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Lauren J. Joseph and Pamela Black

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# Who's the Man? Fragile Masculinities, Consumer Masculinities, and the Profiles of Sex Work Clients

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## Abstract

Some research on male clients of female prostitutes argues that clients are simply seeking unemotional sexual release or looking for wild and varied sexual experiences. Yet other sex workers portray clients as lonely, vulnerable, and desiring of emotional connection with women. Rather than view this as an “either-or” scenario—in which all clients fit one profile—we construct two dichotomous models of masculinity for clients and explore their attitudes toward women and sex. Men in the fragile masculinities category feel uncomfortable around women, unattractive to women, and rejected by women in the sexual marketplace, while consumer masculinities men get excited by approaching a prostitute, seek a variety of partners, and do not want the responsibilities of a relationship. We find that fragile masculinities men may be more dangerous to women than consumer masculinities men.

## Keywords

clients of sex workers, Johns, rape myths, masculinity, prostitution

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What sort of man buys sex, and why? Feminist critics and opponents of sex work have long argued that male consumption of sex work is an expression of masculine power, domination, and control over women (Jeffreys 1997; Dworkin 1981; MacKinnon 1987, 1989). This view suggests that men who purchase the services of prostitutes engage in a gendered form of violence against women, regardless of the circumstances under which the sex is purchased (O'Connell Davidson 1998). Pro-sex feminists and many sex workers, conversely, emphasize the mutuality of the commercial exchange between men and women, and portray sex work as gendered service labor in which male clients purchase the attention of consenting women for temporary pleasure, leisure, and even moments of intimacy (Chapkis 1996; Sanders 2008; Elias et al. 1998; Nagle 1997; Bernstein 2007).

Recent research on the motivations of clients shows that they seek the services of prostitutes for a variety of reasons. Many studies report that male clients are seeking sexual release without emotional attachment, interested in sex that is different or wilder than they can get at home, that the men enjoy the illicit thrill of seeking out and consuming paid sex acts, or that the experience is simply "for pleasure" or "for fun" (Campbell 1998; Plumridge et al. 1997; Mansson 2006; Vanwesenbeeck et al. 1993; Atchison, Fraser, and Lowman 1998). Yet, some accounts from female sex workers present a different picture of clients: the women portray some of their clients as lonely, insecure, often vulnerable men who feel unattractive to women, are uncomfortable around women, and lack noncommercial sexual alternatives. These portrayals of clients suggest that a desire for emotional and sensual attention from women—any woman!—to be one of these men's key motivations for patronizing prostitutes (Sanders 2006, 2008; Peng 2007; Frank 2002).

How should we reconcile these two disparate views of male clients of sex workers and their motivations for seeking out sexual services? Moreover, how can we situate this within arguments about the relationship between the meaning of sex work for the clients, the men's beliefs and attitudes toward women, and their proclivities toward sexual aggression? Rather than seeing this as an "either-or" scenario—in which one of these two propositions is correct about *all men who buy sex*—we advance a more complex and diversified model of masculinity for clients and their relationship to the consumption of sex work, to pleasure, to masculinity, and their beliefs about women and sexual violence.

In this article, we draw on theories of masculinities to construct two distinct models of masculinity for male clients of street prostitutes, *Consumer Masculinities* and *Fragile Masculinities*, and explore their attitudes toward women and sex. Specifically, we examine how these two groups differ in their acceptance of rape myths and their tendency to commit sexual assault. We use statistical methods to analyze survey data from 1,180 men arrested for trying to hire street prostitutes, enrolled in a "John diversion program" designed to discourage reoffending in several cities across the United States (on John diversion programs see, e.g., Monto and Garcia 2001; Wortley, Fischer, and Webster 2002).

Which type of man is more likely to support rape myths and commit sexual assault? Conventional feminist critiques and criminal justice assessments of male clients of sex workers might suggest that men who fit the consumer masculinities model—men who get excited by the illicit experience of approaching a prostitute, who like a variety of partners and seek different kinds of sex, do not want the responsibilities of a relationship, and prefer prostitutes over a relationship—would be *more likely* to accept rape myths and be sexually aggressive toward women. These hypermasculine and risk-associated men match traditional assessments of sexually aggressive and dominant masculinities, consuming women's bodies for pleasure and without emotional attachment. Traditional feminist critiques of masculinity and sexuality presume that men seeking sex for instrumental rather than emotional reasons would tend to see women as objects and concurrently to embrace more dangerous attitudes toward women and sexual assault.

However, we can also envision an alternative association between masculinity, the consumption of sex work, and attitudes toward sexual violence. Perhaps men in what we call the fragile masculinities category—men who feel uncomfortable around women, unattractive to women, and rejected by women in the sexual marketplace—pose *a greater threat to women*, based on their reported support for rape myths and past commission of sexual assault against women. Men who are frustrated with their lack of success in the sexual marketplace and who feel emasculated outside of the paid interaction may harbor greater amounts of anger toward women in the form of higher levels of acceptance of rape myths than other men who patronize sex workers. Thus, this study examines which group of men is more likely to support rape myths and commit sexual assault.

