diagnostic tests for multicollinearity suggested unproblematic levels of correlation between predictors for all models ($\sqrt{VIF} < 2$).

All continuous outcomes, as well as the continuous independent variables for moral foundations, sexual liberalism, punitiveness, confidence in legal system, and economic liberalism were standardized to z-scores. This standardization allows for easy comparison of coefficients by putting predictors on the same scale. The following regression results report these standardized coefficients.

Results

Policy Goal

Participants were asked about what they feel should be the goal of public policy on prostitution. Their response options consisted of 1) "We should prohibit commercial sex and punish those who engage in it", 2) "We should reduce the demand for sexual services and rescue prostitutes", and 3) "We should reduce unsafe working conditions and give prostitutes labor rights". Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses on this item.

A plurality of respondents (43.3%) chose the third option, labeled "Harm Reduction" as their preferred goal of prostitution policy. The second most popular choice was the demand reduction goal, chosen by 32.9%, while the least popular goal was prohibition (23.8%), although this is the philosophy behind the complete criminalization

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of sex work in the United States. However, nearly 24% is not a trivial proportion, and it is notable that no one goal receives the majority of support. This indicates a lack of consensus in terms of what the goal of our sex work policy should be.

Figure 2

Distribution of Responses for Preferred Policy Goal
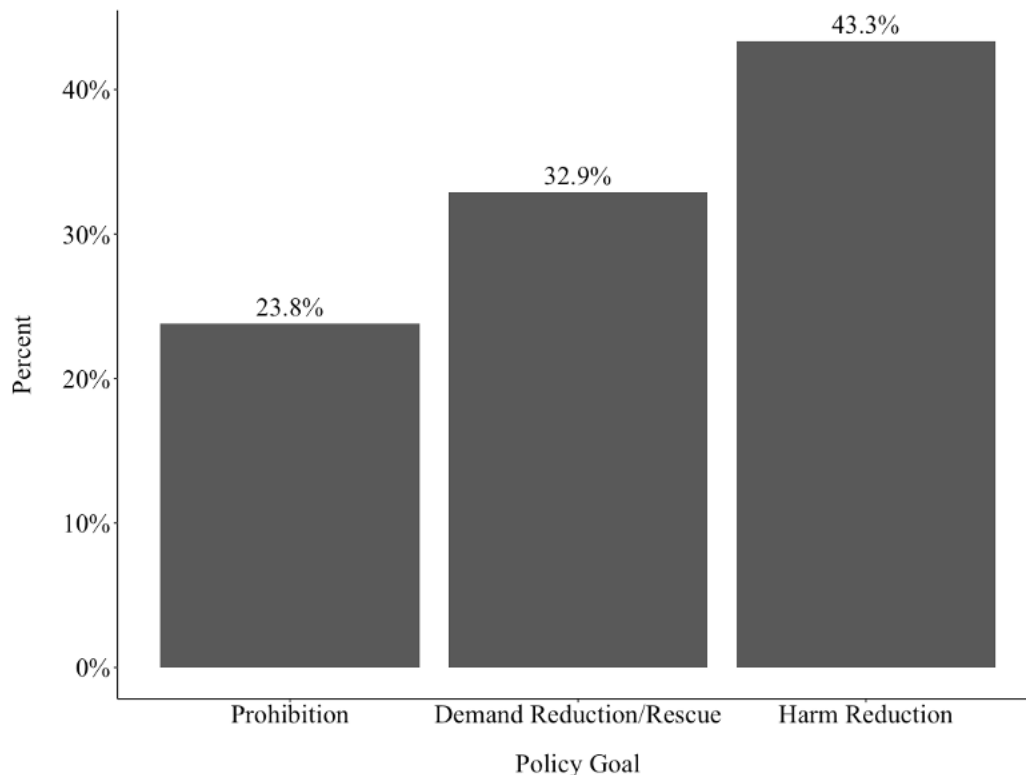
Table 5 shows results from the multinomial logistic regression considering the effects of moral foundations and sex work ideology type as predictors. The first model shows results comparing the demand reduction goal to the prohibition goal, while the second model compares the harm reduction goal to prohibition. As we can see in the first model of Table 5, none of the primary independent variables significantly differentiate the logit probability of selecting the demand reduction goal from the logit probability of selecting the prohibition goal. We do, however, observe several significant factors that

alter the probability of choosing the harm reduction goal. The logit probability of

choosing the harm reduction goal, compared to the prohibition goal, is predicted to

increase by 0.47, or by 60%, when the mean score of individualizing foundation

endorsement increases by one standard deviation ($\beta = 0.47$, $OR = 1.60$, $p = 0.03$).

Conversely, the logit probability would decrease by 0.84 when the mean of collective

foundations increases by one standard deviation ($\beta = -0.84$, $OR = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 5

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Preferred Policy Goal

Predictors	Demand Reduction vs. Prohibition		Harm Reduction vs. Prohibition	
	OR	p	OR	p
Intercept	3.88	0.152	0.37	0.354
Individualizing Foundations	1.07	0.714	1.60	**0.028**
Collective Foundations	0.75	0.186	0.43	**<0.001**
Liberty	0.90	0.557	1.17	0.423
Empowerment Ideology	1.89	0.319	5.85	**0.004**
Oppressive Ideology	0.76	0.397	0.12	**<0.001**
Observations	517			
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.306 / 0.304			

Note: Controls included in model estimation but omitted from results table for brevity.

While ideology type had no significant effect on the probability of choosing the

demand reduction goal, sex work ideology did have an impact on the likelihood of

choosing the harm reduction goal. Those who were classified as holding an

empowerment ideology were more than five times as likely than those with a

polymorphous ideology to select harm reduction as their preferred policy goal ($\beta = 1.77$,

$OR = 5.85$, $p < 0.01$). There was also a large effect observed for the oppressive ideology,

where this orientation toward sex work decreased the logit probability of choosing this

policy goal by 88% compared to those with a polymorphous orientation toward sex work.

Descriptive and Bivariate Statistics for Possible Sex Work Policies

Descriptive statistics for the continuous dependent variables are displayed in

Table 6. All policy outcomes were rated on a 7-point scale, with 7 indicating the

strongest level of agreement or support with the item.

Table 6

Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion for Primary Outcomes

Variable	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Jail for prostitution	4.00	1.95	1	7
Social services	4.49	1.78	1	7
Decriminalization Policy Support				
By Target Population				
Buying sex	4.41	1.93	1	7
Selling sex	4.49	1.91	1	7
Third parties	4.17	1.91	1	7
Nordic Model	3.44	1.72	1	7
By Venue				
Support brothel	4.11	1.97	1	7
Support independent online	4.10	1.95	1	7
Support street	3.77	1.92	1	7
Advisory Board Suggested Outcomes				
Criminalization effective	3.88	1.85	1	7
Criminalization safe	3.35	1.82	1	7
Regulations by SW	4.33	1.79	1	7
Support police contact with SW	2.70	1.88	1	7
Support condoms as evidence	2.84	1.89	1	7
Support report crimes	5.68	1.52	1	7

Table 7 displays bivariate correlations between advisory board suggested items

and support for decriminalization by target population. As shown in the table, attitudes

and preferences on any given policy are often correlated with attitudes toward other

policies. Still, several key findings warrant further attention. First, there is a positive

correlation between support for decriminalization in all policy scenarios, although this

association is strongest between support for decriminalizing buying and decriminalizing

selling $r(517) = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$.

Table 7

Bivariate Correlations Between Criminalization Beliefs and Policy Preferences

	Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6	Var 7	Var 8	Var 9	Var 10
Var 1	--									
Var 2	0.64***	--								
Var 3	-0.17***	0.00	--							
Var 4	0.28***	0.20***	-0.04	--						
Var 5	0.42***	0.38***	-0.07	0.38***	--					
Var 6	-0.28***	-0.28***	0.30***	-0.26***	-0.29***	--				
Var 7	0.05	0.08	0.13**	0.20***	0.15***	-0.06	--			
Var 8	-0.48***	-0.35***	0.27***	-0.17***	-0.25***	0.28***	0.21***	--		
Var 9	-0.48***	-0.37***	0.33***	-0.13**	-0.27***	0.29***	0.21***	0.78***	--	
Var 10	-0.43***	-0.29***	0.30***	-0.08	-0.23***	0.28***	0.21***	0.67***	0.68***	--

Computed correlation used Pearson-method with pairwise-deletion.

Key: 1 = Criminalization is effective for addressing exploitation ; 2 = Criminalization keeps SW safe; 3 = Regulations should be created by SW; 4 = Support for police sexual contact during stings; 5 = Support for condoms as evidence; 6 = Support for SW reporting crimes without arrest; 7 = Nordic Model; 8 = Decriminalize buying; 9 = Decriminalize Selling; 10 = Decriminalize 3rd parties

Unsurprisingly, greater belief in criminalization as an effective way to address

exploitation is negatively correlated with support for decriminalization for sellers, buyers,

and third parties. However, this belief is also negatively associated with support for

regulations created by sex workers and support for sex workers reporting crimes without

arrest. Further, belief in criminalization's efficacy is also positively correlated with

support for police engaging in sexual contact during sting operations ($r(516) = 0.28$, $p <$

0.001).

Given many policy attitudes are correlated, it is worth noting which variables are not related to one another. For instance, the belief that criminalization is an effective way to address exploitation was unrelated to support for the Nordic model. This is interesting given that curbing exploitation and victimization is the primary aim of this policy model (Bender et al., 2019). Also unrelated to support for the Nordic model is the support for sex workers' ability to report crimes without fear of arrest. In fact, although not significant, this relationship is actually negative.

Support for a Criminal Justice or Non-Criminal Justice Response to Prostitution Offenses

The mean level of support for whether people should be arrested and go to jail for prostitution offenses was exactly at the midpoint of *neither agree nor disagree*. A paired t-test determined that the mean score for this item ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.95$) was significantly different from the mean level of agreement that people should go to social services instead of jail for prostitution offenses ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.78$), $t(518) = -3.67$, $p < .001$.

To address whether the public sees sex work as an appropriate area for criminal justice intervention, linear regression models with robust standard errors examined variation in support for sending people to jail for prostitution offenses and sending people to social services for prostitution offenses. Primary independent variables for these analyses were *ideology orientation*, *human rights issue*, *sexuality rights issue*, and *moral foundations*. Results of these regression analyses are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Linear Regression on Support for Jail or Social Services Intervention for Prostitution

Offenses

	Support for Jail			**Social Services**		
Predictors	*Estimates*	*SE*	*p*	*Estimates*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	0.21	0.23	0.354	-0.46	0.27	0.086
Individual Foundations	-0.06	0.04	0.166	0.14	0.06	**0.017**
Collective Foundations	0.14	0.05	**0.011**	-0.12	0.06	**0.045**
Liberty	-0.04	0.04	0.351	-0.00	0.06	0.937
Empowerment Ideology	-0.70	0.11	**<0.001**	0.04	0.12	0.726
Oppressive Ideology	0.40	0.11	**<0.001**	-0.06	0.13	0.642
Human rights issue	-0.10	0.07	0.197	0.05	0.09	0.613
Sexuality rights	-0.14	0.08	0.072	0.22	0.10	**0.028**
Observations	519			519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.473 / 0.434			0.225 / 0.167		
AIC	1215.194			1415.452		

Note: Controls included in model estimation but omitted from results table for brevity.

Examining first the support for jail outcome, these results indicate that the model

explained 43.4% of variance in the outcome (Adjusted R^2 = .434, $F(36, 482)$ = 17.47, $p <$

.001). As shown in the table, collective foundations were the only moral foundation

associated with support for jail time. Since both the outcome and predictors were

standardized, this indicates that one standard deviation increase in collective foundations

is predicted to increase the mean level of support for jail time by 0.14 standard

deviations. Compared to respondents categorized into the polymorphous paradigm, the

predicted mean level of support for jail decreases by 0.70 standard deviations for those

aligned with an empowerment ideology, while it increases by 0.40 standard deviations for

those aligned with an oppressive ideology. It is also observed that greater punitiveness

and greater confidence in the legal system both predict higher mean support for jail time for prostitution offenses.

Shifting to support for social services in lieu of jail for prostitution offenses, it is notable that this model explains a smaller proportion of variance in the outcome (Adjusted $R^2 = .167$, $F(36, 482) = 4.32$, $p < .001$). The analysis finds both individualizing and collective foundations are significantly associated with the outcome, but in opposite directions. This is consistent with the theoretical division of these foundations, in which binding foundations are associated with more punitive and conservative attitudes while individualizing foundations are associated with more liberal attitudes (Graham et al., 2009; Silver & Silver, 2017). Considerations of liberty, however, do not significantly predict support for social services in lieu of jail time for prostitution offenses. We also find that many of the variables significantly associated with support for jail time are not predictive of support for social services, such as sex work ideology type, punitiveness, and confidence in legal system.

Support for Decriminalization by Policy Target Population

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of a proposed policy's target population on support for decriminalization. Results showed that there were statistically significant differences in support for decriminalization depending on who the policy would apply to (F(3, 5700) = 239.8, $p < 0.01$). A post-hoc test using Holm's correction for multiple comparisons showed that there is no significant difference in mean support for decriminalization of sellers compared to buyers ($p > 0.05$). However, there is a statistically significant difference in support for decriminalizing both of these groups compared with support for decriminalizing third parties ($p < 0.001$). We also

observe that the mean level of support for the Nordic model statistically differs from the mean level of support for decriminalizing sellers, buyers, and third parties.

Separate regressions were estimated to model for support for decriminalizing buying sex, selling sex, 3rd parties, and support for the Nordic model. This was accomplished via ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors to examine between respondent variation in support for each policy. First, a model was estimated with only *moral foundations* as predictors. This serves as an initial bivariate check to determine the effect of moral foundations before including competing predictors. Then, subsequent models added *sex work ideology*, *policy goal*, *human rights issue*, and *sexuality rights issue* as primary independent variables, along with demographic characteristics.

Table 9 shows results of the model looking exclusively at the effect of moral foundations on support for decriminalization of selling sex, buying sex, and third parties. For the selling sex model, the adjusted R^2 indicates this model explains about 9% of variance in the outcome (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.089$, $F(3, 515) = 20.02$, $p < .001$). We can see that the effect of individualizing and liberty foundations are consistent in both magnitude and direction, where a standard deviation increase in either foundation is predicted to increase the mean level of the outcome by 0.15 standard deviations. Collective foundations are negatively associated with the outcome, where a one standard deviation increase in average collective foundations score is predicted to decrease the mean level of support for decriminalization by 0.33.

Table 9

Linear Regression Predicting Support for Decriminalization by Target Population

Predictors	Selling			Buying			Third Parties		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.00	0.04	1.000	0.00	0.04	1.000	-0.00	0.04	1.000
Individual Foundations	0.15	0.05	**0.002**	0.10	0.05	**0.045**	0.11	0.05	**0.029**
Collective Foundations	-0.33	0.05	**<0.001**	-0.31	0.05	**<0.001**	-0.38	0.04	**<0.001**
Liberty	0.15	0.05	**0.005**	0.22	0.05	**<0.001**	0.19	0.05	**<0.001**
Observations	519			519			519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.094 / 0.089			0.094 / 0.089			0.121 / 0.116		

Results of the second model in Table 9 show the effect of moral foundations on support for decriminalizing sex buyers. These results are fairly consistent with what was observed for selling sex. Both individualizing and liberty foundations are positively associated with the outcome, but in this model the effect of liberty is stronger. A standard deviation increase in the liberty foundation is predicted to increase the mean level of support for decriminalizing buying sex by 0.22 standard deviations. As with the seller model, collective foundations here are negatively associated with support for decriminalizing sex buying ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Findings from the third-party model are also consistent with the results observed for sellers and buyers. A standard deviation increase in individualizing and liberty foundations is predicted to increase support for decriminalizing third parties by 0.11 and 0.19 standard deviations, respectively. Meanwhile, a standard deviation decrease in collective foundations is predicted to decrease mean support for decriminalizing third parties by 0.38 standard deviations.

Table 10 investigates whether the effects of moral foundations persist after controlling for additional attitudinal scales and individual characteristics. Examining support for decriminalizing selling sex in Table 10, we see this model, compared to the

model in Table 9, explains substantially more variation in the outcome (Adjusted R^2 = 0.418, $F(38, 478) = 12.73$, $p < .001$). However, the effects of moral foundations lose their predictive ability with the inclusion of additional variables. This is observed for almost all foundations across all outcomes, with the exception of collective foundations on support for decriminalizing third parties. A standard deviation increase in collective foundations decreases the mean level of support for decriminalizing third parties by 0.15 standard deviations ($p = 0.01$).

Table 10

Moral Foundations on Support for Decriminalization with Additional Variables

Predictors	Selling			Buying			Third Parties		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.77	0.25	**0.002**	-0.60	0.26	**0.020**	-0.37	0.24	0.124
Individual Foundations	0.09	0.05	0.074	0.05	0.05	0.294	0.10	0.05	0.052
Collective Foundations	-0.02	0.05	0.643	-0.01	0.05	0.781	-0.15	0.06	**0.012**
Liberty	0.04	0.05	0.353	0.09	0.05	0.055	0.09	0.05	0.093
Demand Reduction Goal	0.29	0.12	**0.012**	0.22	0.11	**0.044**	0.24	0.11	**0.033**
Harm Reduction Goal	0.70	0.13	**<0.001**	0.58	0.13	**<0.001**	0.43	0.13	**0.001**
Empowerment Ideology	0.32	0.10	**0.003**	0.40	0.10	**<0.001**	0.37	0.12	**0.002**
Oppressive Ideology	-0.33	0.12	**0.006**	-0.35	0.11	**0.002**	-0.32	0.12	**0.006**
Human rights issue	0.01	0.08	0.885	0.03	0.08	0.742	-0.01	0.08	0.895
Sexuality rights	0.16	0.08	0.050	0.15	0.08	0.068	0.16	0.08	0.065
Observations	517			517			517		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.461 / 0.418			0.451 / 0.408			0.420 / 0.374		

Note: Controls included but not shown here. Full tables shown in Appendix A.

Examining the effect of policy goal, across all outcomes we see that when the goal of policy is demand reduction, as opposed to prohibition, the mean level of support for decriminalization increases. This is observed even with support for decriminalizing buyers ($β = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$), despite the fact that the demand reduction goal explicitly

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targets the consumers. However, when the goal of policy is harm reduction, the effect on support for decriminalization is much greater. For instance, while a demand reduction goal, compared to prohibition, increased mean support for decriminalizing selling sex by 0.29 standard deviations, this increase was 0.70 standard deviations for the harm reduction goal compared to prohibition. This contrast was less stark in the third-party model, where mean level of support for decriminalization increased by 0.24 standard deviations when the goal was demand reduction compared to prohibition, and 0.43 standard deviations when the goal was harm reduction compared to prohibition.

