

WOMEN BUYING SEX IN AUSTRALIA PROMPT RETHINK OF GENDERED SEX INDUSTRY NARRATIVES

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Background: Calls to end the demand for commercial sex have gained social prominence in Australia, frequently conflating voluntary and forced sex work and typically considering clients to be male and sex workers to be female. This paper presents empirical evidence of women buying sex in Australia, demonstrating gender diversity in the sex industry.

Methods: The aim of the project is to examine the female market of sex clients from both client and provider perspectives. This paper presents the collective knowledge of workers through thematic analysis of data from 17 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with sex workers who service female clients. The sex workers of all genders, self-selected for the study via social media advertising and invitations through relevant organisations.

Results: All participants described women who buy sex as diverse, not fitting any particular category, who could be from any ethnicity, income group and adult age. While all types of sexual services are available to women, participants thought there are fewer sex workers who are willing to see female than male clients. Sex workers remarked upon a growing market of female clients who engage all genders for a variety of services including full sex and, erotic massage and dance. Women's motivations to buy sex were described as diverse and similar to those of male identifying clients, ranging from satisfying sexual desire to meeting therapeutic goals.

Conclusion: There appears to be a growing market of women buying sex who do not match any stereotypes. Empirical evidence about women buying sex challenge gender based narratives about the Australian sex industry.