## On Masculinities, Sex Work, and Gendered Violence

Theories of masculinities can shed light on the relationship between men, their consumption of sex work, and their attitudes toward women and violence. The operation of hegemonic masculinity in society serves to privilege certain types of masculinities while causing men who fall short of those expectations to feel subordinate and marginalized (Connell 1995). Beginning at a young age, males are pushed to seek out risk, to be emotionally stoic, physically tough, overtly heterosexual, to reject displays of femininity or fear, and to be successful in the economic sphere. Failure to live up to these rigid gendered expectations, for boys and men, results in shame and humiliation (Messner 1992, 1997; Connell 1995). Research on the male gender identity has shown that men's claim to masculinity is fragile and tenuous: even for the most powerful and dominant of men, a man is always at risk of "failing" to prove to be masculine enough (Pascoe 2007). Masculinity is a perpetual achievement, and men are ceaselessly at risk of being considered insufficiently masculine (Beneke 1997).

Men's experiences in the sexual arena are inextricably tied to these discourses of masculinity: "real men" are expected to display sexual prowess and to "conquer"

women in their pursuit of pleasure and sexual interactions unencumbered by emotional attachment. Successful masculine gender identities are associated with sexual voraciousness, and men's high drive for sex is constructed within Western culture as a "biological need" that demands to be satisfied by quick sexual release (Sanders 2008). Within this construct, sex, for men, should be decoupled from emotions, and men should desire, seek, and have sex for pleasure, rather than for procreation. This cultural script is coupled with the rise in the availability of commercialized and commodified sex in recent years (Bernstein 2007). Healthy sexual men, in this view, are presumed to be, in their natural state, active and desiring consumers of sex, sexuality, and women's bodies—seeking sexual pleasure, variety in sexual partners, and different kinds of sexual experiences without the bonds of commitment. However, within this cultural context, there are also men who fail at successful sexual interaction with noncommercial women, either by being unable to attract a sexual partner or by being unable to talk to women. These men are primed to feel shame and humiliation for their inadequacies. For men, the idea of "needing women," for sexual or emotional support and attention, may be experienced as weakness and dependence—not images associated with strong, potent, and virile masculinity.

The association between masculinity and interpersonal violence is not difficult to locate in Western culture (Messerschmidt 1993). Masculine displays by men in power and with gendered social privilege have been historically and contemporarily linked to violence against women (Katz 2006). Yet, men who feel *insecure* about their masculinity are also highly susceptible to engaging in *compensatory behaviors*—what has been called exaggerated versions of gender stereotypical behavior (Kimmel 2005a, 20) in order to reaffirm their masculine status, in front of other men or with women. In fact, insecure or fragile men have been shown to be at high risk for engaging in many types of violence—both against men and women. For example, one of the best predictors of the onset of domestic violence by men is unemployment (Kimmel 2005b, 195). Beneke (1982) also argues that women's attractiveness elicits from men feelings of desire and longing that, when men are rejected by women, can make men feel helpless, powerless, and vulnerable, sometimes sparking aggressive retribution in the form of rape or other sexual violence. Gilligan (1996) argues that men who have committed severely violent crimes, particularly against women, are subconsciously motivated by a desire to escape and retaliate against gendered shame and humiliation. Feelings of powerlessness and impotence, coupled with a sense of entitlement to women's bodies and the societal prescription that men should feel in control, can be a dangerous mix for men with respect to their proclivity toward sexual violence (Scully 1994).

The term *rape myths* was conceived by Burt (1980) to refer to a set of attitudes believed to support sexual violence toward women. Examples of rape myths are "only bad girls get raped"; "any woman can resist a rapist if she wants to"; "women ask for it"; "women 'cry rape' only when they've been jilted or have something to cover up" (Burt 1980, 217). Underlying this idea is the proposition that violence

against women is not the psychopathological behavior of a small number of sick men, but a sociocultural phenomenon in which persons may rely on a series of culturally available attitudes to justify and support their violent behavior (Monto and Hotaling 2001, 277). Theories of sexual aggression and victimization have increasingly emphasized the role of rape myths in the perpetuation of sexual assault by men against women (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994; Suarez and Gadalla 2010). Various versions of rape myth acceptance scales have been used extensively in a wide variety of studies to test the degree to which men and women in different social locations accept prejudicial, stereotypical, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists, such as college students (Mahon 2010); police officers (Page 2010), and individuals with a personal history of sexual trauma (Baugher et al. 2010). Burt (1980) found that the degree of acceptance of rape myths varies according to various demographic variables; younger people and people with greater levels of education are not as supportive of proviolence attitudes and rape myths as their counterparts.