Sex work ideology has a significant effect on support for decriminalization. We observe that, compared to a polymorphous ideology, holding an empowerment ideology is predicted to increase support for decriminalization of selling sex by 0.32 standard deviations, while this effect is about equal in magnitude but opposite in direction for the oppression ideology ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$). This is an interesting finding, as theoretically, those ascribing to the oppression framework would view sex workers as exploited and in need of rescue and should thus advocate for their legal freedom. However, for those in the oppression paradigm, decriminalization may represent a dangerous path that would enable human traffickers and increase the number of people exploited in the industry (Hughes, 2005; Weitzer, 2007).

This pattern is also observed with support for decriminalizing buyers and third parties. However, the effect of an empowerment ideology is largest in the buyer model, where the empowerment perspective is predicted to increase mean support for decriminalizing buyers by 0.40 standard deviations, compared to the polymorphous ideology ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, having an oppressive ideology compared to

polymorphous decreases support for sex buyers' decriminalization ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$).

An empowerment ideology increases the predicted mean level of support for

decriminalizing third parties by 0.37 standard deviations while the oppressive ideology

decreases predicted support by 0.32 standard deviations. There was no observed

association between whether or not people categorized sex work as a human rights issue

or sexuality rights issue and support for decriminalization in any model.

Support for the Nordic Model

Support for the Nordic model differs from previous outcomes because it explicitly

designates the legal status of both sides of the commercial sex transaction, where the

provider is decriminalized but the consumer is criminalized. Results of the regression

analysis are shown in Table 11. Model 1 reports results from the moral foundations only

model, while model 2 introduces additional predictors and demographic characteristics.

In both cases, we find lower levels of explained variation than was observed with the

previous outcomes, where the larger model only explains about 7% of variation in the

outcome (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.070$, $F(39, 475) = 2.40$, $p < .001$).

In examining the relationship between moral foundations and the outcome, model

specification tests found a non-linear relationship between individualizing foundations

and support for the Nordic model. The predicted mean values of support for the Nordic

model by individualizing foundations are shown in Figure 3. When people's endorsement

of individualizing foundations is quite low (several standard deviations below the mean),

the effect of an increase in individualizing foundations predicts an increase in support for

the Nordic model. However, as people approach the mean value of individualizing

foundations, this relationship reverses, where an increase in individualizing foundations

actually predicts a decrease in support for the Nordic model.

Table 11

Moral Foundations on Support for the Nordic Model

Predictors	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.08	0.05	0.107	0.12	0.30	0.675
Individual Foundations	-0.22	0.06	**<0.001**	-0.16	0.07	**0.027**
Individual Foundations^2	-0.08	0.03	**0.005**	-0.10	0.03	**0.001**
Collective Foundations	0.13	0.05	**0.020**	0.10	0.07	0.136
Liberty	0.02	0.06	0.660	0.01	0.06	0.852
Demand Reduction Goal				0.15	0.13	0.234
Harm Reduction Goal				0.11	0.15	0.458
Empowerment Ideology				-0.24	0.15	0.122
Oppressive Ideology				-0.29	0.14	**0.032**
Human rights issue				0.13	0.10	0.173
Sexuality rights				-0.06	0.10	0.510
Observations	517			515		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.039 / 0.032			0.140 / 0.070		

Note: Controls included but not shown here. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

In model 1, a standard deviation increase in collective foundations shifts the

predicted mean level of support for the Nordic model by 0.13 standard deviations.

Compared to prior models, where collective foundations were negatively associated with

support for the proposed policy, the positive association here could reflect a tendency of

people with strong binding foundations to favor incremental changes that exert fewer

disruptions to the social order (Silver & Silver, 2021). However, collective foundations

are no longer significantly associated with the outcome after controlling for other

predictors and individual characteristics in model 2. We find liberty does not significantly

predict support for this policy in either model. In fact, few variables in the larger model significantly predicted support for the Nordic model.

Figure 3

Predicted Values of Support for Nordic Model by Individualizing Foundations
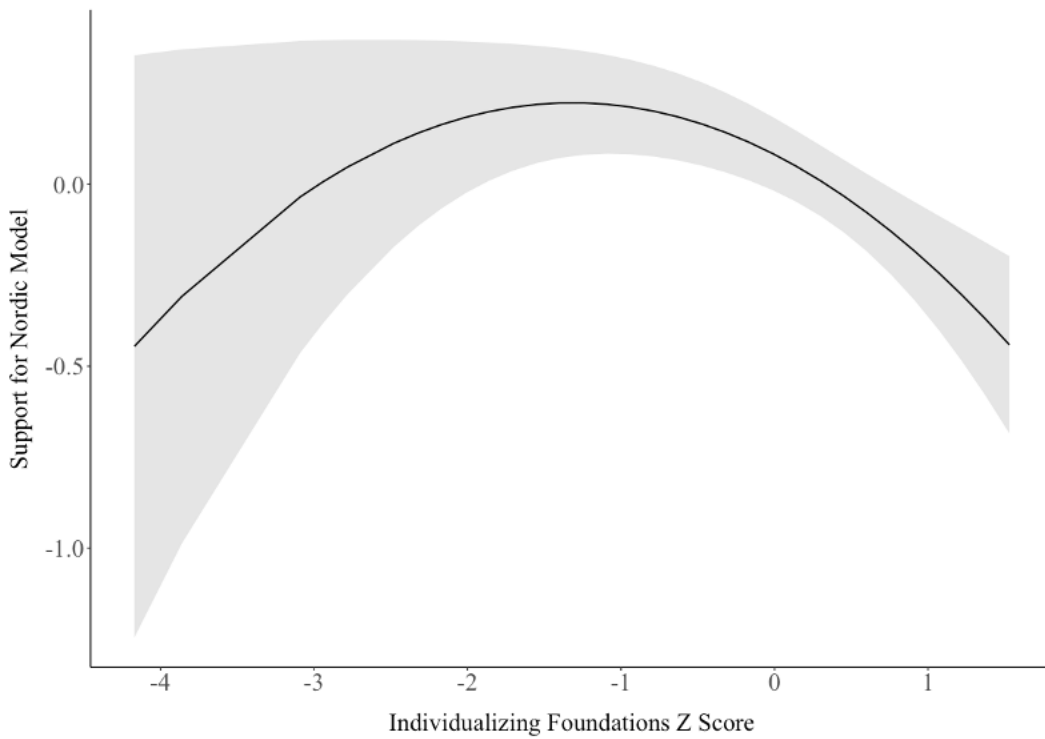
Particularly of interest is the lack of association between the demand reduction policy goal and support for this model. The goal of demand reduction explicitly aligns with this policy model, where the criminalization of buyers attempts to reduce the demand while the decriminalization of providers allows greater opportunity for their "rescue". Results did show the oppressive ideology type, compared to the polymorphous ideology type, is associated with significantly less support for the Nordic model (β = -0.29, $p < 0.05$). Like the previous results, this may reflect a perspective that rejects the notion of voluntary prostitution and calls for suppressing all forms of prostitution

(Hughes, 2005; Outshoorn, 2005). The empowerment ideology is also negatively associated with support; however, this relationship does not reach statistical significance.

Support for Decriminalization by Venue

As with the previous outcomes, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of venue on support for decriminalization. The ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in support for decriminalization by venue $(F(2, 5703) = 133.1, p < 0.01)$. A post-hoc test with Holm's correction showed there was a significant difference in mean support for decriminalizing street sex work compared to brothel or independent online sex work $(p < 0.001)$. However, there was no significant difference in support for decriminalization between brothel and independent online sex work $(p > 0.01)$.

Separate regressions were estimated to model for support for decriminalizing brothel prostitution, internet-facilitated prostitution, and street prostitution. Similar to support for decriminalization by target population, this was accomplished via an ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors to examine between respondent variation in support for each policy. Support for decriminalization in each setting was first regressed on the moral foundations only. Results of this analysis are shown in Table 12. We find that the association between moral foundations and support for decriminalization is consistent across the three venue sites. Individualizing foundations does not significantly predict support for decriminalization in any of the venues, while collective foundations are negatively associated, and the liberty foundation is positively associated with the outcome. A one standard deviation increase in the mean collective foundation score is predicted to decrease the mean level of support for decriminalizing

brothel sex work by 0.37 standard deviations. We see the same effect size for decriminalizing independent online sex work (β = -0.37, $p < 0.01$), and a slightly smaller coefficient for decriminalizing street sex work (β = -0.33, $p < 0.01$). A standard deviation increase in the liberty foundation is predicted to increase the mean level of support for decriminalization in brothel, online, and street sex work by 0.25, 0.22, and 0.21 standard deviations, respectively.

Table 12

Support for Decriminalization by Venue with Moral Foundations Only

	Brothel			Independent Online			Street		
Predictors	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.00	0.04	1.00	-0.00	0.04	0.99	-0.00	0.04	1.00
Individualizing Foundations	0.06	0.05	0.18	0.04	0.05	0.46	0.01	0.05	0.92
Collective Foundations	-0.37	0.05	**<0.01**	-0.37	0.04	**<0.01**	-0.33	0.05	**<0.01**
Liberty	0.25	0.05	**<0.01**	0.22	0.05	**<0.01**	0.21	0.05	**<0.01**
Observations	519			518			519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.123 / 0.118			0.116 / 0.110			0.095 / 0.090		

Table 13 presents results of the larger model, with *moral foundations, policy goal, sex work ideology*, *human rights issue*, and *sexuality rights issue* as the primary independent variables. These models, which also control for demographic characteristics and additional attitudinal scales (full results shown in Appendix A), account for a much larger proportion of variance in the outcome compared to the models with only moral foundations. For both brothel and online sex work, variables in the model account for over 50% of variance in the outcome, while 45.6% of variance is explained by the variables in the model for street sex work.

Table 13

Support for Decriminalization by Venue with Additional Predictors

Predictors	Brothels			Independent Online			Street		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.47	0.19	**0.02**	-0.71	0.20	**<0.01**	-0.43	0.22	0.06
Individual Foundations	0.04	0.04	0.38	-0.02	0.04	0.66	-0.02	0.05	0.64
Collective Foundations	-0.07	0.05	0.13	-0.02	0.05	0.67	-0.03	0.05	0.52
Liberty	0.10	0.04	**0.01**	0.08	0.04	**0.04**	0.10	0.05	**0.04**
Demand Reduction Goal	0.19	0.10	0.07	0.29	0.10	**<0.01**	0.26	0.10	**0.01**
Harm Reduction Goal	0.58	0.12	**<0.01**	0.57	0.12	**<0.01**	0.48	0.13	**<0.01**
Empowerment Ideology	0.41	0.09	**<0.01**	0.52	0.09	**<0.01**	0.44	0.12	**<0.01**
Oppressive Ideology	-0.50	0.11	**<0.01**	-0.31	0.10	**<0.01**	-0.24	0.11	**0.03**
Human rights issue	-0.03	0.07	0.71	-0.03	0.07	0.63	-0.08	0.08	0.27
Sexuality rights	0.11	0.07	0.12	0.17	0.08	**0.03**	0.18	0.08	**0.02**
Observations	517			516			517		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.596 / 0.563			0.575 / 0.541			0.496 / 0.456		

Note: Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Results here show that collective foundations no longer significantly predict support for decriminalization in any of the venues. The liberty foundation, however, still positively predicts support for decriminalization, where a one standard deviation increase in this foundation predicts a 0.10 standard deviation increase in support for brothel and street sex work, and a 0.08 standard deviation increase in support for online sex work. Participants choosing the demand reduction policy goal do not significantly differ from those who chose the prohibition goal in terms of their support for decriminalizing brothel sex work. However, people who prefer a demand reduction approach did exhibit significantly more support for decriminalizing online sex work (β = 0.29, $p < 0.01$) and street sex work (β = 0.26, $p < 0.01$) than prohibitionists. People who chose the harm reduction goal have a predicted mean level of support for decriminalizing brothel sex

work that is 0.58 standard deviations higher compared to the prohibition goal. This sizable effect could be attributed to the recognition of additional safety and protection measures in place at indoor establishments (Brents & Hausbeck, 2005). Though participants who chose the harm reduction policy goal also demonstrate greater mean support for online ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < 0.01$) and street ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$) sex work.

We also find the effect of sex work ideology is significantly associated with support for decriminalization by venue. Compared to the polymorphous ideology, people with an empowerment orientation exhibit greater support for decriminalizing brothels ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$), online sex work ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), and street sex work ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$). The largest difference is observed with online sex work, where an empowerment ideology is predicted to increase the mean level of support for decriminalizing this type of sex work by 0.52 standard deviations compared to a polymorphous ideology. This could stem from the notion that online sex work has served as a powerful revenue-generating mechanism and created an economic market where women dominate over men, which validates this as a lucrative and empowering enterprise for women (Bleakley, 2014; Brents & Sanders, 2010).

People with an oppressive orientation toward sex work, compared to polymorphous, demonstrated lower support for decriminalization in all cases. The smallest mean difference was seen with street sex work, where an oppressive ideology predicted a 0.24 standard deviation decrease in support for decriminalization compared to a polymorphous ideology. The greatest difference between the oppressive and polymorphous ideologies were with brothel sex work, where an oppressive ideology predicted half a standard deviation decrease in support for decriminalization.

People who classified sex work as an issue of human rights or sexuality rights did not significantly differ in mean support for brothel decriminalization from those who did not select these issue categories. There was also no difference in support for decriminalizing online or street sex work between those who did and did not conceptualize sex work as a human rights issue. However, there was a significant difference in support for decriminalization in these venues between respondents who did and did not select sexuality rights issue. Compared to those who did not, those who did choose this issue category have a predicted mean support for decriminalizing online sex work that is 0.17 standard deviations greater and a predicted mean 0.18 standard deviations greater for street sex work.

Advisory Board Suggested Outcomes

Beliefs About Criminalization. Regression analyses were estimated using each of the advisory board-recommended variables as outcomes. The first two to be presented here are the *criminalization effective* and *criminalization safe* outcomes. These outcomes measure the extent to which respondents agree that criminalization is an effective way to address exploitation and that criminalization keeps sex workers safe. Table 14 provides regression output for these two outcomes. Collective foundations are significantly positively associated with both outcomes, where a standard deviation increase in collective foundations predicts the mean score for criminalization is effective and mean score for criminalization is safe will both increase by 0.19 standard deviations. Individualizing foundations are not significantly associated with either outcome. Model specification tests observed that the liberty foundation had a nonlinear association with

both outcomes. Figure 4 plots the predicted mean values of both outcomes across the mean values of the liberty foundation.

Table 14

Regression on Belief in Whether Criminalization is Effective for Addressing Exploitation and Whether It Keeps Sex Workers Safe

	Criminalization Effective			Criminalization Safe		
Predictors	β	*SE*	*p*	β	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	0.29	0.25	0.246	0.91	0.28	**0.001**
Individualizing Foundations	-0.06	0.05	0.228	-0.04	0.05	0.416
Collective Foundations	0.19	0.06	**0.001**	0.19	0.06	**0.001**
Liberty	-0.04	0.04	0.362	-0.10	0.05	**0.040**
Liberty^2	-0.08	0.03	**0.006**	-0.07	0.03	**0.018**
Empowerment Ideology	-0.52	0.12	**<0.001**	-0.45	0.12	**<0.001**
Oppressive Ideology	0.34	0.11	**0.003**	0.02	0.13	0.869
Human rights issue	-0.11	0.08	0.167	-0.09	0.09	0.307
Sexuality rights	-0.23	0.09	**0.009**	-0.23	0.09	**0.013**
Observations	519			519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.415 / 0.370			0.282 / 0.227		

Note: Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Holding an empowerment ideology toward sex work is negatively associated with both of these beliefs. However, the oppression ideology, compared to a polymorphous ideology, is only associated with the belief that criminalization is effective. As with all previous models, there was no significant difference in mean response on the outcome between people who did and did not consider sex work to be a human rights issue. People who thought of sex work as a sexuality rights issue compared to those who did not show significantly less agreement in the belief that criminalization is an effective way to

address exploitation (β = -0.23, $p < 0.01$) and in the belief that criminalization keeps sex workers safe (β = -0.23, $p < 0.05$).

Figure 4

Predicted Values of Beliefs About Criminalization by Liberty Foundation Z Score
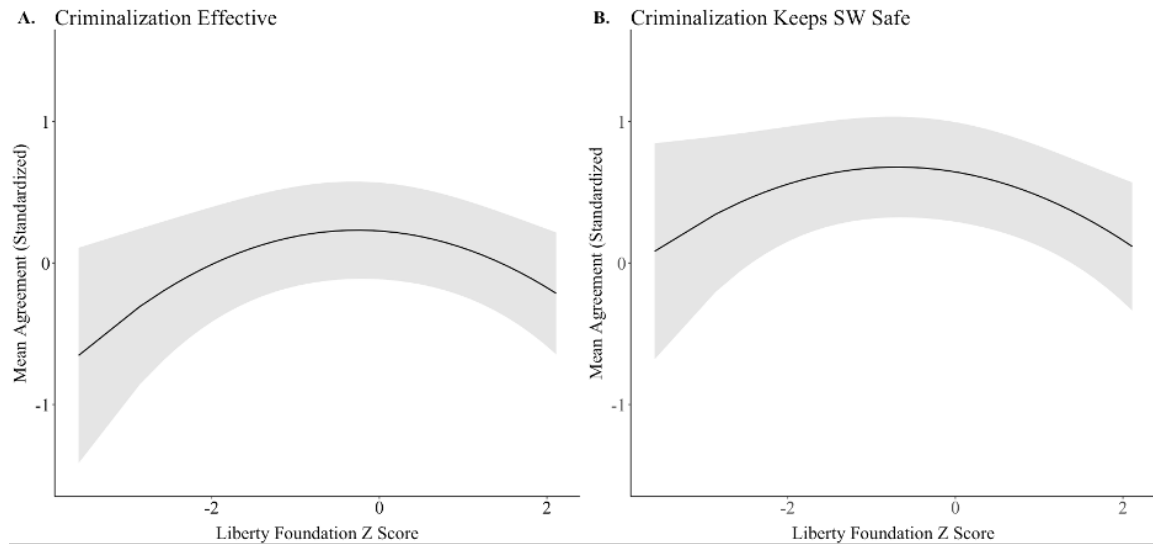
Support for Prostitution Regulations Being Made by Sex Workers and Trafficking Survivors. Multiple regression with robust standard errors examined the effect of predictors on level of agreement with the statement "Prostitution regulations should be created by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors". The results, displayed in Table 15, show that the model accounts for 14.3% of variance in the outcome (Adjusted R^2 = 0.143, $F(37, 481)$ = 3.86, $p < .001$). We find that a one standard deviation increase in the mean of individualizing foundations is predicted to increase the mean level of agreement by 0.12 standard deviations ($p < 0.05$). Beyond that, the only other factors that significantly predicted agreement here were sexual liberalism (β = 0.15, $p < 0.01$) and age (β = -0.01, $p < 0.01$). Model specification tests did find a nonlinear effect for the liberty foundation, which is depicted in Figure 5 Panel A. Although this predictor did not

significantly predict variation in the outcome, this model with a polynomial term was a significantly better fit to the data than the model without.

Table 15

Regression on Support for Sex Workers and Trafficking Survivors Making Prostitution Regulations

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.10	0.28	0.719
Individualizing Foundations	0.12	0.06	**0.043**
Collective Foundations	-0.03	0.07	0.647
Liberty	-0.01	0.05	0.868
Liberty^2	-0.06	0.03	0.093
Empowerment Ideology	0.10	0.13	0.448
Oppressive Ideology	-0.06	0.14	0.642
Human rights issue	0.04	0.09	0.643
Observations	519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.204 / 0.143		

Note: Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Support for Police Engaging in Sexual Contact During Sting Raids.

Regression analysis examined the effect of predictors on level of support for police engaging in sexual contact with sex workers while carrying out prostitution stings. The results are shown in Table 16. These results indicate the model explains 13.6% of variance in level of support for police engaging sexually with sex workers during raids (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.136$, $F(37, 480) = 4.20$, $p < .001$). Individualizing foundations is negatively associated with support for this police behavior ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$), as is the liberty foundation ($\beta = -0.19$, $p = 0.001$). Model specification tests found a non-linear effect of liberty on the outcome (Figure 5 Panel B); however, this quadratic term was not significant. While collective foundations have generally been associated with more

punitive attitudes, and punitiveness is indeed a positive predictor here ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.01$), collective foundations were not significantly associated with this outcome ($p > 0.05$), possibly because these actions would violate collective concerns of purity.

Table 16

Support for Police Ability to Engage in Sexual Contact During Sting Operations

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.30	0.28	0.288
Individualizing Foundations	-0.14	0.06	**0.015**
Collective Foundations	0.09	0.06	0.114
Liberty	-0.19	0.05	**0.001**
Liberty^2	-0.07	0.04	0.055
Empowerment Ideology	-0.30	0.11	**0.007**
Oppressive Ideology	0.03	0.14	0.860
Human rights issue	0.03	0.09	0.767
Sexuality rights	-0.24	0.10	**0.014**
Observations		518	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.198 / 0.136	

Note: Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Further, while prior models often observe coefficients for punitiveness and sexual liberalism in opposite directions, here, we see that both variables are positively associated with the outcome (Punitiveness $\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.01$; Sexual Liberalism $\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$; See Appendix A for full results).

Support for Possession of Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution. Participants were asked to rate the level to which they agree that police should be allowed to use possession of condoms as evidence of prostitution. The adjusted R^2 showed this regression model explained 19.7% of variance in the outcome. The results in Table 17 show that individualizing and collective foundations both significantly predict support for

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using condoms as evidence, with coefficients that are almost equal in magnitude but opposite in direction.

Figure 5

Predicted Values of Outcomes by Liberty Foundation Z Score
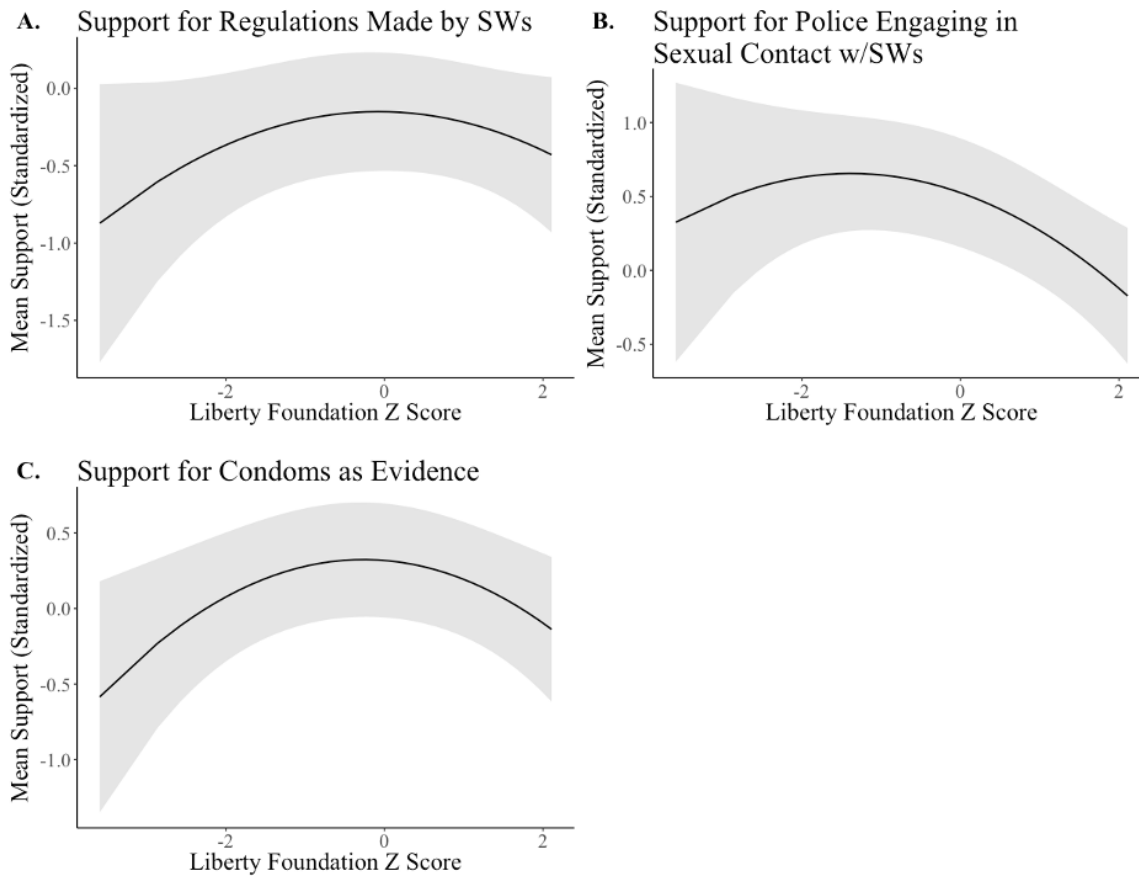
Maintaining an empowerment ideology toward sex work, as opposed to a polymorphous ideology, is negatively associated with support for condoms as evidence policies ($\beta = -0.39$, $p = 0.001$). However, those with an oppressive ideology of sex work do not significantly differ from those in the polymorphous group in terms of support for using condoms as evidence.

Table 17

Support for Possession of Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.21	0.27	0.447
Individualizing Foundations	-0.20	0.06	**<0.001**
Collective Foundations	0.21	0.06	**<0.001**
Liberty	-0.04	0.05	0.379
Liberty^2	-0.08	0.03	**0.006**
Empowerment Ideology	-0.39	0.11	**0.001**
Oppressive Ideology	0.01	0.13	0.959
Human rights issue	-0.06	0.09	0.466
Sexuality rights	-0.17	0.09	0.063
Observations		518	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.255 / 0.197	

*Note:* Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Support for Sex Workers Reporting Crime Without Fear of Arrest for

Prostitution. Participants were asked to rate the level to which they agree that sex

workers should be able to report crimes like rape or sex trafficking to the police without

being arrested for prostitution. Regression results on the effect of *moral foundations*, *sex*

work ideology, *human rights issue*, and *sexuality rights issue*, are shown in Table 18.

Notably, all moral foundations significantly predict support for this outcome. A standard

deviation increase in individualizing foundations is associated with a 0.29 standard

deviation increase in the mean level of support for allowing sex workers to report crimes

without fear of arrest. Conversely, a standard deviation increase in collective foundations

predicts a 0.25 standard deviation decrease in mean support. Lastly, a standard deviation

increase in the mean level of liberty foundation predicts a 0.17 standard deviation

increase in mean support.

Results also show that having an empowerment ideology toward sex work, compared to a polymorphous ideology, is predicted to increase the mean level of support for sex workers reporting crimes without arrest by 0.25 standard deviations. Support here does not significantly differ for those with an oppressive ideology, compared to the polymorphous ideology. Interestingly, beyond these factors, the only other significant predictor was political liberalism ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$). Controls for sexual liberalism, punitiveness, confidence in the legal system, concerns about trafficking, and demographic characteristics were all unrelated to support for allowing sex workers to report crimes without arrest.

Table 18

Support for Sex Workers' Immunity when Reporting Crimes

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.68	0.25	**0.007**
Individualizing Foundations	0.29	0.06	**<0.001**
Collective Foundations	-0.25	0.06	**<0.001**
Liberty	0.17	0.04	**<0.001**
Empowerment Ideology	0.25	0.11	**0.021**
Oppressive Ideology	0.07	0.13	0.558
Human rights issue	0.14	0.08	0.077
Sexuality rights	0.07	0.09	0.464
Observations		519	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.326 / 0.276	

Note: Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Discussion

This chapter examined public attitudes toward various prostitution policies with a focus on its criminal status. Findings revealed that a harm reduction framework was the preferred goal of prostitution policy in the U.S. by a plurality of respondents (43.3%),

relative to a demand reduction or prohibition goal. There was significantly more support

for sending people to social services compared to sending people to jail for prostitution

offenses. We observed that ideological orientation toward sex work was predictive of

support for the jail outcome, but it did not predict support for social services. Compared

to the more flexible polymorphous position, people who aligned with the oppression

paradigm demonstrated stronger support for incarceration, while those in the

empowerment paradigm showed less.

Support for Decriminalization by Target Population and Venue

Prior work has suggested public attitudes toward sex work regulation may vary

depending on the parties being punished and the type of sex work under regulation

(Cunningham & Shah, 2018; Lowman & Louie, 2012). Examination of support for

decriminalization by target population and venue revealed significantly less support for

decriminalizing third parties, compared to buyers and sellers. Past work has shown that

certain seemingly innocuous third-party behaviors, such as driving a sex worker, can

inadvertently constitute a violation of human trafficking law without the perpetrator's

knowledge (Horning & Stalans, 2022), despite public opinion work that suggests such

activities should not be charged as trafficking (Community United for Safety and

Protection, 2016). Thus, an important avenue for future research in this area would be to

examine whether opposition to decriminalization of third parties coincides with support

for legal stipulations that designate certain individuals as facilitating trafficking.

Finding that support for decriminalization did not significantly differ between

buyers and sellers is consistent with prior work in the U.S. and Canada that shows greater

support for punishing sex workers and clients equally over punishing one party more than

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another (Lowman & Louie, 2012; Moore, 2015). However, since prior work finds negative beliefs about the people who pay for sex is associated with greater support for regulation, this suggests that the perspective of sex buying as a deviant and exploitative behavior is either largely absent in the population or such views are equally applied to selling sex (Peled et al., 2020; Valor-Segura et al., 2011). We also found significantly less support for decriminalizing street sex work compared to brothel and online sex work, which is consistent with existing research that shows more favorable attitudes toward indoor sex work, which is seen as safer and more legitimate, compared to street sex work (Cunningham & Shah, 2018; Lowman & Louie, 2012). Despite these differences, the factors associated with support for decriminalization were mostly consistent across the target populations and venues.

Although prior work has shown moral foundations to predict positions on moral and political issues above and beyond political orientation (Barnett et al., 2018; Christie et al., 2019; Napier & Luguri, 2013; Silver & Silver, 2021), few foundations were associated with support for decriminalization once additional predictors and controls were included. Harm is supposedly the most accessible and important moral intuition and translates across moral content (Schein & Gray, 2015), so it is surprising that we would not find an association here for any of the venues or target populations except for the Nordic model. The effect of collective foundations did not persist once competing predictors were included in any of the support for decriminalization models, with the exception of third parties. This suggests that the effect of this foundation on support for decriminalization is potentially mediated by other variables. Future work could explicitly examine this possibility through mediation analysis.

Surprisingly, an oppression ideology, compared to the polymorphous ideology, was associated with significantly less support for decriminalization in all cases, including selling. The oppression paradigm views sex workers as victims, and from this perspective it is considered counterproductive to arrest them for their victimization (Helderop et al., 2023), so it is peculiar that participants aligned with this view would exhibit significantly less support for their decriminalization. When specifically asked about the Nordic model, which exempts sex workers of criminal liability and focuses criminal punishment on the consumer side, we still observe a negative association between the oppression ideology and support for this model. This does not align with the theoretical conceptualization of the oppression paradigm, in which its subscribers see sex work as sexual slavery (Weitzer, 2009b). One possible explanation for this could be that, compared to those with a polymorphous ideology who theoretically attribute more agency to sex workers, those in the oppression paradigm may still view criminalization as a useful tool for rescuing victims.

Further, it is interesting that the demand reduction policy goal was not predictive of support for this model. This policy goal made explicit reference to "rescuing" prostitutes, so it would be expected that those viewing sex work as oppressive and exploitative would support such a policy model more than those who believe everyone engaging in the commercial sex market should be punished. Given the unexpected findings surrounding this policy model and its unique relationship to moral foundations, future work could attempt to further explain variation in support for the Nordic model.

In most cases, social problem classification, either human rights or sexuality rights, did not predict support for decriminalization. This could be because these

categories are broad enough that they cannot sufficiently distinguish between people, which would also support why they were the most popular response options. For instance, two people could view sex work as a human rights issue but hold very different views on prostitution policies. For instance, one person could consider the human rights issue at hand a matter of the right to work and make a living safely without persecution, while another could view it as a human rights issue because people are coerced into sexual slavery (Davis, 2015). A similar contrast could be made regarding sexuality rights, where someone may see the issue as a limit on sexual freedom, and someone else with the sexual slavery view would see it as the complete absence of sexual freedom. Further, classifying sex work as a human rights issue was unrelated to *any* policy outcomes, including additional items submitted by the advisory board.

Advisory Board Outcomes

Two of those outcomes suggested by the sex worker advisory board examined public beliefs about sex work criminalization, namely whether it is effective for addressing exploitation and whether it keeps sex workers safe. It was observed that individualizing foundations were not significantly associated with either belief, but this is particularly interesting for the latter. A core component of individualizing foundations is care/harm, which is related to the ability to feel and dislike the pain of others (*Moral Foundations Theory | Moralfoundations.Org*, n.d.). Since the MFQ harm items are tapping into a sensitivity to suffering and concern for protecting the vulnerable, we might expect this foundation to have some relationship with beliefs about safety. This lack of association could result for several reasons. It is possible that the harm foundation is associated with the belief that criminalization keeps sex workers safe, but this

relationship is masked when aggregated into the larger individualizing foundation.

Another possible explanation is that this outcome is not asking about the value of keeping sex workers safe, but whether criminalization accomplishes that. Thus, the importance of harm/caring for others may not materialize because of a difference in what is valued versus what is actually achieved.

Regardless, while non-significant, it is worth noting the direction of the individualizing foundation coefficient, which is actually negative, suggesting people who place greater value on the individualizing foundations have weaker belief in the ability of criminalization to keep sex workers safe. While the association between collective foundations and punitive attitudes has been consistently demonstrated in the current study and prior research (O'Hear & Wheelock, 2019; Silver & Silver, 2017), this analysis extended current knowledge by examining not just support for penal measures, but belief in their efficacy. We found a positive association between collective foundations and belief that criminalization is effective for addressing exploitation and keeping sex workers safe. People that place greater value on binding foundations may be more inclined to believe criminalization is successful in these respects because they are inclined to support authority figures and the laws they have put in place, and a positive outlook on our country's policies can be considered a show of loyalty.

Few factors predicted agreement that prostitution regulations should be created by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors. As stronger belief in criminalization is an effective way to address exploitation belief was negatively correlated with support for sex worker-created regulations and sex worker immunity, sex workers rights led organizations and decriminalization advocacy efforts could focus public education

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campaigns on the inefficacy and harmful consequences of current policy as a means of shifting support for these types of legislation.

Public opinion in the U.S. has become gradually more liberal, and it is thought these trends may be a consequence of people's adherence to moral foundations (Eriksson & Strimling, 2015). The results of this chapter showed the ability of moral foundations to predict attitudes toward sex work regulation and related policies is limited in the presence of additional attitudinal scales. Prior research suggests arguments grounded in individualizing foundations are "generally acceptable", meaning they are relevant to everyone, while binding foundations are "limitedly acceptable" because they are only relevant to some people, making arguments based in the former more effective in driving opinion change (Eriksson et al., 2022). Yet, individualizing foundations were unrelated to support for decriminalization across groups and venues. Perhaps, because individualizing foundations are generally acceptable and relevant to everyone, criminal justice attitudes are better suited to be distinguished according to endorsement of collective foundations.

The effect of moral foundations was particularly salient in predicting support for sex workers' criminal immunity when reporting crimes. In this model, all three foundations had a significant effect. This points to the role of morality in attitudes toward selective immunity from criminal law. This kind of policy was passed in the Vermont House of Representatives but failed to pass in the State Senate in 2020 (An Act Relating to Human Trafficking and Prostitution, 2020). Future attempts to enact this kind of policy might benefit from targeting the binding foundations that hinder support here. Appeals to the foundations of authority and loyalty by, for example, emphasizing how this type of policy would bolster law enforcement's ability to go after criminals and strengthen the

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country/community, may encourage people to overcome their objections as they see how this policy aligns with their own values.

It is also worth noting that this was one of the few outcomes where participants heavily favored one side over the other. Support for sex workers' ability to report crimes without fear of arrest, police sexual contact during stings, and possession of condoms as evidence were highly skewed, with strong support for the former and strong opposition for the two latter. However, the majority of other continuous policy outcomes, the modal response was the neutral option. Where there was overall more support for decriminalizing buying and selling sex than there was opposition, there was still a substantial proportion who were ambivalent. So, while advocates and scholars portray a strong sense of polarization in this debate, the general public is much more undecided when it comes to their stance on prostitution policy.