Rape myths are the attitudes and beliefs that support the act of rape, or “sexual assault,” against women. The degree of acceptance of rape myths is associated with tendency to commit sexual assault (Burt 1980). Sexual assault takes many forms, including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact or threats (National Center for Victims of Crime). The term *sexual assault* has become dominant in the US legal context in order to account for the wider set of behaviors that often accompany rape. In this study, our Sexual Assault scale measures whether or not the respondent has used force or threatened to use force to obtain sex, thus focusing specifically on the behavior of sexual violence, while the Rape Myth Support scale measures attitudes and beliefs.

How do clients differ from the average male in their attitudes toward women and sexual violence? There is some limited data that suggest they are not dramatically different in their values and beliefs. Monto and McRee (2005) compare male clients to nationally representative samples of American men and find that although many if not most American men have *not* visited a prostitute, most differences between the two groups were small. While customers were statistically less likely to be married or happily married, more likely to be unhappy overall, and expressed greater sexual liberalism than men in the nationally representative sample, Monto and McRee stress that the differences between customers and noncustomers were modest. Monto and Hotaling (2001) also compare clients to representative samples of men and suggest that customers are no more likely to endorse rape myths than other samples of men. Other studies (Preston and Brown-Hart (2005) find racial and ethnic differences in clients’ motivations for seeking out prostitutes as well as likelihood of holding liberal sexual attitudes, although again only by degree. More research needs to be conducted in this area, and to distinguish among groups of men within the population of men who patronize sex workers overall. In our data set, support for rape myths among men caught with prostitutes was generally low, as were levels of reported sexual assault. However, both rape myth support and sexual assault commission were higher in some

groups of clients than in others, leading us to investigate in which groups these attitudes, beliefs, and practices are more prevalent.

## **Emotional Labor and Sex Work: What Men Are Consuming When They “Buy Sex”**

The question of what men are purchasing when they pay for sexual encounters has been the subject of extensive debate. The motivations for seeking out sexual labor have been identified as highly varied: desire for sexual variation, sexual access to partners with preferred ages, racialized features and physiques, the appeal of an “emotion-free, no-strings-attached” sexual encounter, marital problems, lack of alternative sexual outlets, companionship, a drive to explore “exotic” sex acts, the thrill of the encounter, or as a form of “leisure” (Bernstein 2001, 396; Vanwesenbeeck et al. 1993; Holtzman and Pines 1982; Peng 2007; Mansson 2006; Monto 2009; Xantidis and McCabe 2000). Bernstein (2001) argues that men’s demand for sexual commerce has come to be part of a recreational or leisure model of sex work consumption. Here, men are found to be engaging in commodified sexual encounters that can include fleeting moments of “bounded intimacy” with sex workers in a wider cultural environment that is increasingly connecting erotic expression and consumption with the ethos of the marketplace. This points to a consumerist approach to sex and sexuality that some men may choose to embrace in a variety of forms, from pornography, “sex tours” in foreign countries, telephone sex lines, on the Internet, or with prostitutes on the street.

Empirical research from the perspective of the sex worker reveals that the work involves not just physical but also “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983). Sex workers are often expected to display or feign sexual arousal or sexual pleasure for their clients’ gratification as well as provide emotional, therapeutic-type services to the men (Peng 2007; Sanders 2006, 2008; Bernstein 2007). These simulated or real expressions of caring and interest by sex workers are the type of emotional labor expected of those in the “listening occupations,” such as barber, hairstylist, and manicurist (Lever and Dolnick 2010, 187–88). Sex workers often describe a parallel between their work and that of a psychotherapist, describing clients who wished to be held, caressed, or even wanted only to talk during their interaction. According to a sex worker interviewed by Sanders (2006), “I see [this job] as being a physical social worker. Ten percent of the job is sex. Ninety percent of the job is chatting, therapy” (p. 2436). A study based on interviews with male clients at a massage parlor found that all of the men “asserted [their paid sex] in terms of emotionality at some level,” noting the experience of being pampered and the “emotional release” of intimate contact with a caring, tender woman as their key motivation for patronizing the parlors (Plumridge et al. 1997, 175). While these types of interactions may be especially pronounced in interactions with call girls, who typically have more extended time with clients and are often expected to provide more of a “girlfriend experience,” the pattern is also evident in interactions with other types of sex

workers (as not all men can afford call girls). Some street prostitutes report that they see some of their clients in hotel rooms and that they have “regulars” which permits for more intimate encounters—Lever and Dolnick (2010, 194) find that 43 percent of street workers have regular clients they have seen regularly for longer than one year.

Frank (2003) describes men’s visits to strip clubs as “masculinizing practices,” in which men are provided safe opportunities for close interactions with women without the risk of rejection or vulnerability, and an experience in which the men can have what she describes as a fantasy of sexual potency. “Sexuality and sexual conquest, after all,” she notes, “can be experienced by men as humiliating and stressful as well as thrilling” (p. 70). The strippers understood their job to be primarily “about boosting a man’s ego by convincing him that he is desirable, masculine, and successful” (p. 72). Allison’s (1994) research on male patrons of hostess clubs in Japan shows that businessmen seek not sexual release (which they can find elsewhere) but rather sexualized talk or flirtatious banter with women who make them feel sexually potent and reinforce their masculine identities, both individually and as a group. While men may be the unwitting beneficiaries of gendered privilege and power in society, one of the many functions of sex work can be to provide the male client with a temporary fantasy world of sexual power that he may not experience in his daily life (Bernstein 2007).

Xantidis and McCabe (2000), in their analysis of sixty-six men and their motivations for seeking the services of female sex workers, find the existence of two distinct subgroups of clients within their sample. The first group was characterized high sensation seeking and appeared motivated to visit sex workers because of a need for novelty and variety in sexual encounters. The second subgroup, however, was characterized by low social–sexual effectiveness and appeared motivated to visit sex workers because of an interpersonal need for intimacy. Building off of this distinction between types of clients, we constructed the two models of masculinities for male clients: consumer masculinities and fragile masculinities. Men with these distinct motivations for seeking prostitutes will have distinct patterns of beliefs, and should not be merged together in analyses of their attitudes toward women and sexual violence. We challenge the presumption that men who purchase sex work explicitly *as a consumer*—out of a desire to find variety in partners, are looking for thrills, who seek sex without relationships, or who are seeking different kinds of sex (consumer masculinities) will necessarily subscribe to rape myths or have committed sexual assault more frequently than other men who buy sex.

## Method

### Data

Data for this study were obtained from National Archive of Criminal Justice Data: *Clients of Street Prostitutes in Portland, Oregon, San Francisco and Santa Clara, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada, 1996–1999* (Monto 2000). Self-administered

surveys were distributed to men in prevention programs in all four cities. Both English and Spanish language surveys were available, with an overall response rate of more than 80 percent, for a total of 1,343 respondents. The data set was modified to remove any respondents with “missing” responses on the demographic variables, resulting in a final  $N$  of 1,180. Most (71.1 percent) had completed at least some college. More than one-half (57 percent) were not married. More than four-fifth (81.4 percent) were working full time. One quarter of the subjects were military veterans, and 58.3 percent were white. Most of the men (80.7 percent) stated that their spouse was their regular sex partner, and about one-third (31.4 percent) reported having serious trouble with their partner, with one in five reporting being either separated from or that they broke up with their partner. The average age of the sample was 37.97. Complete frequency and percentage distributions for the cleaned data set can be found in Table 1.

### *Operationalization and Measurement*

Fragile and consumer masculinities serve as the intervening variables within this study. Respondents with high scores on the Fragile Masculinity scale were men who viewed sex with prostitutes as their only opportunity for sexual interaction with women, believing themselves to be unattractive to the opposite sex. The Fragile Masculinity scale ( $\alpha = .683$ ) includes the following indicators: (1) respondent has difficulty meeting women; (2) respondent states that he feels that most women find him unattractive; and (3) respondent states that he is shy and awkward with women. The range for this scale is 3 to 12, with 3 indicating the lowest possible score on the Fragile Masculinity scale and 12 the highest.

Respondents with high scores on the Consumer Masculinity scale ( $\alpha = .708$ ) were men who view sex as a commodity—to desire sex with a variety of partners and without relationship responsibilities. The Consumer Masculinity scale includes (1) respondent prefers prostitution to a relationship; (2) respondent likes to have a variety of partners; (3) respondent does not want relationship responsibilities; (4) respondent has no time for a relationship. Respondents scoring 4 did not have a “consumer masculinity” orientation while those scoring 16 exemplified this personality.

It should be noted, however, that these two categories—consumer and fragile masculinities—are not mutually exclusive, and in fact there was a weak correlation between the two types of masculinities ( $r = .243$ ). Yet, the categories remain distinct in that they have differing effects on the dependent variables and were also differentially associated with the independent variables.

The two dependent variables in this study are a “Sexual Assault scale” and a “Rape Myth Support scale.” These scales were created to measure attitudes toward rape and behavior defined as sexual assault. The Sexual Assault scale ( $\alpha = .775$ ) includes two indicators: (1) respondent threatened physical force for sex; and (2) respondent used physical force for sex. While men who have threatened physical force for sex may not follow through with physical force, the use of the threat