Chapter 6

Research Question 3

This chapter examines how various arguments deployed by scholars and advocates in the debate for decriminalization are rated as convincing by members of the general public. Additionally, it examines whether the effectiveness of arguments varies as a function of whether it is the provider or consumer side that is being decriminalized.

The present study employs a vignette experiment to examine the extent to which the public subscribes to various arguments levied by advocates in favor of decriminalization to address the following research questions:

RQ3: Which arguments for sex work decriminalization do people find most convincing?

3a. Does the effect of arguments depend on whether they are in reference to decriminalizing buying sex or selling sex?

3b. Is there meaningful variation in the effect of anti-criminalization arguments across different groups of the US public?

Dependent Variables

Convincingness Ratings

After respondents were presented with an argument against criminalization of prostitution, they responded to two questions asking the extent to which they found it a convincing argument for decriminalizing buying sex and decriminalizing selling sex.

Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Extremely unconvincing* to *Extremely convincing*. This raw score was centered to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. This standardized rating of convincingness serves as the dependent variable in the following analysis. To control for potential priming effects, the survey randomized the presentation order of questions for decriminalizing buying and selling.

Nordic Policy Support

An issue among advocates for decriminalization is whether sex work should be fully or partially decriminalized, where the latter entails keeping the act of buying sex a crime. This aspect of the debate abounds in the literature on sex work and human trafficking policy (Hughes, 2008; Huschke & Schubotz, 2016; Raymond, 2004b; Shively et al., 2012), and also materializes in legislation and lobbying disputes ("2022 Bills That Endanger Sex Workers," 2022; An Act Relating To Criminal Offenses -- Commercial Sexual Activity, 2021; An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors, 2021; NY State Assembly Bill A7069A, 2021; Rupert, 2021).

Opponents of partial decriminalization emphasize that this policy does not provide a holistic solution and still has a negative impact on sex workers (Benoit et al., 2017; Sanders & Campbell, 2014). Despite this, the Nordic model has become increasingly popular and been adopted in numerous nations (McCarthy et al., 2012). Thus, this study also employed a vignette explicitly addressing the Nordic model to investigate whether the claims against this policy effectively decrease support for it.

As shown in the last chapter, participants rated their support for an asymmetric criminalization model, also known as the end-demand, Swedish, or Nordic model, in which selling sex is decriminalized but buying sex remains illegal. Following random

assignment to the previously described vignetted, all participants were shown the

following argument against this particular policy model:

> Evidence suggests that criminalizing buyers, but not sellers, still has negative impacts for sex workers. This approach is meant to reduce the demand for sex work, but this means sex workers must compete for clients through lowering their prices and limits their ability to negotiate safer sex practices, such as condom use.

Respondents then responded to the same question in which they rated their level

of support for or opposition toward decriminalizing selling sex while buying sex remains

criminalized. Responses were given on a 7-point scale from *Strongly oppose* to *Strongly*

support.

Independent Variables

Experimental Conditions

Arguments against criminalization were determined by examining sex work

policy and advocacy and selecting the most prevalent narratives. A total of six possible

vignettes were constructed with each adopting a different problem frame. These problem

frames addressed topics of privacy, female sexuality, labor rights, public health, crime

victimization, and social justice for marginalized communities. The full text of the

vignette conditions and their argument label are displayed in Table 19.

Participants were randomly assigned to see three of these vignettes and rate the

degree to which they found them convincing. Random assignment ensures respondents

who receive one argument are on average similar to respondents who receive a different

argument. This allows for isolation of the effect of particular arguments and makes

selection bias an implausible source of confounding. Given a prior poll found freedom

from government interference as the most persuasive argument for decriminalization

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(Moore, 2015), the privacy argument was used as the reference vignette type in regression models. This was also the vignette that was allocated to the most respondents (N = 270).

Policy Target Group

A topic of contention in the debate for decriminalization is whether it should apply only to sex workers, or whether the consumer side should be decriminalized as well. This is evidenced by the debate waged over Washington D.C.'s Community Health and Safety Act of 2019, which stalled over the controversy of decriminalizing buyers (Lang, 2019). Thus, an aim of this paper was to examine whether the arguments for decriminalization have a differential influence between sex work buyers and sellers. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which arguments were seen as convincing both for decriminalizing buying sex and decriminalizing selling sex. A binary indicator for whether ratings were given in response to buyers or sellers was included as an independent variable.

Control Variables

Pre-Vignette Policy Support. The degree of support or opposition for decriminalization for both buying and selling sex were measured earlier in the survey prior to presentation of arguments against criminalization. These ratings were given on a 7-point scale ranging from *Strongly oppose* to *Strongly support*. The pre-test values given for selling sex were included to control for participants' baseline level of support for decriminalizing this behavior.

Table 19

Experimental Vignette Content

Privacy: Current laws criminalizing prostitution are a form of government interference in people's private lives. Adults should be able to engage in consensual sex without government interference. People should be able to do sex work either without government interference or as a form of work that is permitted to operate like any other free market activity.

Female Sexuality: Current laws criminalizing prostitution have served to oppress and control female sexuality. Its criminalization and stigmatization reflect society's aim to control female sexuality in order to keep women in a reproductive role. People should be able to profit from their sexuality and choose the terms of their consent, without being confined by patriarchal notions of female sexual activity.

Public Health: Current laws criminalizing prostitution represent a significant threat to the health of individuals and communities. Criminalization increases the risk of unsafe sex practices because police can confiscate condoms as evidence. Sex workers have a greater risk of STIs, and often can't access healthcare because of the risk of being arrested, or due to discrimination and mistreatment by medical staff. People should be able to access healthcare without the fear of being arrested.

Labor Rights: Current laws criminalizing prostitution drives the industry underground into unsafe conditions. Criminalization denies sex workers the legal protections and employment rights afforded to every other occupational group, like retirement planning and unemployment benefits. Sex work is just like any other occupation, where people sell their labor in exchange for money. People should be able to engage in sex work with access to the same employment and legal rights of any other occupation.

Crime Victimization: Current laws criminalizing prostitution make sex workers more likely to experience sexual and physical violence. Criminalization makes them more vulnerable to theft, rape, and assault by bad actors because they can't rely on protections from the law. People should be able to report crimes without fear of arrest.

Social Justice: Current laws criminalizing prostitution have disproportionately fallen on marginalized communities and have contributed to the problem of mass incarceration. Its criminalization is part of broader systemic issues that have led to a disproportionate number of people of color ending up in the criminal justice system. Additionally, the laws tend to overly target people from sexual minority groups, like the LGBTQ community.

Another variable was included to control for whether support for decriminalization between buying and selling sex differed for the respondent at baseline. I estimated the difference between pre-test support for decriminalizing selling and buying sex using respondents' raw scores. Support for decriminalizing buying sex was subtracted from their support for decriminalizing selling sex, so that positive values indicate greater support for selling as opposed to buying, while negative scores indicate greater support for decriminalizing buying compared to selling. A difference score of 0 signifies the participant supports or opposes decriminalizing both equally.

Attitudinal Scales. The moral foundations described previously were included to examine whether moral foundations are associated with the degree to which respondents find arguments convincing for decriminalization. The categorical variable for sex work ideology is also incorporated, with the polymorphous ideology serving as the reference category. Additionally, other attitudinal measures for punitiveness, sexual liberalism, confidence in legal system, and economic liberalism were included. All of these variables have been scaled to z-scores to allow for comparison of the size of coefficients.

Demographic Characteristics. Sociodemographic characteristics consisting of age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, religion, religious attendance, political liberalism, country region, marital status, and sexual orientation were accounted for in the following analysis.

<div align="center">

Analysis

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To proceed with the analysis, the data were transformed to longform to account for each participant responding to the post-vignette questions multiple times. This also made it possible to separate the convincingness rating from the policy's target group (i.e.,

buyers, sellers). To examine how various arguments are perceived as convincing for decriminalization, and whether the effect of arguments varies between buyers and sellers, multiple regressions with Gaussian likelihood were estimated via multilevel models with random intercepts to account for repeated measures within respondents. The estimation of multilevel models was preceded by estimating the unconditional means model for convincingness score and calculating the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). The unconditional multilevel model returned an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.72, indicating 72% of variance is between-person variation. This suggests some degree of stability in each respondent's position across vignettes, indicating most of the variation comes from characteristics of the respondents, as opposed to the nature of the argument.

Following this, several models were estimated. The first included only the vignette type and target group, while a subsequent model included an interaction between the vignette and group. The interaction term communicates whether the effect of arguments varies between buyers and sellers, addressing Research Question 3a. A final model was estimated, accounting for *sex work ideology* and *moral foundations* and demographic characteristics.

To address Research Question 3b, whether there is meaningful variation in the effect of anti-criminalization arguments across different groups of the US public, a series of models were estimated where an interaction was estimated between the vignette condition and demographic factors, examining the effect of each demographic one at a time. All analyses were conducted in R statistical software using the "lme4" package.

To examine whether support for the Nordic model significantly decreased following the presentation of its counter argument, a dependent t-test was conducted using participants' ratings of support before and after the vignette.

Results

Model 1 of Table 20 reports the results of the model including only the vignette type and whether the policy was targeted at buying or selling sex as independent variables. These results show that, on average, arguments were rated as more convincing for decriminalizing selling sex compared to decriminalizing buying sex ($B = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$).

The results indicate that, compared to the argument for privacy, a public health frame and a crime victimization frame are significantly more convincing, while the social justice argument is significantly less convincing. Given the size of coefficients for crime victimization and social justice arguments, these can be interpreted as the most and least convincing, respectively, across all conditions.

This distinction is visible in Figure 6, which presents pairwise contrasts of the mean differences with 95% confidence intervals between each of the vignette types. We observe the largest mean difference between the crime victimization and social justice arguments. The confidence intervals also indicate which arguments did not significantly differ in terms of convincingness when the confidence interval passes through the zero line. While the crime victimization and public health arguments were the most convincing, these two did not significantly differ from each other in terms of their influence on respondents.

Table 20

Multilevel Model on Ratings of Convincingness for Decriminalization

	Model 1			**Model 2**		
Predictors	β	*SE*	*p*	β	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	-0.04	0.05	0.433	-0.65	0.16	**<0.001**
Female Sexuality	-0.05	0.04	0.171	-0.06	0.04	0.095
Public Health	0.12	0.04	**0.001**	0.11	0.04	**0.001**
Labor Rights	-0.03	0.04	0.375	-0.04	0.04	0.236
Crime Victimization	0.13	0.04	**<0.001**	0.12	0.04	**0.001**
Social Justice	-0.11	0.04	**0.003**	-0.11	0.04	**0.002**
Selling Sex	0.05	0.02	**0.008**	0.05	0.02	**0.008**
Decrim. Selling Support				0.36	0.04	**<0.001**
Selling-Buying Support difference				-0.00	0.02	0.925
Individualizing Foundations				0.11	0.04	**0.002**
Collective Foundations				-0.00	0.04	0.931
Liberty				0.01	0.03	0.854
Empowerment ideology				0.11	0.08	0.166
Oppressive ideology				-0.40	0.08	**<0.001**
Random Effects						
σ^2		0.28			0.28	
τ_{00}		0.72 ResponseId			0.33 ResponseId	
ICC		0.72			0.54	
N		519			519	
Observations		3110			3110	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2		0.008 / 0.724			0.393 / 0.723	
AIC		6346.646			6184.257	

Note: Controls included but not shown here for brevity. Full table of results shown in Appendix A.

Figure 6

Pairwise Contrasts of Vignette Types
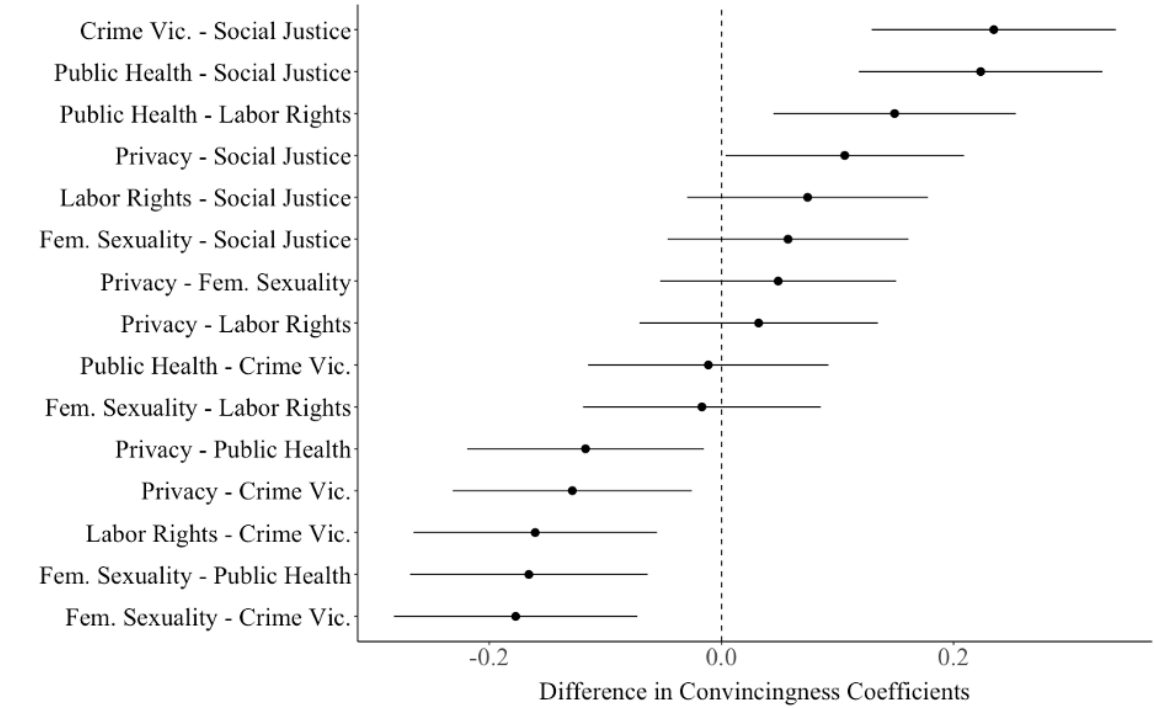
A model with an interaction between vignette type and target policy group was then estimated and compared to the model without. Comparison of model AICs suggested the more parsimonious model without the interaction was a better fit to the data. There was also no significant interaction between any of the vignette types and the policy target group. This suggests that the effect of argument type does not depend on whether it is reference to sex buying or sex selling.

This is illustrated in Figure 7, which presents mean convincingness ratings with 95% confidence intervals for the interaction of vignette type and group. While there are some slight differences in convincingness between buying and selling sex, these differences are within the bounds of uncertainty, so the effect of argument type does not appear to vary by group. This evidence demonstrates that although arguments are

generally seen as significantly less convincing for decriminalizing buying sex compared to decriminalizing selling sex, this effect is consistent across vignettes.

Figure 7

Predicted Mean Scores of Convincing for Decriminalization by Vignette Type
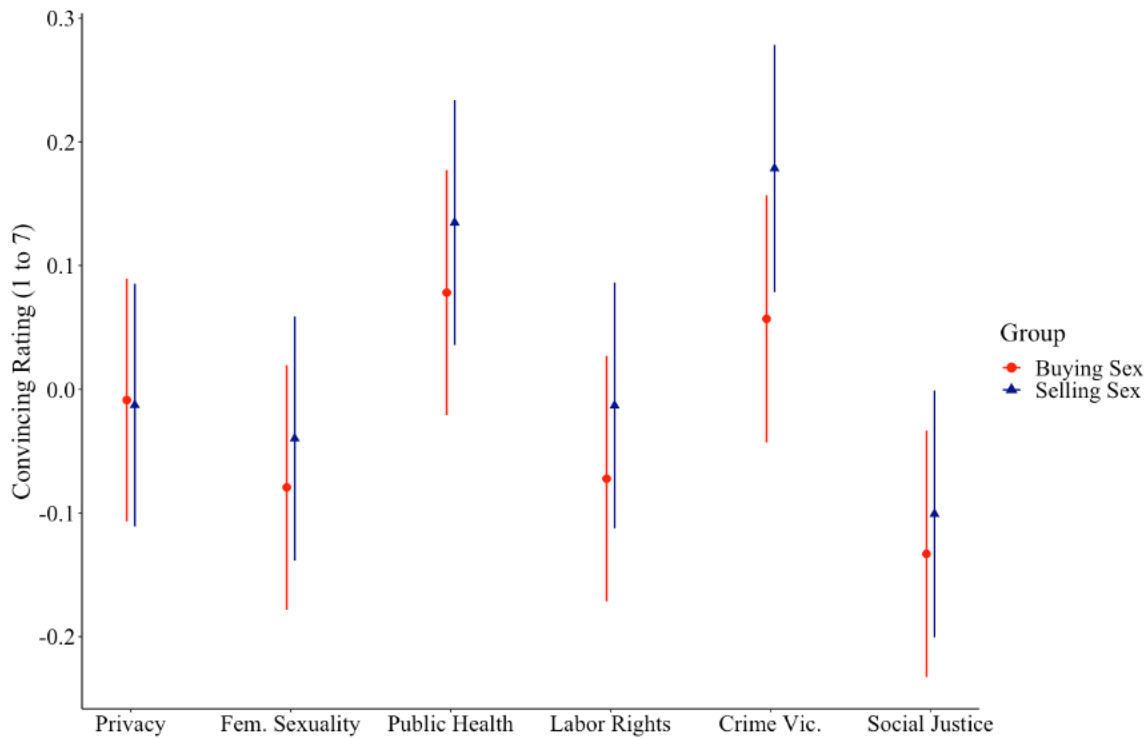
Model 2 of Table 20 introduces pre-vignette level of support for decriminalization, additional attitudinal scales, and demographic characteristics. The stability of vignette effects in light of additional variables is a characteristic of successful randomization to respondents. The conditional R^2 indicates that both fixed and random effects collectively explain 72.3% of variance in the outcome. Again, the public health and crime victimization arguments were rated as significantly more convincing than the privacy argument, while the social justice vignette is significantly less convincing than the privacy argument. The degree to which arguments were seen as convincing for

decriminalization were related to pre-existing levels of support, where higher baseline support for decriminalizing selling sex compared to buying sex was significantly positively associated with the outcome. For every 1-point increase in respondents' baseline support for decriminalizing selling sex over buying sex, the mean convincingness rating of arguments is predicted to increase by 0.09 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$).