**Table 1.** Description of Sample ( $N = 1,180$ )

|   | <i>f</i> | %     |
|---|----------|-------|
| Education level                         |          |       |
| Received a master's                     | 126      | 10.7  |
| Received a bachelor's                   | 283      | 24.0  |
| Some college after high school          | 430      | 36.4  |
| Graduated from high school              | 221      | 18.7  |
| Did not graduate high school            | 120      | 10.2  |
| Marital status                          |          |       |
| Married                                 | 507      | 43.0  |
| Not married                             | 673      | 57.0  |
| Current work status                     |          |       |
| Working full time                       | 960      | 81.4  |
| Not working full time                   | 220      | 18.6  |
| Spouse regular sex partner              |          |       |
| Yes                                     | 825      | 80.7  |
| No                                      | 197      | 19.3  |
| Served in military                      |          |       |
| No                                      | 852      | 75.1  |
| Yes                                     | 283      | 24.9  |
| Serious trouble with partner            |          |       |
| No                                      | 766      | 68.6  |
| Yes                                     | 350      | 31.4  |
| Separated from partner                  |          |       |
| No                                      | 865      | 77.6  |
| Yes                                     | 249      | 22.4  |
| Broke up with partner                   |          |       |
| No                                      | 851      | 77.4  |
| Yes                                     | 249      | 22.6  |
| Is Respondent white?                    |          |       |
| No                                      | 492      | 41.7  |
| Yes                                     | 688      | 58.3  |
|   | Mean     | SD    |
| Age (range 18–84)                       | 37.97    | 11.06 |
| Fragile masculinity score (range 3–12)  | 5.75     | 2.32  |
| Consumer masculinity score (range 4–16) | 7.55     | 2.98  |
| Sexual Assault scale (range 0–2)        | .019     | .177  |
| Rape Myth Support scale (range 4–24)    | 7.57     | 3.8   |

indicates a willingness or acceptance of physical force as a means of getting sex; hence, both indicators are included. The range for this scale was 0 to 2, with 0 indicating the respondent had not reported that he had threatened or used force and a score of 2 indicating that he had both threatened and used force.

The "Rape Myth Support" scale ( $\alpha = .795$ ) includes variables reflecting Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Support scale: (1) respondent feels that stuck up women deserve a

**Table 2.** Operationalization of Variables

| Intervening Variables                                     |   |
|---|---|
| Fragile Masculinity scale<br>Range 3–12; $\alpha = .683$  | R has difficulty meeting women<br>R feels most women find him unattractive<br>R says he is shy and awkward with women   |
| Consumer Masculinity scale<br>Range 4–16; $\alpha = .708$ | R prefers prostitution to a relationship<br>R likes to have a variety of partners<br>R doesn't want relationship responsibilities<br>R has no time for a relationship   |
| Dependent variables                                       |   |
| Sexual Assault scale<br>Range 0–2; $\alpha = .775$        | R threatened physical force for sex<br>R used physical force for sex  |
| Rape Myth Support scale<br>Range 6–24; $\alpha = .795$    | R feels that stuck up women deserve a lesson<br>R feels that women hitchhiking deserve rape<br>R feels that forced sex after necking is the woman's fault<br>R feels that women will report rape to get back at a man<br>Proportion of rape victims have a bad reputation<br>Proportion of women who will report rape to protect their own reputation |

**Table 3.** Educational Level's Mean Score for Sexual Assault Scale and Rape Myth Support Scale

| Education                          | Mean Score Sexual Assault Scale | Mean Score Rape Myth Support Scale |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (a) Received a master's            | .0000                           | 6.536 <sup>(d)(e)</sup>            |
| (b) Received bachelor's            | .0219                           | 6.314 <sup>(c)(d)(e)</sup>         |
| (c) Some college after high school | .0242                           | 7.493 <sup>(b)(d)(e)</sup>         |
| (d) Graduated from high school     | .0144                           | 8.983 <sup>(a)(b)(c)</sup>         |
| (e) Did not graduate high school   | .0263                           | 10.067 <sup>(a)(b)(c)</sup>        |

Note. The superscripts denote which education levels that the variable is significantly different from.

lesson; (2) respondent feels that women hitchhiking deserve rape; (3) respondent feels that forced sex after necking is the woman's fault; (4) respondent feels that women will report rape to get back at a man; (5) proportion of rape victims the respondent feels has a bad reputation; and (6) proportion of rape victims the respondent feels report rape to protect their own reputation. Responses to items 1–4 were coded: 1 = *disagree strongly*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *agree somewhat*, 4 = *agree strongly*. Responses to items 5 and 6 were coded 0 = *almost none*, 1 = *about one-quarter*, 2 = *about half*, 3 = *about three-quarters*, 4 = *almost all*.

There were ten independent variables included in this analysis. Respondents' education level, marital status, current work status, age, veteran status, and race (white/nonwhite) were included as demographic variables. Respondent relationships