A one standard deviation increase in individualizing foundations shifts the predicted mean level of convincingness by 0.15 standard deviations, while neither the collective nor liberty foundation are significant predictors. Compared to those categorized as falling into the polymorphous paradigm, those with an empowerment ideology generally rate arguments as significantly more convincing for decriminalization ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$). Those with an oppressive orientation toward sex work have a predicted mean convincingness score 0.58 standard deviations lower than those in the polymorphous group.

Effect of Arguments by Demographics

A series of models was also estimated to examine whether the effect of arguments was conditional on individual characteristics. Comparison of BICs between models with and without interactions for gender, race, age, ethnicity, education, religion, religious attendance, political liberalism, country region, marital status, and sexual orientation all supported the non-interaction model as the best fit for the data. This suggests that the effects of arguments are consistent across the distribution of age, race, and other respondent characteristics.

Counter Argument to Nordic Model

To examine whether support for the Nordic model significantly decreased following the presentation of its counter argument, a dependent t-test was conducted using participants' ratings of support before and after the vignette. A dependent t-test showed no significant difference in mean support for the Nordic model before and after reading this argument ($t(515) = 0.46$, $p = 0.65$). This indicates that the counter claims presented regarding sex workers' weaker negotiation position in a partially decriminalized environment did not have an effect on respondents' level of support for this policy.

Discussion

Research Question 3 investigated the effect of various arguments on support for decriminalization. The first component employed a vignette experiment to examine how some of the primary arguments deployed in this debate are rated as convincing for decriminalizing each of the main parties involved in commercial sex transactions, the sex workers (sellers) and consumers (buyers). Randomly assigning participants to receive three of six possible arguments, this portion of the study produced three main findings.

First, the most effective argument for swaying public opinion toward sex work decriminalization appears to be the crime victimization argument. This argument frames the problem with sex work as a matter of broader public safety that is hindered by sex work's illegal status. Due to criminalization, sex workers cannot report crimes, such as theft, rape, and human trafficking to law enforcement for fear of their own arrest on prostitution charges. This framework was rated as the most convincing overall, although not significantly more than the public health argument, which was rated as the second most convincing. The public health argument emphasized how stigmatization and

criminalization impedes access to healthcare and discourages possession of condoms as it

can potentially be criminal evidence. Since prior research has observed that the spread of

STIs was the second largest concern among people who support criminalization (Osse,

2012), this would appear to be a promising argument for shifting support within that

group. Yet overall, these results stand in contrast to prior work that found freedom from

government interference, which would equate to the privacy condition in the current

study, as the most convincing (Moore, 2015).

Second, the extent to which specific arguments were rated as convincing did not

depend on whether they were in reference to decriminalizing sellers or buyers. Although

all arguments were generally rated as less convincing for decriminalizing buyers than

they were for decriminalizing sellers, this effect did not change depending on the

particular argument presented. While myriad moral arguments have been deployed by

governments and advocates to justify criminalization of sex work (McCarthy et al., 2012;

Rupert, 2021), arguments framing the commercial sex industry as an institution of

patriarchal gender inequality have been used to strengthen the link between sex work and

theories on violence against women (Sanders, 2016). The arguments presented here, with

the exception of the privacy vignette, focus on increasing rights and protections for sex

workers. Thus, it is logical that they would be rated as more convincing for

decriminalizing selling sex. Including more client-based arguments, such as promoting

commercial sex for individuals with disabilities to enhance quality of life (Davis, 2015;

Sanders, 2007), or neutral arguments, such as taxation benefits, might yield different

results.

Third, the effect of arguments did not vary according to any individual demographic characteristics. It might be expected that certain arguments would resonate more with certain sectors of the population. For instance, the argument rooted in female sexual oppression would likely be rated as more convincing for women than for men. Indeed, there were significant interactions between gender and four of the six arguments, specifically, public health, female sexuality, crime victimization, and social justice. However, a comparison of model BICs for predictive accuracy casts doubt on whether the effects really differ by gender. Thus, in addressing Research Question 3b, whether arguments are more or less convincing for certain segments of the population, it appears they are not. This suggests that the effects of arguments hold across different strata of the population and that we would not anticipate a given message to resonate with only certain audience segments.

The extent to which arguments are seen as convincing has implications for efforts to frame the problem in such a way that garners sufficient support for policy change. Surprisingly, the labor rights framework was not rated as particularly convincing. This is interesting given labor rights issue was the third most common problem type chosen earlier in the survey, although it was only selected by 13.7% of the sample. These findings show some consistency with prior work that found professionalizing the industry and access to employment rights was only considered the most persuasive argument for decriminalization by 19% of respondents (Moore, 2015).

Activists believe the validity of a labor rights framework has been hampered by the conflation of sex work with sex trafficking (Jackson, 2016). Although conceptualizing sex work as a form of legitimate labor is considered essential for policy

change (van der Meulen, 2011), prior work also suggests that policy changes may precede a shift in the collective mindset, where decriminalization is more conducive to labor legitimacy (Escot et al., 2021; Pajnik & Radačić, 2020). Thus, while the present study suggests that framing sex work as just like any other form of labor may not resonate particularly well with the general public at this time, it is likely this framework will only become more pertinent with continued innovation in technology and the gig economy (Boone, 2021; Butler, 2019; Cowen & Colosi, 2020). Future work might examine how this messaging could be improved by instead focusing on the potential economic benefits resulting from taxation, similar to the way taxation of marijuana was pitched to the public as financial windfall (Becker, 2019; Roberts, 2022).

The least convincing argument was the social justice frame, which is rooted in criminalization's contribution to mass incarceration and impact on marginalized communities. A resolution introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019 and again in 2021 utilizes this same rationale in justifying the need for a transformation of our criminal justice system. While the legislation proposed various reforms, one clause pertained to the decriminalization of sex work (Pressley, 2019). Findings from this study suggest this is not the most effective message to be used in the campaign for sex work decriminalization, although the extent to which it may be convincing for other reforms remains to be seen.

Finally, a counterargument to the end-demand model did not significantly reduce support. Future investigations in this realm could deploy counterarguments that emphasize how asymmetric decriminalization continues to drive the industry

underground, leading to health and safety risks for sex workers (Benoit et al., 2017;

Östergren, 2006).

Chapter 7

General Discussion and Conclusion

Ultimately, one of the goals of this study was to contribute to our capacity to effectively communicate with the public about sex work and advance decriminalization efforts. The messaging used to influence the public can be critical to the success of social movements and achieving change (Benford & Snow, 2000). This study expands our understanding of how the public views the modern landscape of sex work and provides insight into the messages that could bolster support for policy initiatives surrounding sex work decriminalization. This chapter will summarize findings from the three research questions, describe the limitations of the current study, and discuss the implications for policy and directions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1 showed that sex work is by and large seen as a sexuality rights and human rights issue. However, these categorizations were not the product of considerations of harm, immorality, contribution to trafficking, or acceptability for different types of sex work. Regarding the role of morality, greater endorsement of individualizing foundations was only predictive of higher ratings of acceptability, while endorsement of collective foundations related to all perception categories above and beyond the type of sex work, whilst controlling for participant religiosity and political

orientation. This may explain some of the success of the moral crusade against sex work, which frames the industry's existence as symptomatic of larger threats to traditional mores and family values (Weitzer, 2019). However, these findings also suggest its success has been limited in the expansion beyond prostitution to other forms of sex work, like pornography. Such expansion efforts have concentrated on the role of trafficking victims and harmful health consequences (Hughes, 2005; McKay et al., 2021; Weitzer, 2019). While pornography and prostitution were rated equally on acceptability and immorality, they differed on perceptions of harm and their contribution to trafficking. Whether this difference is the result of aspects intrinsic to each occupation, or the effect of dissonance between their legal statuses, requires further exploration. In any case, while the perceptions of harm are highest for prostitution, it appears the general public is supportive of policies to mitigate that harm.

Results of Research Question 2 overall demonstrated support for a harm reduction approach to prostitution policy. Examining beliefs about criminalization showed that most of the public does *not* think criminalization keeps sex workers safe. There was evidence of broad support for sex workers' immunity in reporting crimes, and broad opposition to the use of condoms as evidence of prostitution and to police engaging in sexual contact with sex workers during stings. Participants showed greater support for directing people to social services instead of jail for prostitution offenses, and overall, there was more support than there was opposition for the decriminalization of sex buyers and sellers. Evidence of preference for a harm reduction approach is strengthened by the low level of support shown for the Nordic model. Also called the end-demand model, this asymmetric criminalization of buyers coupled with the decriminalization of sellers had

the lowest average support of the various regulation schemes. This is consistent with evidence from Canada that observed little support for this type of policy (Lowman & Louie, 2012).

Examination of the moral foundations showed endorsement of collective foundations was associated with more favorable views of criminalization and lower support for policy changes. Now, the collective foundations are associated with more conservative views, and conservatives tend to oppose change or prefer more incremental change (Iyer et al., 2012; Silver & Silver, 2021; Strupp-Levitsky et al., 2020). This latter point might explain why collective values were associated with *more* support for the Nordic model, a less drastic deviation from current policy than full decriminalization, until accounting for the effect of political ideology. However, consistent with prior work that shows people with high endorsement of these foundations support more punitive measures, this study found that, above and beyond punitiveness and political orientation, endorsement of collective foundations was associated with lower support for the proposed reforms. This may be a function of positive beliefs about criminalization that stem from adherence to the authority and loyalty foundations. Appeals to voters for the need for policy changes should minimize violations of these foundations to allow people to support such changes in a way that does not conflict with their sense of national or state loyalty or convey disrespect for authority.

Research Question 3 showed framing sex work criminalization as an issue of crime victimization and public health are the most effective problem frames for increasing support for decriminalization. These are both arguments that highlight the potential negative impact of criminalization on the larger community by appealing to

concerns of public health and safety. Surprisingly, arguments rooted in personal privacy and labor rights were not particularly convincing, even though these too could have implications for the larger population, such as the extent to which the government can regulate people's sexual practices or limit the employment rights of some occupations.

Limitations

As with all studies, this research was subject to several limitations. First, survey respondents were not randomly selected from the population. This study utilized an opt-in sample, so people that chose to partake in the survey may differ from those who did not. However, a census-matched template was applied to match respondents to the population in terms of their distribution on age, race, gender, and ethnicity. Methods of nonprobability sampling to produce matched samples have been shown to be more generalizable than unmatched opt-in samples (Graham et al., 2020). Although the extent to which this sample matched census proportions was impacted by removing participants for inattentive responses, comparison with 2018 and 2021 GSS data showed no significant difference between the samples in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity, although the mean age for the present study ($M = 45.11$, $SD = 16.66$) was observed to be significantly lower than mean age of the 2018 GSS sample ($M = 48.97$, $SD = 18.06$). Additionally, the present study's confidence in legal system measure was also used in the GSS, which allows an assessment of how this sample aligns with benchmarks from a nationally representative sample, as recommended by recent literature (Graham et al., 2020). Comparison of the distribution of respondents' confidence in legal system to the GSS revealed no significant difference between the samples, increasing confidence in the generalizability of the present study's findings.

Another potential limitation was the language deployed throughout the survey. Research has shown the term "prostitution" has negative connotations and it is recommended to use the term "sex work" to avoid inducing initial bias (Hansen & Johansson, 2022). While "sex work" was used throughout the survey where possible, there were instances where it was necessary to use "prostitution" in order to make an explicit distinction between this and other forms of sex work, like pornography, that were also present in the survey. Thus, future studies that do not inquire about opinions of other forms of sex work may observe more favorable attitudes when using "sex work" in place of "prostitution".

A third limitation is the high frequency of neutral responses on survey items. Also known as fence sitting or satisficing, this is when respondents choose neutral values rather than take a side on a difficult issue (Krosnick et al., 2001; Nowlis et al., 2002). While inclusion of a neutral option prevents people who are ignorant or indifferent to an issue from being forced to choose a side, thereby reducing response bias, it is also disputed because of a potential increase in participants who say they have no opinion (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Edwards & Smith, 2014). While I felt it was best to provide an option for indecision, future research could remove this scale point and examine public attitudes towards these policies when they are forced to have an opinion.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study hold implications for the future of the policy landscape on this topic. As public opinion can act as both a constraint and a call to action for policymakers, understanding the contours of opinion on an issue can help clarify the feasibility of certain policy avenues (Shapiro, 2011). This is particularly true in morally

charged policy debates; since principles and values are at the forefront of morality politics, the authority of technical experts is minimized as any member of the public can claim to be well-informed on the issue (Mooney, 1999; Wagenaar et al., 2013). One of the factors contributing to the stalemate in prostitution policy reform is the influence of lobbyists and advocacy groups that oppose decriminalizing both sex workers and their customers. They argue this would increase exploitation and trafficking, and instead advocate that the best course of action is to solely decriminalize sex workers, while sex buyers become the target of prosecution (Harrington, 2018; NCOSE, 2019). This study showed that such a policy model was largely unsupported by the American public (about 43% report at least some opposition compared to ~22% who show some support). Rather, there was greater support than opposition for the decriminalization of sex work, and this support was not contingent on its application to sellers or buyers.

However, we did find that the argument outlining the faults with the Nordic model had no impact on participant support for this policy. This finding bolsters that of earlier research demonstrating the negligible influence of counterevidence on support for criminal justice policies concerning sexual offenses, suggesting such short text exposures are an ineffective means to measure or detect opinion change (Rydberg et al., 2018b). However, baseline support for policies in the aforementioned study was high, whereas the present sample appeared more ambivalent toward the Nordic model. Thus, it is possible that the observed result simply points to the need for additional counterpoints to the Nordic model in policy debates where the distinction between decriminalized parties creates a political impasse.

The present study also showed strong opposition to using condoms as evidence of prostitution, and strong support for sex workers' ability to report crimes without fear of arrest for prostitution. This shows legislation like California's SB 233, which granted sex workers protection from arrest when reporting violent crimes and prohibits the use of condoms as evidence of sex work, is popular and would receive broad support in other states that propose similar legislation (SB 233, 2019). In the absence of such policies, sex workers face increased health risks from not carrying condoms and greater vulnerability to violence from not being able to report (Decker et al., 2015; Wurth et al., 2013). A lack of immunity also puts sex workers at risk of abuse by police when they are coerced into performing sexual acts to avoid arrest (Sakha et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Given the present findings and prior work have shown heavy opposition to police engaging in sexual contact with sex workers (Community United for Safety and Protection, 2016), this suggests there would be strong public support for bills to limit police abuses of power like Pennsylvania's HB 2709, which would criminalize sexual activity with people who are under investigation (Segelbaum & Ruland, 2020). Although this bill did not make it to a vote during the legislative session, this study shows that in future terms policymakers should continue to advance this type of legislation and can do so with the confidence that it would be endorsed by their constituents.

The present findings also revealed heterogeneity in opinion between people to give insight into who may be more or less likely to support such legislative changes. A breakdown of support for sex worker immunity in reporting, police sexual contact during stings, and support for decriminalizing buying and selling sex by country region, political

orientation, and religion was provided to some advisory board members to inform targeting of public outreach and education campaigns.

Despite general support leaning in favor of decriminalization, such proposals may still face opposition. The implications of this study for increasing support are that campaign efforts should utilize messaging that makes a positive appeal to the collective moral foundations. This tactic of "moral reframing" has demonstrated success in shifting conservative views on issues like the environment and economic inequality by appealing to the values of authority, loyalty, and purity (Day et al., 2014; Feinberg & Willer, 2019). For instance, the "tendency to present environmental crises as injustices is not highly appealing to conservatives", and conservatives' pro-environmental stance increased after engaging their binding and liberty moral principles (Wolsko, 2017, p. 285). Likewise, while the issue of injustice is certainly germane to discussion of criminal justice reform, this framing lacks appeal to a broader range of moral values.

Messages that broach more collective moral values could entail adherence to the authority of the church and appeals to in-group loyalty, as congregations can be highly cohesive (Cao et al., 2017). There is a link between religious organizations and mobilization of the anti-trafficking movement in the public and political spheres (Bernstein, 2010; Jackson, 2016; Zimmerman, 2010). Although the victim frame used by religious and radical feminist organizations is often at odds with those of sex worker rights organizations, this frame could be applied in a way that underscores how sex workers are victimized by the criminal justice system. The criminal justice model prioritizes investigation and prosecution over individuals' safety and well-being, bearing consequences even where sex workers are not the target of law enforcement (de Vries et

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al., 2023; Levy & Jakobsson, 2014). Emphasizing unjust legal victimization could shift reliance on punitive measures targeting offenders to instead mobilizing support for laws that provide sex workers with criminal immunity and expunge prostitution offenses from criminal records. Religious activists have pushed for similar measures in the past, including safe harbor laws and record expungement (Cheek, 2022). Additionally, messages surrounding decriminalization should minimize emphasis on sexual acts and images of street-based sex work, which is often regarded as the "dirty" sector of the industry (Armstrong, 2019), and this image would evoke purity concerns.

Lastly, the experimental component of this dissertation revealed the most convincing argument for decriminalization was the crime victimization frame. This finding in combination with the high overall support for sex workers' criminal immunity when reporting crimes suggests efforts to decriminalize sex work should emphasize the issue with the current policy is a lack of legal protection and an increased risk of violence. The findings of this research suggest that framing the problem in this way would be the most effective way to convince voters of the critical importance of changing current laws and passing decriminalization policies.

Examples of Policy Implications in Context

In February of 2023, Massachusetts Representative Kay Kahn introduced H. 1603, a bill to partially decriminalize sex work by repealing criminal penalties for sex workers, while the client side of the transaction remains illegal. This follows a series of attempts over recent years to implement an end-demand approach to prostitution policy in Massachusetts (An Act Decriminalizing Prostitution, 2017; An Act Relative to Sexually Exploited Individuals, 2019). Past renditions of this policy have halted in the legislative

process when they have been assigned a study order, which allows the Joint Committee to study the measure and similar policies, but also becomes a place where legislation often goes to die (*The Legislative Process in Massachusetts | Mass Legal Services*, 2007). The current iteration follows previous versions in its emphasis on sex work as a form of exploitation that harms workers, but also includes additional stipulations on prevention, assistance, and survivor-led programs, all to be housed within the department of public health. This shows the adoption of a public health approach that may be beneficial to policymakers attempting to decriminalize sex work.