**Table 4.** Mean Comparisons for Sexual Assault Scale and Rape Myth Support Scale

|                              | Sexual Assault Scale |       |      | Rape Myth Support Scale |       |      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-------|------|
|                              | N                    | M     | Sig. | N                       | M     | Sig. |
| Marital status               |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| Married                      | 487                  | .0123 | .241 | 436                     | 7.372 | .111 |
| Not married                  | 645                  | .0245 |      | 567                     | 7.753 |      |
| Current work status          |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| Working full time            | 924                  | .013  | .075 | 825                     | 7.36  | .000 |
| Not working full time        | 208                  | .048  |      | 178                     | 8.64  |      |
| Spouse regular sex partner   |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| Yes                          | 795                  | .014  | .111 | 725                     | 7.12  | .009 |
| No                           | 192                  | .047  |      | 162                     | 8.04  |      |
| Served in military           |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| No                           | 844                  | .013  | .107 | 744                     | 7.59  | .834 |
| Yes                          | 282                  | .039  |      | 238                     | 7.53  |      |
| Serious trouble with partner |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| No                           | 760                  | .016  | .511 | 647                     | 7.85  | .000 |
| Yes                          | 348                  | .023  |      | 319                     | 6.88  |      |
| Separated from partner       |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| No                           | 859                  | .013  | .081 | 744                     | 7.63  | .309 |
| Yes                          | 247                  | .045  |      | 222                     | 7.34  |      |
| Broke up with partner        |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| No                           | 845                  | .011  | .027 | 735                     | 7.53  | .345 |
| Yes                          | 247                  | .053  |      | 218                     | 7.83  |      |
| Is respondent white?         |                      |       |      |                         |       |      |
| No                           | 462                  | .02   | .994 | 386                     | 9.21  | .000 |
| Yes                          | 68                   | .019  |      | 617                     | 6.57  |      |

were also included as independent variables, as the personal lives of clients were believed to affect their attitudes toward women, sex, and relationships. Four relationship variables were included: (1) respondent's spouse is his regular sex partner (2) respondent having serious trouble with his partner; (3) respondent separated from his partner; and (4) respondent had broken up with partner.

## Results

### *Mean Comparisons*

Means comparisons (one-way analysis of variance and independent samples *t*-tests) were performed to examine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables. While education does not have a significant effect on sexual assault, it does have a significant effect on rape myth support. Respondents who received a master's degree are less likely to support rape myths than those who graduated from high school or those who did not graduate from high school.

Respondents receiving a bachelor's degree are least likely to support rape myths, and significantly less likely than any other group except for those receiving a master's degree. Those with some college after high school are less likely to support rape myths than those who graduated from high school and those who did not graduate from high school.

Marital status does not have a significant effect on either sexual assault or rape myth support. Work status is significantly associated with rape myth support only, with those not working full time being more likely to support them. Respondents whose spouse was not their regular sex partner also were more likely to believe rape myths. Military veterans were neither more likely to have engaged in sexual assault or to support rape myths. Surprisingly, men who were not having trouble with their partners were more likely to believe in rape myths than those who were. Being separated from one's partner did not affect either sexual assault or rape myth support; however, respondents who broke up with their partners were more likely to have engaged in sexual assault. Race had no significant effect on sexual assault, but racial minorities were more likely to believe in rape myths than white respondents.

### *Multivariate Results*

Two regressions were conducted to see what variables are associated with the fragile masculinities and consumer masculinities constructs. As shown in Table 5, not having one's spouse as a regular sexual partner is associated with both types of masculinities; however, it is most strongly associated with fragile masculinities. Education level is also significantly associated with both masculinity types; however, the effect of education differs between the two types of masculinities. Lower education levels are associated with fragile masculinities, while higher education levels are associated with consumer masculinities. A third variable is associated with fragile masculinities only; men who are not currently working full time are more likely to exhibit a fragile masculinity.

Contrary to the myth of emotionally unattached, hypermasculine men forcing themselves on women, consumer masculinities is not significantly associated with either sexual assault or rape myth support. However, as shown in Table 6, fragile masculinities does have an association. Fragile masculinities has the strongest effect on sexual assault; the only other significant factor is being separated from one's partner (adjusted  $R^2$  of .191). Fragile masculinities is also associated with rape myth support; this association is stronger ( $B = .173$ ) than it is for sexual assault. Race has the strongest effect on rape myth support: the  $B$  of  $-.274$  indicates that nonwhites are more likely than whites to believe rape myths. Lower education level has the second strongest effect, followed by fragile masculinities. The  $B$  for "serious trouble with partner" is negative, indicating that those men who are not experiencing serious trouble with their partners are most likely to subscribe to rape myths.

**Table 5.** Factors Associated with Consumer and Fragile Masculinity

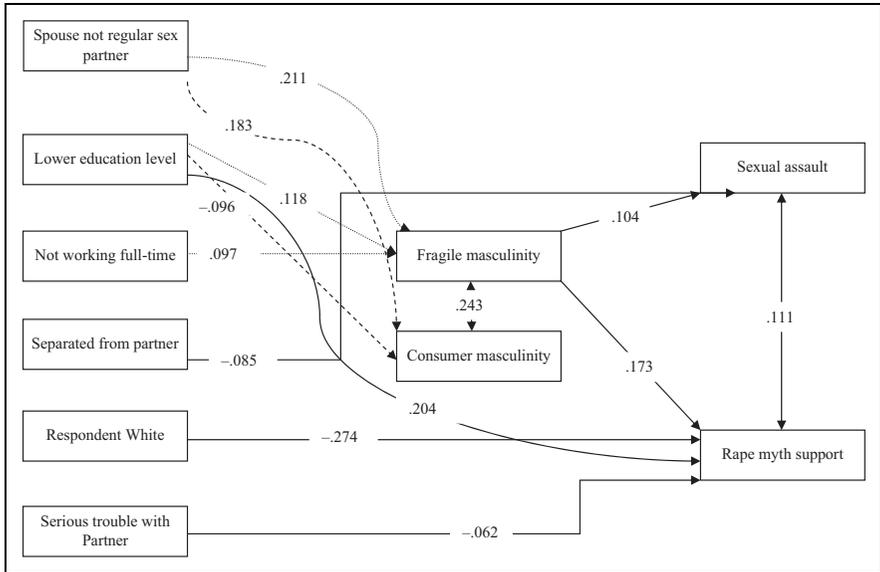
|                                | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> | Sig. |
|--------------------------------|---------|----------|------|
| <b>Consumer masculinity</b>    |         |          |      |
| Spouse not regular sex partner | .183    | 5.032    | .000 |
| Lower education level          | -.096   | -2.646   | .008 |
| <i>R</i>                       | .204    |          |      |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | .039    |          |      |
| <b>Fragile masculinity</b>     |         |          |      |
| Spouse not regular sex partner | .211    | 5.824    | .000 |
| Lower education level          | .118    | 3.282    | .001 |
| Not employed full time         | .097    | 2.686    | .007 |
| <i>R</i>                       |         |          |      |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> |         |          |      |

**Table 6.** Factors Associated with Sexual Assault and Rape Myth Support

|                                | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> | Sig. |
|--------------------------------|---------|----------|------|
| <b>Sexual Assault</b>          |         |          |      |
| Independent variables          |         |          |      |
| Fragile masculinity            | .104    | 3.134    | .002 |
| Demographic variables          |         |          |      |
| Separated from partner         | .085    | 2.558    | .011 |
| <i>R</i>                       | .135    |          |      |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | .016    |          |      |
| <b>Rape myth support</b>       |         |          |      |
| Independent Variables          |         |          |      |
| Fragile Masculinity            | .173    | 5.406    | .000 |
| Demographic variables          |         |          |      |
| Is R white?                    | -.274   | -8.485   | .000 |
| Lower education level          | .204    | 6.292    | .000 |
| Serious trouble with partner   | -.062   | -1.979   | .048 |
| <i>R</i>                       | .442    |          |      |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | .191    |          |      |

Figure 1 shows the direct and indirect factors associated with both sexual assault and rape myth support. Factors having a direct effect on sexual assault include being separated from one's partner and fragile masculinities; however, not working full time, lower education levels and spouse not being one's regular sex partner have indirect effects through the intervening variable "fragile masculinity." A correlation of .243 between consumer and fragile masculinities suggests that consumer masculinities may also be indirectly associated with sexual assault.

Four factors are directly associated with rape myth support: having serious trouble with partner, racial minority status, lower education level, and a "fragile



**Figure 1.** Factors contributing to fragile and consumer masculinities and their effect on support for rape myths and sexual assault.

masculinity.” Additionally, three variables have an effect on rape myth support through the intervening variable “fragile masculinity”: spouse not regular sex partner, lower education level, and not working full time.

### Discussion

We found support for both dimensions of our hypothesis: first, we found that there is more than one type of man seeking sex workers; some men are associated with consumer masculinities characteristics, while others are indicative of a fragile masculinities model. Second, we found differences in levels of support for rape myths and sexual assault among men who fit the fragile masculinities model and men who fit the consumer masculinities model. We should note that most men in this sample did not exhibit support for rape myths, nor did they report having committed sexual assault in the past. Support for rape myths and sexual assault is generally low across the men patronizing street prostitutes, with most male clients disagreeing, for example, that women who hitchhike deserve to be raped.

However, for those men in the sample who *do* support rape myths and have committed sexual assault, we found that there is an important and significant difference: those men tend to be heavily concentrated in the fragile masculinities category. Thus, men with insecure and unsupported masculine identities are more likely to believe in rape myths and to have committed sexual assault in the past.

Moreover, these data show that the lack of a full-time job contributes heavily to men's association with fragile masculinity, a pattern also supported by the literature on masculinities (Mac An Ghail 1996). Men often locate their gendered self-identity in their work and may lose self-esteem and be viewed negatively by society and especially by women as potential sexual or dating partners if they do not have a job or sufficient income (Waters and Moore 2002; Artazcoz et al. 2004). Thus, we would expect that men who are not fully employed are likely to feel less attractive to women, to find it difficult to meet women, and to feel insecure and vulnerable as a result of their employment status—all indicators of a fragile masculinity. In a related pattern, lower educational levels were also associated with the fragile masculinity category. We suggest that men with lower education levels may feel less attractive in the labor market due to their lower education achievements, their lower earning power, or their lower socioeconomic status, leading them to feel less attractive in the sexual marketplace when it comes to successfully picking up and courting noncommercial women.

This study also yielded some surprises. Conceptually, we expected to find whites (as a dominant group) to be more likely to support rape myths than nonwhites; we assumed this would be an extension of dominant group power. However, these data showed that nonwhites were more likely to support rape myths. This does make conceptual sense, however, when one considers that fragile masculinities men are also more likely to support rape myths—perhaps rape myths appeal to disenfranchised males.