While the addition of programs and services goes beyond the simple repeal of penalties proposed in prior bills, it does retain the criminal status of sex buyers. Media articles reporting on the bill acknowledge that such a policy is "not recommended by human rights, health, or sex worker advocacy groups, since continuing to criminalize prostitution clients keeps the industry underground and leaves in place most of the harms presented by full criminalization" (Brown, 2023). Yet the present findings suggest this rhetoric is not effective in shifting support away from the Nordic model. However, Brown (2023) went on to further debate the merits of this policy on the grounds that it increases the rate of rapes (see Gao & Petrova, 2022). Evidence of higher rape rates would make a strong case against the Nordic model and employing this type of rhetoric in policy debates could be potentially impactful for opponents of this type of legislation when coupled with evidence documenting lower rates of sexual assault under full decriminalization (Cunningham & Shah, 2018; Gao & Petrova, 2022).

Another example of where multiple efforts to decriminalize sex work have taken place is in New York. In the past few years, partial and full decriminalization legislation

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has been repeatedly introduced in the New York Senate (NY State Assembly Bill A7069A, 2022; NY State Senate Bill S1352, 2023; NY State Senate Bill S4396, 2023; NY State Senate Bill S6040A, 2022). In the current legislative session, S1352 proposes partial decriminalization, while S4396 would decriminalize both buying and selling sex between consensual adults. This latter bill employs a variety of arguments in its justification, including freedom from government interference, impact on marginalized communities, risk of violence, and labor rights :

> "Trying to stop sex work between consenting adults should not be the business of our criminal justice system. Criminalizing sex work criminalizes a means of survival for marginalized people, and it makes LGBTQ people especially vulnerable to police harassment and arrest based on their gender expression and sexuality."

> "Criminalization drives sex work into the shadows in an underground illegal environment where sex workers face increased violence, abuse, and exploitation, and are more vulnerable to trafficking…Decriminalizing sex work upholds the rights of those who trade sex, reduces violence and trafficking, and increases labor protections." (NY S4396)

Similar arguments regarding marginalized communities and individual harm are deployed in the reasoning for the partial decriminalization bill:

> "The sex trade, particularly prostitution, preys on the most marginalized and vulnerable people in our communities - women and girls, especially of color, the LGBTQ+ population, run away and foster youth, individuals experiencing homelessness, and undocumented immigrants. It is rooted in inequality, which pimps and traffickers abuse to sell vulnerable people to sex buyers with expendable income."

> "Pimps and traffickers, brothel and illicit massage parlor owners, and sex buyers themselves cause people in prostitution physical harm and emotional trauma that is lifelong…The sex trade system operates on physical and psychological violence. The traumatic scars it leaves cannot be regulated or deregulated away. The sex trade cannot be made less harmful." (NY S1352)

> Both pieces of legislation consider the impact of sex work criminalization on

LGBTQ communities. Policymakers may consider this an effective strategy following the

2021 repeal of an anti-loitering law, also known as the "walking while trans" ban (Padilla, 2021). But the present findings show this is not a particularly convincing message in and of itself, and further, it does not distinguish policies attempting to decriminalize sex workers and buyers from policies that only aim to decriminalize workers. Emphasis on the harms resulting from criminalization was generally shown to be a more effective strategy, and both bills claim they will reduce violence against sex workers. While arguments used in this study were broadly considered more convincing for decriminalizing sellers than buyers, study findings showed this effect was larger for crime victimization compared to a social justice frame. Thus, it would appear S1352 would have the stronger case in arguing for partial decriminalization on these grounds.

Now, S4396 counters the justification for partial decriminalization by citing increased violence against sex workers difficulty negotiating condom use under this model in France. While condom negotiation was not shown to significantly shift support for or against an end-demand model in this study, focusing on a harm impact could be more successful. However, S1352 explicitly identifies the source of harm as buyers and third parties, while S4396 lacks specificity on how decriminalizing buyers could reduce violent conditions. A potential remedy to this could be countering that targeting buyers reduces the market to the most dangerous clientele, while a fully decriminalized market enables screening to ensure a safer client base and eliminates barriers to clients reporting suspected trafficking or other crimes (Dodillet & Östergren, 2011; Ellison et al., 2019; Graham, 2017; Lutnick, 2019; van der Meulen, 2011).

Implications for Rhetoric. The purpose of this research was to examine how the rhetoric used by scholars and advocates in sex work policy debates resonates with the

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general public and, specifically under Research Question 3, assess which arguments make the most persuasive case for criminal justice reform in this area. That being said, the results of this study offer some potential rhetorical guidance towards efforts to pass decriminalization legislation. For instance, these findings suggest efforts to appeal to a broad audience in favor of sex work decriminalization should frame the response to sex work as an issue of public health and victimization, while also appealing to the collective values that predict opposition to reform. While the literature on Moral Foundations Theory asserts that individualizing foundations have a broader appeal than collective foundations (Eriksson et al., 2022), the subsets with strong adherence to collective foundations can constitute a legitimate barrier to justice reform when support for such reforms would violate personal values. An example of rhetoric utilizing crime victimization and public health arguments while making positive appeals to collective values is illustrated below:

"Laws against sex work were supposed to protect our communities, but they are actually doing the opposite. The criminalization of sex work has only made it harder for law enforcement to locate victims of exploitation and identify abusers. Because sex work is illegal, everyone involved, including sex workers, their friends, and clients, are afraid to report crimes like rape, assault, robbery, and trafficking, because then *they* will be arrested on prostitution-related charges. This means serious crimes go unreported, evidence and key witnesses are lost, and police officers are unable to find and punish the offenders that pose a threat to our community.

In addition to unreported violence, the illegal status of sex work prevents those involved from getting necessary healthcare. When condoms are used as evidence of a

prostitution crime, or workers and clients can't access healthcare because of the risk of being arrested or mistreatment by healthcare staff, that opens the door to STI transmission that could impact overall public health. A community with decriminalized sex work is actually healthier because it promotes safer practices, and everyone can access appropriate health services. Further, removing these barriers means that more sex workers will be seen by medical staff who are trained to recognize signs of abuse, and thus victims of exploitation can be more easily identified. Overall, with sex work decriminalized, our institutions are empowered to protect victims and pursue violent criminals."

Appealing to respect for authority (i.e., law enforcement) and attempting to minimize purity violations is one possible way to integrate collective foundations into pro-decriminalization arguments. While speculative, this offers an example of the type of language that may generate a broad interest in sex work decriminalization according to the present study's findings. Nevertheless, the narratives illustrated above will likely still face some opposition, and the impact of counterarguments in the evolution of this rhetoric remains to be seen.

Directions for Future Research

The framework of Weitzer's (2009b) paradigms characterize the primary theoretical perspectives toward sex work present in the literature, and the current study applied these paradigms to evaluate the extent to which the public aligns with these viewpoints. The study showed little polarization, and that perspectives often did not categorically lean one way over another. Rather, responses varied across the items with most people falling somewhere between the oppression and empowerment paradigms.

The current study was limited in its capacity to measure alignment with each perspective separately and, rather than creating a separate scale for each paradigm, relied on a single continuum. This shortfall elicited negative feedback from an advisory board member on its ostensibly dichotomous nature. While the neutral option on this scale served to represent the polymorphous paradigm in the present study, future work could better capture this perspective by utilizing items that explicitly measure the extent to which people believe factors like victimization, agency, and job satisfaction vary across time, place, and sector of sex work. Thus, it is recommended that prospective studies adapt the item anchors to develop three separate scales, similar to Bonache et al.'s (2021) arrangement of regulatory attitudes.

There were several recommendations from the sex worker advisory board that could not be incorporated into the present study due to limitations of survey length. One of these avenues for future research involved untangling the nuances of different forms of sex work, like escorting and sugar babying, and by providing scenarios and asking respondents whether the actions in a given example should be illegal. Likewise, there were suggestions to present scenarios that can currently be defined as trafficking under certain state or federal laws, and probe respondents about whether such cases should, in fact, be considered trafficking. Examples include sex workers sharing a space, such as a hotel room; a sex worker having a place of prostitution, such as their home; someone who works for a sex worker as a driver or scheduler.

Another suggestion pertained to public opinion of laws that limit the ability of freelance sex workers to accept payment for their work. This is particularly relevant as banking giants like Mastercard, Visa, and Discover have recently suspended payments

from adult content sites and their advertisers over concerns about illegal and unauthorized content, even prompting a ban of sexually explicit content on the platform OnlyFans, which skyrocketed to popularity because of this type of material (Lapowsky, 2021; Rooney & Li, 2022; Shane, 2021). While the OnlyFans ban was later reversed in response to public backlash, the actions of credit card processors pose consequences for adult content providers and raise broader questions concerning free speech and content moderation on the internet. In a similar vein, another recommendation was public opinion on the tax status of sex work services. Should the IRS have a section for erotic service providers? This type of investigation could build upon an earlier suggestion of changing the labor rights argument to evaluate the public response to potential economic benefits of decriminalization (Srsic et al., 2021). This type of messaging was successful with campaigns surrounding marijuana, and it has been suggested that sex work decriminalization could follow a similar trajectory seen with marijuana decriminalization (Mancini et al., 2020).

Lastly, very few factors predicted support for legislation created by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors. More work is needed to understand opinion on this issue, particularly as there is an increasing call for state and federal agencies to involve sex workers in policy decisions (Robinson & Singh Kehal, 2020).

Conclusion

Attempts to decriminalize sex work are becoming increasingly common, with municipal authorities taking steps to scale back the enforcement of prostitution laws (*Chicago's "Decriminalization" of Sex Work | INSIDE COMPLIANCE*, 2021; Schuppe, 2021; Sherman et al., 2023). Yet large scale attempts at reform have often been

unsuccessful, with intense campaigns by advocates and lobbying groups attempting to sway policymakers' decisions. Although this framing battle over the larger meaning of sex work in our society has been taking place, there was a gap in knowledge of how the public views sex work as a social problem within an increasingly mainstream commercial sex industry. The current study contributed to the literature by comparing attitudes toward different types of sex work and exploring how the public endorses various problem frames that drive positions on prostitution policies.

The results of the dissertation indicate that moral values are implicated in personal preferences toward some policies, above and beyond other individual and attitudinal characteristics. The polarizing rhetoric deployed by interest groups in this policy debate does not appear to reflect the ambivalence of the public on many of these issues. While the anti-trafficking movement and moral crusade against sex work have seen some success in recent years, the American general public appears hesitant to put all their eggs in the "sex work is exploitation" basket, and supports efforts to reduce the harms experienced by those in the industry.

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Table 3.

Multilevel Regression Predicting Perceptions of Sex Work by Type

Predictors	Harm β	Harm p	Immorality β	Immorality p	Trafficking β	Trafficking p	Acceptability β	Acceptability p
Intercept	0.51	**<0.01**	0.37	**0.05**	0.27	0.18	-0.29	0.10
Webcamming	-0.50	**<0.01**	-0.23	**<0.01**	-0.51	**<0.01**	0.28	**<0.01**
Stripping	-0.46	**<0.01**	-0.19	**<0.01**	-0.41	**<0.01**	0.31	**<0.01**
Pornography	-0.23	**<0.01**	-0.07	**<0.01**	-0.27	**<0.01**	0.15	**<0.01**
Individual Foundations	-0.07	0.06	-0.06	0.16	-0.01	0.88	0.10	**0.01**
Collective Foundations	0.18	**<0.01**	0.23	**<0.01**	0.17	**<0.01**	-0.20	**<0.01**
Liberty	-0.07	**0.04**	-0.04	0.34	-0.07	0.06	0.07	0.08
Sexual liberalism	-0.45	**<0.01**	-0.41	**<0.01**	-0.28	**<0.01**	0.44	**<0.01**
Age	-0.00	0.48	-0.00	0.11	-0.01	**<0.01**	-0.00	0.86
Women	0.20	**<0.01**	0.03	0.74	0.17	**0.03**	-0.20	**0.01**
Black	0.11	0.25	-0.01	0.95	0.01	0.91	-0.05	0.62
Other Race	0.12	0.18	0.11	0.24	0.17	0.07	0.00	0.97
Hispanic	0.19	**0.02**	0.16	0.08	0.10	0.26	-0.01	0.94
Less than HS	0.04	0.83	-0.24	0.26	-0.28	0.17	-0.22	0.26
Some college	-0.11	0.18	-0.06	0.51	-0.00	0.98	0.05	0.54
2yr degree	0.05	0.60	-0.04	0.73	-0.02	0.88	-0.06	0.59
4yr degree	-0.05	0.56	-0.04	0.66	0.08	0.40	0.02	0.86
Postgraduate degree	0.07	0.57	-0.07	0.58	0.18	0.17	-0.09	0.48
Catholic	0.05	0.58	0.01	0.90	-0.00	0.97	0.01	0.92
Not religious	-0.06	0.53	-0.14	0.15	0.03	0.76	0.05	0.60
Other religion	-0.17	0.08	-0.13	0.22	-0.08	0.43	-0.11	0.25
Religious attendance	0.01	0.32	0.04	**0.02**	0.02	0.10	-0.01	0.57
Political liberalism	-0.07	**<0.01**	-0.05	**0.03**	-0.05	**0.03**	0.04	0.06
Midwest	-0.12	0.17	-0.02	0.82	-0.01	0.90	0.28	**<0.01**
Northeast	-0.15	0.10	-0.07	0.50	-0.12	0.23	0.18	0.06
Southwest	-0.16	0.10	-0.09	0.38	-0.20	**0.04**	0.10	0.32
West	-0.11	0.26	-0.10	0.33	-0.18	0.09	0.17	0.08

	Est	p	Est	p	Est	p	Est	p
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.05	0.56	0.03	0.80	0.10	0.31	-0.05	0.56
Married	0.12	0.11	0.24	**<0.01**	0.10	0.23	-0.08	0.33
Non-heterosexual	-0.13	0.18	-0.14	0.17	-0.14	0.15	0.15	0.11
Moderate problem					0.11	0.29		
Very big problem					0.31	**0.01**		
Trafficking increasing					0.19	**0.02**		

Random Effects

σ^2	0.13	0.09	0.26	0.18
τ_{00}	0.41 ResponseId	0.50 ResponseId	0.42 ResponseId	0.42 ResponseId
ICC	0.75	0.84	0.62	0.70
N	519 ResponseId	519 ResponseId	519 ResponseId	519 ResponseId
Observations	2076	2076	2076	2076
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.459 / 0.867	0.411 / 0.908	0.317 / 0.738	0.403 / 0.820

Table 4.

Regression on Probability of Viewing Sex Work as Human or Sexuality Rights Issue

Predictors	Human Rights			Sexuality Rights		
	OR	SE	p	OR	SE	p
Intercept	0.71	0.39	0.526	0.92	0.52	0.880
SW Harm	1.02	0.21	0.933	0.67	0.15	0.066
SW Immorality	0.88	0.15	0.456	0.83	0.15	0.319
SW Contribution to Trafficking	1.04	0.15	0.782	1.02	0.15	0.906
SW Acceptability	1.04	0.16	0.794	1.31	0.20	0.084
Individualizing Foundations	1.14	0.14	0.288	1.34	0.17	**0.018**
Collective Foundations	0.77	0.10	**0.043**	0.93	0.13	0.584
Liberty	1.31	0.16	**0.022**	1.11	0.14	0.380
Sexual liberalism	1.33	0.18	**0.033**	1.09	0.15	0.553
Age	1.01	0.01	0.251	1.00	0.01	0.872
Women	0.94	0.22	0.792	0.88	0.21	0.578
Black	1.02	0.30	0.955	0.99	0.30	0.976
Other Race	1.71	0.50	0.064	1.12	0.33	0.700
Hispanic	0.73	0.20	0.246	1.31	0.36	0.320
Less than HS	0.76	0.47	0.655	2.95	2.24	0.154
Some college	0.89	0.22	0.642	0.66	0.17	0.117
2yr degree	0.67	0.22	0.209	0.92	0.31	0.791
4yr degree	1.16	0.34	0.606	0.64	0.19	0.136
Postgraduate degree	0.76	0.29	0.475	0.59	0.24	0.189
Catholic	1.04	0.29	0.881	1.44	0.42	0.207
Not religious	0.49	0.14	**0.013**	1.10	0.33	0.759
Other religion	0.73	0.23	0.312	1.48	0.47	0.224
Religious attendance	0.93	0.04	0.121	1.00	0.05	0.924
Political liberalism	1.09	0.07	0.174	1.03	0.07	0.635
Midwest	1.28	0.35	0.373	1.49	0.44	0.169
Northeast	1.15	0.34	0.639	1.30	0.41	0.395
Southwest	0.96	0.30	0.908	0.89	0.28	0.701
West	1.82	0.56	0.054	1.02	0.32	0.943

Predictors	Human Rights			Sexuality Rights		
	OR	SE	p	OR	SE	p
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	1.06	0.31	0.833	1.83	0.57	0.051
Married	1.37	0.35	0.217	1.41	0.37	0.190
Non-heterosexual	0.71	0.22	0.269	0.97	0.32	0.914
Observations		519			519	
R^2 Tjur		0.111			0.165	

Table 5.

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Preferred Policy Goal

Predictors	Demand Reduction vs. Prohibition		Harm Reduction vs. Prohibition	
	OR	p	OR	p
Intercept	3.88	0.152	0.37	0.354
Individual Foundations	1.07	0.714	1.60	**0.028**
Collective Foundations	0.75	0.186	0.43	**<0.001**
Liberty	0.90	0.557	1.17	0.423
Empowerment Ideology	1.89	0.319	5.85	**0.004**
Oppressive Ideology	0.76	0.397	0.12	**<0.001**
Punitiveness	0.62	**0.004**	0.52	**0.001**
Sexual liberalism	1.04	0.798	1.96	**0.001**
Confidence in legal system	0.86	0.200	0.82	0.184
Economic liberalism	0.98	0.884	1.24	0.187
Age	1.00	0.941	1.05	**<0.001**
Women	0.90	0.747	0.66	0.255
Black	0.57	0.131	0.32	**0.013**
Other Race	1.47	0.372	1.41	0.492
Hispanic	0.91	0.800	0.91	0.829
Less than HS	1.79	0.441	0.56	0.625
Some college	0.98	0.950	1.50	0.323
2yr degree	1.04	0.924	2.63	0.062
4yr degree	1.55	0.309	2.80	**0.043**
Postgraduate degree	0.68	0.461	1.03	0.962
Catholic	0.97	0.927	0.91	0.835
Not religious	1.73	0.209	3.54	**0.011**
Other religion	0.72	0.447	1.68	0.285
Religious attendance	1.02	0.786	0.99	0.926
Political liberalism	0.94	0.490	1.10	0.378
Midwest	1.45	0.336	2.09	0.102
Northeast	0.89	0.788	1.32	0.572
Southwest	1.95	0.122	3.91	**0.006**

	Demand Reduction vs. Prohibition		Harm Reduction vs. Prohibition	
Predictors	*OR*	*p*	*OR*	*p*
West	1.41	0.435	2.04	0.168
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	1.05	0.904	0.76	0.571
Married	0.91	0.796	0.63	0.269
Non-heterosexual	1.51	0.406	0.95	0.933
Moderate problem	0.81	0.752	0.33	0.093
Very big problem	0.43	0.216	0.22	**0.032**
Trafficking increasing	0.75	0.430	0.67	0.343
Observations	517			
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.306 / 0.304			

Table 8.

Linear Regression on Support for Jail or Social Services Intervention for Prostitution

Offenses

Predictors	Support for Jail			Social Services		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.21	0.23	0.354	-0.46	0.27	0.086
Individualizing Foundations	-0.06	0.04	0.166	0.14	0.06	**0.017**
Collective Foundations	0.14	0.05	**0.011**	-0.12	0.06	**0.045**
Liberty	-0.04	0.04	0.351	-0.00	0.06	0.937
Empowerment Ideology	-0.70	0.11	**<0.001**	0.04	0.12	0.726
Oppressive Ideology	0.40	0.11	**<0.001**	-0.06	0.13	0.642
Human rights issue	-0.10	0.07	0.197	0.05	0.09	0.613
Sexuality rights	-0.14	0.08	0.072	0.22	0.10	**0.028**
Punitiveness	0.11	0.04	**0.010**	-0.09	0.05	0.110
Sexual liberalism	-0.12	0.05	**0.009**	0.20	0.06	**<0.001**
Confidence in legal system	0.10	0.04	**0.007**	-0.00	0.05	0.957
Economic liberalism	0.04	0.04	0.319	-0.07	0.05	0.124
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.164	-0.00	0.00	0.773
Women	0.01	0.09	0.885	0.05	0.11	0.605
Black	0.22	0.12	0.065	-0.05	0.16	0.758
Other Race	-0.01	0.11	0.945	0.10	0.12	0.379
Hispanic	0.15	0.10	0.134	-0.03	0.11	0.779
Less than HS	0.35	0.23	0.134	-0.02	0.38	0.947
Some college	-0.11	0.09	0.228	0.05	0.11	0.632
2yr degree	0.03	0.13	0.793	0.05	0.14	0.709
4yr degree	-0.12	0.11	0.257	0.12	0.13	0.354
Postgraduate degree	-0.14	0.16	0.388	0.17	0.18	0.340
Catholic	0.01	0.10	0.941	-0.05	0.13	0.678
Not religious	-0.19	0.11	0.089	-0.03	0.13	0.824
Other religion	-0.05	0.10	0.638	-0.01	0.13	0.951
Religious attendance	0.01	0.02	0.688	0.02	0.02	0.262
Political liberalism	-0.02	0.03	0.452	0.08	0.03	**0.019**

	Support for Jail			**Social Services**		
Predictors	β	*SE*	*p*	β	*SE*	*p*
Midwest	0.02	0.10	0.851	0.01	0.13	0.947
Northeast	0.11	0.11	0.321	-0.13	0.13	0.336
Southwest	-0.06	0.12	0.573	-0.09	0.14	0.542
West	0.11	0.11	0.303	0.17	0.14	0.241
Divorced/Separated/ Widowed	-0.06	0.10	0.528	-0.16	0.13	0.236
Married	0.04	0.09	0.702	-0.15	0.11	0.180
Non-heterosexual	-0.05	0.13	0.717	-0.04	0.13	0.788
Moderate problem	0.12	0.12	0.312	0.07	0.13	0.584
Very big problem	0.24	0.14	0.088	0.02	0.15	0.871
Trafficking increasing	0.07	0.09	0.434	-0.09	0.10	0.368
Observations	519			519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.473 / 0.434			0.225 / 0.167		

Table 10.

Moral Foundations on Support for Decriminalization with Controls

Predictors	Selling			Buying			Third Parties		
	β	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	-0.77	0.25	**0.002**	-0.60	0.26	**0.020**	-0.37	0.24	0.124
Individual Foundations	0.09	0.05	0.074	0.05	0.05	0.294	0.10	0.05	0.052
Collective Foundations	-0.02	0.05	0.643	-0.01	0.05	0.781	-0.15	0.06	**0.012**
Liberty	0.04	0.05	0.353	0.09	0.05	0.055	0.09	0.05	0.093
Demand Reduction Goal	0.29	0.12	**0.012**	0.22	0.11	**0.044**	0.24	0.11	**0.033**
Harm Reduction Goal	0.70	0.13	**<0.001**	0.58	0.13	**<0.001**	0.43	0.13	**0.001**
Empowerment Ideology	0.32	0.10	**0.003**	0.40	0.10	**<0.001**	0.37	0.12	**0.002**
Oppressive Ideology	-0.33	0.12	**0.006**	-0.35	0.11	**0.002**	-0.32	0.12	**0.006**
Human rights issue	0.01	0.08	0.885	0.03	0.08	0.742	-0.01	0.08	0.895
Sexuality rights	0.16	0.08	0.050	0.15	0.08	0.068	0.16	0.08	0.065
Punitiveness	-0.06	0.05	0.233	-0.08	0.04	0.064	-0.02	0.05	0.698
Sexual liberalism	0.23	0.05	**<0.001**	0.22	0.05	**<0.001**	0.25	0.05	**<0.001**
Confidence in legal system	0.04	0.04	0.431	0.06	0.05	0.187	0.04	0.04	0.381
Economic liberalism	-0.02	0.04	0.617	0.05	0.04	0.258	-0.06	0.04	0.157
Age	0.00	0.00	0.091	0.00	0.00	0.265	0.00	0.00	0.265
Women	0.07	0.09	0.481	0.06	0.09	0.500	-0.05	0.09	0.621
Black	-0.25	0.11	**0.018**	-0.12	0.12	0.325	-0.22	0.12	0.061
Other Race	-0.05	0.11	0.668	-0.02	0.11	0.889	0.01	0.11	0.949
Hispanic	0.02	0.11	0.876	-0.11	0.11	0.324	0.01	0.11	0.941
Less than HS	-0.09	0.19	0.653	0.10	0.23	0.656	0.12	0.24	0.618
Some college	0.06	0.09	0.502	0.07	0.09	0.448	-0.05	0.09	0.599
2yr degree	0.07	0.12	0.549	-0.10	0.13	0.429	-0.09	0.13	0.465
4yr degree	0.20	0.11	0.078	0.09	0.11	0.426	-0.01	0.12	0.925
Postgraduate degree	-0.03	0.17	0.844	-0.07	0.17	0.672	-0.09	0.17	0.584
Catholic	0.02	0.11	0.846	0.18	0.11	0.105	-0.12	0.11	0.293
Not religious	0.03	0.10	0.810	0.00	0.10	0.998	-0.13	0.11	0.217
Other religion	0.10	0.12	0.409	0.13	0.12	0.258	-0.13	0.13	0.316
Religious attendance	0.01	0.02	0.600	0.00	0.02	0.822	0.02	0.02	0.393

Liberalism	0.02	0.03	0.454	0.02	0.03	0.465	0.04	0.03	0.227
Midwest	-0.06	0.10	0.598	-0.07	0.10	0.477	-0.07	0.11	0.507
Northeast	-0.23	0.10	**0.031**	-0.25	0.12	**0.032**	-0.15	0.12	0.191
Southwest	-0.11	0.12	0.338	-0.02	0.11	0.878	0.01	0.13	0.932
West	-0.13	0.12	0.276	-0.02	0.12	0.896	0.03	0.12	0.816
Divorced/Separated/ Widowed	-0.27	0.11	**0.014**	-0.07	0.11	0.542	-0.04	0.11	0.697
Married	-0.24	0.09	**0.008**	-0.08	0.09	0.416	-0.13	0.10	0.201
Non-heterosexual	-0.06	0.12	0.625	-0.11	0.12	0.381	0.02	0.12	0.864
Moderate problem	0.22	0.12	0.056	0.07	0.11	0.535	0.06	0.13	0.655
Very big problem	0.17	0.14	0.223	0.01	0.14	0.925	-0.04	0.15	0.799
Trafficking increasing	-0.10	0.09	0.281	-0.07	0.10	0.476	-0.10	0.10	0.335
Observations	517			517			517		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.461 / 0.418			0.451 / 0.408			0.420 / 0.374		

Table 11.

Moral Foundations on Support for Nordic Model

Predictors	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.08	0.05	0.107	0.12	0.30	0.675
Individual Foundations	-0.22	0.06	**<0.001**	-0.16	0.07	**0.027**
Individual Foundations²	-0.08	0.03	**0.005**	-0.10	0.03	**0.001**
Collective Foundations	0.13	0.05	**0.020**	0.10	0.07	0.136
Liberty	0.02	0.06	0.660	0.01	0.06	0.852
Demand Reduction Goal				0.15	0.13	0.234
Harm Reduction Goal				0.11	0.15	0.458
Empowerment Ideology				-0.24	0.15	0.122
Oppressive Ideology				-0.29	0.14	**0.032**
Human rights issue				0.13	0.10	0.173
Sexuality rights				-0.06	0.10	0.510
Punitiveness				0.09	0.05	0.112
Sexual liberalism				0.12	0.06	0.051
Confidence in law				0.08	0.05	0.139
Economic liberalism				-0.13	0.05	**0.013**
Age				-0.00	0.00	0.330
Women				0.00	0.11	0.998
Black				-0.20	0.14	0.155
Other Race				0.11	0.12	0.327
Hispanic				0.06	0.12	0.620
Less than HS				0.40	0.31	0.193
Some college				-0.02	0.12	0.847
2yr degree				0.17	0.16	0.287
4yr degree				0.05	0.15	0.726
Postgraduate degree				0.08	0.19	0.676
Catholic				-0.05	0.14	0.743
Not religious				0.01	0.13	0.947
Other religion				-0.08	0.14	0.568

| | **Model 1** | | | **Model 2** | | |
Predictors	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Religious attendance				0.04	0.02	0.079
Liberalism				0.03	0.04	0.490
Midwest				-0.16	0.14	0.268
Northeast				-0.15	0.14	0.261
Southwest				-0.13	0.15	0.383
West				-0.19	0.15	0.198
Divorced/Widowed				-0.05	0.13	0.714
Married				-0.07	0.12	0.558
Non-heterosexual				-0.20	0.14	0.162
Moderate problem				0.08	0.16	0.640
Very big problem				0.07	0.18	0.693
Trafficking increasing				-0.09	0.12	0.421
Observations	517			515		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.039 / 0.032			0.140 / 0.070		

Table 13.

Support for Decriminalization by Venue with Additional Predictors

	Brothels			Independent Online			Street		
Predictors	*β*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	-0.47	0.19	**0.02**	-0.71	0.20	**<0.01**	-0.43	0.22	0.06
Individual Foundations	0.04	0.04	0.38	-0.02	0.04	0.66	-0.02	0.05	0.64
Collective Foundations	-0.07	0.05	0.13	-0.02	0.05	0.67	-0.03	0.05	0.52
Liberty	0.10	0.04	**0.01**	0.08	0.04	**0.04**	0.10	0.05	**0.04**
Demand Reduction Goal	0.19	0.10	0.07	0.29	0.10	**<0.01**	0.26	0.10	**0.01**
Harm Reduction Goal	0.58	0.12	**<0.01**	0.57	0.12	**<0.01**	0.48	0.13	**<0.01**
Empowerment Ideology	0.41	0.09	**<0.01**	0.52	0.09	**<0.01**	0.44	0.12	**<0.01**
Oppressive Ideology	-0.50	0.11	**<0.01**	-0.31	0.10	**<0.01**	-0.24	0.11	**0.03**
Human rights issue	-0.03	0.07	0.71	-0.03	0.07	0.63	-0.08	0.08	0.27
Sexuality rights	0.11	0.07	0.12	0.17	0.08	**0.03**	0.18	0.08	**0.02**
Punitiveness	-0.05	0.04	0.17	-0.04	0.04	0.26	-0.06	0.04	0.18
Sexual liberalism	0.28	0.04	**<0.01**	0.27	0.05	**<0.01**	0.27	0.05	**<0.01**
Confidence in law	0.05	0.04	0.19	0.09	0.04	**0.01**	0.07	0.04	0.06
Economic liberalism	-0.04	0.03	0.27	-0.04	0.03	0.20	-0.01	0.04	0.81
Age	0.00	0.00	0.19	0.00	0.00	0.93	-0.00	0.00	0.61
Women	-0.10	0.08	0.18	-0.06	0.08	0.48	-0.03	0.09	0.72
Black	-0.14	0.10	0.14	-0.18	0.10	0.09	-0.13	0.11	0.23
Other Race	-0.09	0.10	0.37	-0.06	0.10	0.56	-0.03	0.11	0.80
Hispanic	-0.07	0.10	0.46	-0.06	0.10	0.56	-0.24	0.11	**0.03**
Less than HS	-0.06	0.20	0.76	-0.15	0.19	0.41	-0.15	0.22	0.49
Some college	0.05	0.08	0.56	0.06	0.08	0.46	-0.09	0.09	0.34
2yr degree	0.18	0.10	0.08	0.02	0.10	0.87	-0.11	0.12	0.36
4yr degree	0.14	0.10	0.19	0.12	0.10	0.24	0.08	0.11	0.44
Postgraduate degree	0.02	0.13	0.87	0.06	0.15	0.69	0.08	0.15	0.60
Catholic	-0.11	0.10	0.26	0.03	0.10	0.73	0.13	0.11	0.23
Not religious	-0.05	0.09	0.58	0.08	0.09	0.40	-0.04	0.10	0.67
Other religion	-0.11	0.10	0.27	-0.08	0.11	0.44	0.07	0.11	0.53
Religious attendance	-0.01	0.02	0.61	0.00	0.02	0.94	0.01	0.02	0.50

Liberalism	0.03	0.02	0.21	0.07	0.03	**0.01**	0.07	0.03	**0.02**
Midwest	-0.01	0.09	0.89	0.05	0.09	0.59	-0.04	0.10	0.69
Northeast	-0.06	0.09	0.46	-0.09	0.10	0.36	-0.23	0.11	**0.04**
Southwest	-0.03	0.11	0.81	0.09	0.11	0.44	-0.02	0.12	0.90
West	0.07	0.11	0.53	-0.03	0.12	0.82	0.02	0.11	0.83
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.03	0.09	0.73	-0.12	0.10	0.21	-0.20	0.10	**0.04**
Married	0.03	0.08	0.70	-0.04	0.08	0.62	-0.14	0.09	0.14
Non-heterosexual	-0.05	0.10	0.61	0.01	0.09	0.89	0.01	0.10	0.94
Moderate problem	0.11	0.09	0.21	0.14	0.10	0.16	0.23	0.13	0.06
Very big problem	0.06	0.11	0.61	0.05	0.11	0.63	0.05	0.15	0.74
Trafficking increasing	-0.10	0.09	0.24	-0.08	0.09	0.36	-0.12	0.09	0.21
Observations		517			516			517	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.596 / 0.563			0.575 / 0.541			0.496 / 0.456	

Table 14.

Regression on Belief in Whether Criminalization is Effective for Addressing Exploitation and Whether It Keeps Sex Workers Safe

Predictors	Criminalization Effective			Criminalization Safe		
	Estimates	*SE*	*p*	*Estimates*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	0.29	0.25	0.246	0.91	0.28	**0.001**
Individual Foundations	-0.06	0.05	0.228	-0.04	0.05	0.416
Collective Foundations	0.19	0.06	**0.001**	0.19	0.06	**0.001**
Liberty	-0.04	0.04	0.362	-0.10	0.05	**0.040**
Liberty^2	-0.08	0.03	**0.006**	-0.07	0.03	**0.018**
Empowerment Ideology	-0.52	0.12	**<0.001**	-0.45	0.12	**<0.001**
Oppressive Ideology	0.34	0.11	**0.003**	0.02	0.13	0.869
Human rights issue	-0.11	0.08	0.167	-0.09	0.09	0.307
Sexuality rights	-0.23	0.09	**0.009**	-0.23	0.09	**0.013**
Punitiveness	0.23	0.05	**<0.001**	0.18	0.05	**<0.001**
Sexual liberalism	-0.08	0.05	0.121	-0.01	0.06	0.905
Confidence in legal system	0.07	0.04	0.112	0.00	0.06	0.989
Economic liberalism	-0.02	0.04	0.575	-0.03	0.05	0.466
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.273	-0.01	0.00	**0.015**
Women	-0.09	0.10	0.350	-0.04	0.10	0.661
Black	0.15	0.13	0.247	0.20	0.15	0.181
Other Race	0.09	0.11	0.412	0.29	0.12	**0.017**
Hispanic	0.15	0.11	0.150	0.00	0.11	0.983
Less than HS	-0.03	0.22	0.894	-0.22	0.22	0.301
Some college	-0.12	0.10	0.228	-0.15	0.11	0.171
2yr degree	-0.00	0.13	0.992	-0.04	0.15	0.781
4yr degree	-0.09	0.12	0.433	-0.21	0.13	0.110
Postgraduate degree	-0.25	0.16	0.106	-0.19	0.19	0.321
Catholic	-0.13	0.11	0.246	-0.14	0.13	0.271
Not religious	-0.15	0.12	0.188	-0.25	0.13	**0.044**
Other religion	-0.06	0.12	0.593	-0.34	0.13	**0.009**
Religious attendance	-0.01	0.02	0.578	0.01	0.02	0.813

Political liberalism	0.03	0.03	0.362	0.02	0.03	0.600
Midwest	0.02	0.11	0.863	-0.29	0.12	**0.021**
Northeast	0.06	0.12	0.626	-0.09	0.13	0.475
Southwest	-0.07	0.13	0.614	-0.33	0.14	**0.015**
West	0.12	0.11	0.291	-0.15	0.12	0.242
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.01	0.11	0.958	-0.17	0.12	0.148
Married	0.05	0.09	0.619	-0.01	0.10	0.913
Non-heterosexual	0.02	0.13	0.901	0.14	0.14	0.300
Moderate problem	0.00	0.13	0.985	0.06	0.13	0.673
Very big problem	0.09	0.15	0.540	0.09	0.15	0.552
Trafficking increasing	0.16	0.09	0.080	-0.01	0.10	0.897
Observations		519			519	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.415 / 0.370			0.282 / 0.227	

Table 15.

Regression on Support for Sex Workers and Trafficking Survivors Making Prostitution

Regulations

Predictors	Estimates	SE	p
Intercept	-0.10	0.28	0.719
Individualizing Foundations	0.12	0.06	**0.043**
Collective Foundations	-0.03	0.07	0.647
Liberty	-0.01	0.05	0.868
Liberty^2	-0.06	0.03	0.093
Empowerment Ideology	0.10	0.13	0.448
Oppressive Ideology	-0.06	0.14	0.642
Human rights issue	0.04	0.09	0.643
Sexuality rights	0.08	0.09	0.389
Punitiveness	-0.02	0.06	0.742
Sexual liberalism	0.15	0.06	**0.008**
Confidence in legal system	-0.04	0.05	0.458
Economic liberalism	0.02	0.05	0.751
Age	-0.01	0.00	**0.008**
Women	0.20	0.11	0.073
Black	-0.21	0.14	0.135
Other Race	0.08	0.12	0.503
Hispanic	0.02	0.11	0.877
Less than HS	-0.49	0.27	0.065
Some college	-0.04	0.11	0.677
2yr degree	0.20	0.15	0.184
4yr degree	0.12	0.13	0.369
Postgraduate degree	0.21	0.20	0.298
Catholic	-0.14	0.13	0.282
Not religious	0.18	0.14	0.196
Other religion	0.05	0.14	0.721
Religious attendance	0.03	0.02	0.184
Political liberalism	0.06	0.04	0.081

Midwest	0.19	0.13	0.152
Northeast	0.00	0.13	0.972
Southwest	-0.17	0.14	0.244
West	-0.10	0.14	0.478
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.04	0.13	0.754
Married	-0.00	0.12	0.970
Non-heterosexual	0.10	0.14	0.482
Moderate problem	0.06	0.14	0.677
Very big problem	0.03	0.16	0.849
Trafficking increasing	-0.16	0.10	0.129
Observations	519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.204 / 0.143		

Table 16.

Support for Police Ability to Engage in Sexual Contact During Sting Operations

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.30	0.28	0.288
Individualizing Foundations	-0.14	0.06	**0.015**
Collective Foundations	0.09	0.06	0.114
Liberty	-0.19	0.05	**0.001**
Liberty^2	-0.07	0.04	0.055
Empowerment Ideology	-0.30	0.11	**0.007**
Oppressive Ideology	0.03	0.14	0.860
Human rights issue	0.03	0.09	0.767
Sexuality rights	-0.24	0.10	**0.014**
Punitiveness	0.15	0.06	**0.010**
Sexual liberalism	0.13	0.06	**0.018**
Confidence in legal system	0.08	0.06	0.141
Economic liberalism	-0.04	0.05	0.361
Age	0.00	0.00	0.193
Women	0.12	0.11	0.272
Black	-0.08	0.13	0.526
Other Race	0.05	0.12	0.663
Hispanic	-0.05	0.12	0.649
Less than HS	-0.16	0.24	0.512
Some college	-0.17	0.11	0.126
2yr degree	-0.09	0.16	0.576
4yr degree	-0.06	0.14	0.656
Postgraduate degree	0.03	0.21	0.870
Catholic	-0.10	0.14	0.488
Not religious	-0.14	0.13	0.280
Other religion	-0.11	0.14	0.452
Religious attendance	0.03	0.02	0.184
Political liberalism	-0.02	0.03	0.632
Midwest	0.18	0.13	0.170

Predictors	β	SE	p
Northeast	-0.03	0.13	0.817
Southwest	-0.04	0.14	0.780
West	0.01	0.14	0.923
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	-0.22	0.13	0.103
Married	-0.24	0.11	**0.024**
Non-heterosexual	-0.03	0.12	0.827
Moderate problem	-0.04	0.13	0.768
Very big problem	-0.15	0.16	0.348
Trafficking increasing	-0.00	0.11	0.988
Observations		518	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.198 / 0.136	

Table 17.

Support for Possession of Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	0.21	0.27	0.447
Individual Foundations	-0.20	0.06	**<0.001**
Collective Foundations	0.21	0.06	**<0.001**
Liberty	-0.04	0.05	0.379
Liberty^2	-0.08	0.03	**0.006**
Empowerment Ideology	-0.39	0.11	**0.001**
Oppressive Ideology	0.01	0.13	0.959
Human rights issue	-0.06	0.09	0.466
Sexuality rights	-0.17	0.09	0.063
Punitiveness	0.16	0.05	**0.002**
Sexual liberalism	0.03	0.06	0.616
Confidence in legal system	0.03	0.05	0.623
Economic liberalism	-0.03	0.05	0.554
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.192
Women	-0.04	0.10	0.723
Black	0.11	0.14	0.409
Other Race	-0.00	0.12	0.979
Hispanic	0.13	0.12	0.270
Less than HS	-0.03	0.14	0.847
Some college	-0.10	0.11	0.379
2yr degree	-0.13	0.15	0.395
4yr degree	-0.01	0.14	0.934
Postgraduate degree	0.02	0.18	0.910
Catholic	-0.00	0.13	0.981
Not religious	-0.18	0.13	0.167
Other religion	-0.08	0.14	0.574
Religious attendance	0.04	0.02	0.117
Political liberalism	0.04	0.03	0.182
Midwest	-0.02	0.13	0.860

Predictors	β	SE	p
Northeast	0.00	0.13	0.974
Southwest	-0.08	0.13	0.545
West	0.08	0.14	0.535
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	-0.23	0.13	0.067
Married	-0.12	0.10	0.254
Non-heterosexual	-0.07	0.13	0.618
Moderate problem	0.15	0.13	0.249
Very big problem	0.17	0.15	0.246
Trafficking increasing	0.01	0.10	0.934
Observations		518	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted		0.255 / 0.197	

Table 18.

Support for Sex Workers' Immunity When Reporting Crimes

Predictors	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.68	0.25	**0.007**
Individualizing Foundations	0.29	0.06	**<0.001**
Collective Foundations	-0.25	0.06	**<0.001**
Liberty	0.17	0.04	**<0.001**
Empowerment Ideology	0.25	0.11	**0.021**
Oppressive Ideology	0.07	0.13	0.558
Human rights issue	0.14	0.08	0.077
Sexuality rights	0.07	0.09	0.464
Punitiveness	-0.00	0.05	0.934
Sexual liberalism	0.04	0.05	0.386
Confidence in legal system	-0.04	0.05	0.416
Economic liberalism	0.04	0.05	0.425
Age	0.00	0.00	0.582
Women	-0.13	0.10	0.193
Black	-0.27	0.14	0.059
Other Race	-0.02	0.13	0.847
Hispanic	0.01	0.11	0.963
Less than HS	-0.51	0.32	0.111
Some college	0.14	0.10	0.167
2yr degree	-0.06	0.15	0.702
4yr degree	0.11	0.12	0.350
Postgraduate degree	0.10	0.17	0.576
Catholic	0.13	0.13	0.305
Not religious	0.07	0.11	0.536
Other religion	-0.18	0.13	0.160
Religious attendance	0.01	0.02	0.758
Political liberalism	0.08	0.03	**0.019**
Midwest	0.12	0.10	0.233
Northeast	-0.08	0.12	0.515

Predictors	β	SE	p
Southwest	0.11	0.12	0.347
West	-0.03	0.14	0.825
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.18	0.12	0.120
Married	0.09	0.11	0.393
Non-heterosexual	0.07	0.13	0.584
Moderate problem	-0.09	0.12	0.413
Very big problem	-0.03	0.15	0.834
Trafficking increasing	0.14	0.11	0.188
Observations	519		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.326 / 0.276		

Table 20.

Ratings of Convincingness for Decriminalization with Additional Predictors

Predictors	Model 2		
	β	SE	p
Intercept	-0.65	0.16	**<0.001**
Female Sexuality	-0.06	0.04	0.095
Public Health	0.11	0.04	**0.001**
Labor Rights	-0.04	0.04	0.236
Crime Victimization	0.12	0.04	**0.001**
Social Justice	-0.11	0.04	**0.002**
Selling Sex	0.05	0.02	**0.008**
Decrim. Selling Support	0.36	0.04	**<0.001**
Selling-Buying Support difference	-0.00	0.02	0.925
Individualizing Foundations	0.11	0.04	**0.002**
Collective Foundations	-0.00	0.04	0.931
Liberty	0.01	0.03	0.854
Empowerment ideology	0.11	0.08	0.166
Oppressive ideology	-0.40	0.08	**<0.001**
Punitiveness	-0.02	0.03	0.534
Sexual liberalism	0.14	0.04	**<0.001**
Confidence in legal system	0.08	0.03	**0.004**
Economic liberalism	-0.00	0.03	0.988
Age	0.01	0.00	**0.013**
Women	0.01	0.07	0.931
Black	0.08	0.09	0.352
Other Race	0.01	0.08	0.890
Hispanic	0.03	0.08	0.726
Less than HS	0.03	0.18	0.877
Some college	-0.03	0.07	0.644
2yr degree	-0.16	0.09	0.085
4yr degree	-0.07	0.08	0.418
Postgraduate degree	-0.02	0.11	0.858

Catholic/Orthodox	0.03	0.08	0.727
Not religious	0.13	0.08	0.129
Other religion	0.09	0.09	0.319
Religious attendance	0.02	0.01	0.121
Political liberalism	0.06	0.02	**0.005**
Midwest	0.15	0.08	0.056
Northeast	0.12	0.09	0.162
Southwest	0.12	0.09	0.191
West	0.08	0.09	0.400
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	0.00	0.09	0.995
Married	0.09	0.07	0.245
Non-heterosexual	0.08	0.09	0.376

Random Effects

σ^2	0.28	
τ_{00} ResponseId	0.33	
ICC	0.54	
N ResponseId	519	
Observations	3110	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.393 / 0.723	

Appendix B

The appendix includes original survey items drafted for inclusion in the proposed study. Items are subject to revision throughout proposal and pilot stages.

I.   Perceptions of Sex Work

Now we would like to know your opinions on different types of sex work. As mentioned before, "sex work" can include a broad range of activities. In this part of the survey, we would like to know about your views toward four specific types of sex work, as defined below:

Web camming: individuals perform erotic shows in front of a webcam, which are livestreamed to viewers

Stripping: the erotic portrayal of one's body through nude dance, seductive movement, and sexually suggestive behaviors

Pornography: sexually explicit videos or photographs intended to elicit sexual arousal

Prostitution: the exchange of sexual acts for something of value, i.e., the buying and selling of sexual acts

For the following statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the statement shown applies to each type of sex work.

Harm
1. Is a harmless activity (Reverse coded)
2. Is a form of gender-based violence
3. Often leads to mental illness
4. Is a legitimate form of labor (Reverse coded)
5. Is exploitative of workers
6. Is a better option than a minimum wage job with little chance of advancement (Reverse coded)
7. Is oppressive
8. Increases the rate of sexually transmitted infections
9. Workers in this industry are a good source for sexual health information (Reverse coded)
10. Often leads to serious health problems

Immorality
11. Promotes immorality
12. Damages society's morals
13. Is degrading
14. Is empowering

Relation to Trafficking
15. Contributes to human trafficking

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Acceptability
    16. Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it is completely acceptable, completely unacceptable, or something in between, where 1 = "completely unacceptable" and 10 = "completely acceptable"

II.   Empowerment Orientation Scale

The phrase "sex work" is an umbrella term that includes industries such as stripping, pornography, web camming, prostitution, phone sex, etc. With this in mind, please read the pairs of statements and indicate if your opinion is closer to the first statement, the second statement, or in the middle.

1. A: All forms of sex work should be prohibited
    B: All forms of sex work should be permitted

2. A: People that engage in sex work choose to do so
    B: People that engage in sex work are forced to do so

3. A: Sex work is inherently harmful
    B: Sex work is not inherently harmful

4. A: Sex work is empowering
    B: Sex work is degrading

5. A: Sex work is a form of labor
    B: Sex work is a form of violence

6. A: The government is obligated to get people out of sex work
    B: Adults have the right to make their own decisions about working in the sex trade

7. A: Prostitution is a victimless crime
    B: Prostitution is not a victimless crime

8. A: Decriminalizing prostitution would reduce sexual assault and sexual harassment outside the industry
    B: Decriminalizing prostitution would increase sexual assault and sexual harassment outside the industry

9. A: Decriminalizing prostitution would increase objectification of women
    B: Decriminalizing prostitution would reduce the stigma associated with female sexuality

III.   Type of Social Problem

Instructions: Some people consider sex work to be an issue of rights. What kind of rights issue, if any, do you think sex work is? Choose all that apply.

- ◯ Racial justice issue
- ◯ Labor rights issue
- ◯ Gender rights issue
- ◯ Public health issue
- ◯ Human rights issue
- ◯ Privacy rights issue
- ◯ Family rights issue
- ◯ Sexuality rights issue
- ◯ Immigration issue
- ◯ Other
- ◯ None of the above

IV.   Policy Preferences

Now we would like to know your opinions about prostitution specifically. **Prostitution** is the exchange of sexual acts for something of value, (i.e., the buying and selling of sexual acts) between two consenting adults. It does not include other crimes like sexual assault or kidnapping. Prostitution is not child sex trafficking. Prostitution is not commercial sexual exploitation of minors. This section does not apply to commercial sex transactions involving minors.

In most of the US, buying and selling commercial sex are criminal offenses with potential punishments that include fines, mandatory treatment programs, and/or imprisonment. The following questions will ask about your opinions on this policy and potential alternatives to this approach.

1. People should be arrested and go to jail for prostitution offenses

2. People should receive social services (i.e., medical and housing assistance, child support, educational/vocational training) instead of jail time for prostitution offenses

3. Criminalizing prostitution is an effective way to address exploitation

4. Criminalizing prostitution keeps sex workers safe

5. Prostitution regulations should be created by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors

6. During undercover stings and raids, which plainclothes officers pose as potential customers, solicit sex workers, and then arrest them.

    Do you support or oppose police being allowed to engage in sexual contact with sex workers during these stings?

7. Police should be allowed to use possession of condoms as evidence that someone is engaging in prostitution

8. Sex workers should be able to report crimes like rape or sex trafficking to the police without being arrested for prostitution

Recently, some areas have considered eliminating criminal penalties for prostitution offenses. This is called **decriminalization**. This means people would not be arrested, receive jail time, or a criminal record for prostitution activities. This does *not* mean prostitution would be legalized.

Again, prostitution involves two consenting adults. This section does not apply to commercial sex transactions involving minors.

Based on this information, please rate your level of support for this policy in the following situations.

9. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose a policy that decriminalizes *buying* sex between consenting adults (i.e., non-violent clients of sex workers)?

10. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose a policy that decriminalizes *selling* sex between consenting adults (i.e., sex workers)?

11. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose a policy that decriminalizes third parties in commercial sex transactions (i.e., neither sex workers nor clients)? This can include people who schedule appointments, advertise, screen clients, and/or provide security to sex workers.

12. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose a policy that **decriminalizes selling** sex, but **criminalizes buying** sex between consenting adults?

Brothel prostitution is when commercial sex takes place within designated indoor premises.

13. What is your level of support for decriminalizing brothel prostitution between consenting adults?

Independent online prostitution is where workers operate independently by using online platforms to advertise and arrange meetings with clients.

14. What is your level of support for decriminalizing independent online prostitution between consenting adults?

Street prostitution is when clients are solicited on the street, park, or other public places, and serviced in side streets, vehicles, or short stay premises, like hotels.

15. What is your level of support for decriminalizing street prostitution between consenting adults?

16. Regarding the goal of public policy on prostitution, which of the following comes closest to your view?
○ We should prohibit commercial sex and punish those who engage in it
○ We should reduce the demand for sexual services and rescue prostitutes
○ We should reduce unsafe working conditions and give prostitutes labor rights

V. Experimental Conditions

a. Current laws criminalizing prostitution are a form of government interference in people's private lives. Adults should be able to engage in consensual sex without government interference. People should be able to do sex work either without government interference or as a form of work that is permitted to operate like any other free market activity.

b. Current laws criminalizing prostitution have served to oppress and control female sexuality. Its criminalization and stigmatization reflect society's aim to control female sexuality in order to keep women in a reproductive role. People should be able to profit from their sexuality and choose the terms of their consent, without being confined by patriarchal notions of female sexual activity.

c. Current laws criminalizing prostitution represent a significant threat to the health of individuals and communities. Criminalization increases the risk of unsafe sex practices because police can confiscate condoms as evidence. Sex workers have a greater risk of STIs, and often can't access healthcare because of the risk of being arrested, or due to discrimination and mistreatment by medical staff. People should be able to access healthcare without the fear of being arrested.

d. Current laws criminalizing prostitution have disproportionately fallen on marginalized communities and have contributed to the problem of mass incarceration. Its criminalization is part of broader systemic issues that have led to a disproportionate number of people of color ending up in the criminal justice system. Additionally, the laws tend to overly target people from sexual minority groups, like the LGBTQ community.

e. Current laws criminalizing prostitution make sex workers more likely to experience sexual and physical violence. Criminalization makes them more vulnerable to theft, rape, and assault by bad actors because they can't rely on protections from the law. People should be able to report crimes without fear of arrest.

f. Current laws criminalizing prostitution drives the industry underground into unsafe conditions. Criminalization denies sex workers the legal protections and employment rights afforded to every other occupational group, like retirement planning and unemployment benefits. Sex work is just like any other occupation, where people sell their labor in exchange for money. People should be able to engage in sex work with access to the same employment and legal rights of any other occupation.

VI.   Nordic Model Vignette

Evidence suggests that criminalizing buyers, but not sellers, still has negative impacts for sex workers. This approach is meant to reduce the demand for sex work, but this means sex workers must compete for clients through lowering their prices and limits their ability to negotiate safer sex practices, such as condom use.

Given this information, what is your level of support for partial decriminalization, in which selling sex is decriminalized, but buying sex remains illegal?

Strongly oppose ⚪ ⚪ ⚪ ⚪ ⚪ ⚪ ⚪ Strongly support

VII.   Additional Batteries

a. Moral Foundations Questionnaire

b. Sexual Liberalism

c. Economic Liberalism

d. Punitiveness Index

e. Concerns About Trafficking

How big of a problem do you think sex trafficking is in the United States?
○ A very big problem
○ A moderately big problem
○ A small problem
○ Not a problem at all

Do you think sex trafficking in the United States is…?
○ Increasing
○ Decreasing
○ Staying the same
○ Don't Know

f. Confidence in Legal System

g. Demographic Battery