Another surprising finding was that relationship problems did not necessarily lead to sexual assault (or support for the ideology of sexual assault via rape myths). Men who were with a partner and not having trouble with their partner were *most likely* to have engaged in or threatened sexual assault or to support rape myths. This is an interesting finding that points to the complexity of how men learn rape myths and exhibit sexual assault behavior over their lifetimes, as well as the prevalence and normalization of sexually violent beliefs and behaviors by men in relationships. How might these men perceive their relationships to be “not problematic”? Perhaps, those men who have threatened sexual assault or supporting rape myths do not perceive these intimate interactions to be “troubled” because they see them as standard practice within male–female relationship patterns, thus failing to report that they are having difficulties with their partner. It may be the women in the relationships that view them as problematic, rather than the men. Moreover, this category rests on individual, subjective interpretations of what constitutes “serious trouble,” which may differ significantly among men. This is also true for the definitions surrounding what constitutes “threatened or used physical force for sex”—again, an individual and subjective evaluation of male–female intimate interaction. Thus, we can only speculate on the intricate dynamics of these intimate partner relationships of male clients given the limitations of the quantitative data, but we should consider these complex dimensions for future studies on men in noncommercial romantic relationships who patronize sex workers.

This study has several limitations that should be mentioned here. First, we do not know what effect arrest and sentencing had on the respondents' reporting of their attitudes and behaviors. Forced attendance of "John school" may have made respondents more hostile toward women, caused them to be more repentant for their behavior, or may have had no effect on the men and their responses. Moreover, it is impossible to tell how honest respondents were in these surveys, since the surveys were conducted in the context of a state-run penal program (albeit anonymously and without risk based on their responses). However, while these limitations make it more challenging to conduct comparisons between these subjects and nonarrested male patrons of sex workers given the specific nature of the data, the data allow us to examine *differences among* men who have all been arrested and sentenced for street prostitution, and are in the same program under the same conditions. It is the differences among the men that prove to be the greatest support for our claims: not all men seek prostitutes for the same reasons, and different types of men hold divergent values and attitudes toward women.

Second, another limitation to our data is that all of the men in this sample were arrested patronizing *street prostitutes*. It is evident from social science research that there are a wide variety of avenues through which men procure sexual services. Much of the sex work purchased today occurs indoors, such as with escorts or call girls, or in massage parlors, and only a limited percentage of prostitution occurs on the streets (Weitzer 2010). However, research on indoor prostitution tells us that indoor sex work, compared to street prostitution, tends to be of longer duration (purchased by the hour or evening rather than by sex act), with more repeat and "regular" customers, more extended relationships, and more emotional intimacy developed among the patron and sex worker over time. Thus, we can expect that fragile masculinities men—men seeking intimacy, talk, and emotional connectivity—would be *more likely* to seek out indoor prostitution if they were able to afford it (indoor sex work tends to be more expensive, and not all fragile masculinities men will have sufficient funds to purchase indoor prostitution, regardless of their desires). Indeed, we can anticipate an even greater concentration of fragile masculinities men in indoor prostitution, with even more acute demands placed upon the sex workers' abilities to satiate *some* male clients' needs for bounded intimacy and personal attention. Hence, we would expect that our findings on distinctions between fragile and consumer masculinities men would be even more dramatic if this survey research were conducted with men patronizing indoor sex workers.

Finally, we should exercise caution in interpreting the finding that race has the strongest effect on rape myth support. Race is a complex, socially constructed category that often conceals more than it reveals, particularly when comparing broad categories of "white" and "nonwhite" individuals. Future investigation of this discrepancy in rape myth support among different racial categories within the population of male sex work clients is warranted. An expanded inquiry would be more finely attuned to account for the complexities of racial identifications, socioeconomic status, the effects of racism, and the sociohistorical experiences of minority men of varying ethnic, racial, and class

backgrounds (particularly in relation to the criminal justice system and the propensity to be arrested for soliciting a prostitute) than we were able to address in this article, given the limitations of survey data and the focus of this particular analysis. (For a more in-depth discussion of racial and ethnic differences in attitudes toward sex, prostitution, and violence against women, see, e.g., Preston and Brown-Hart 2005).

## Conclusions

Using binary logistic regression analysis, we distinguished between types of men who buy sex. We found that men in the fragile masculinities model who feel rejected by women, feel unattractive to women, and lack confidence when it comes to relating to women, are more likely to support rape myths and have committed sexual assault than men in the consumer masculinities category. Sex work has been shown to be not only—or not even mostly—about sexual release but rather about the management of masculine identities and male egos as they intertwine with constructs of desire and sexuality in the sexual marketplace (Frank 2003; Allison 1994). While there may be a tendency to assume that men who treat sex like a consumer good are more dangerous to women, the results from this study suggest otherwise. Men who have a difficult time forming relationships with women, who feel rejected by them overall, are more likely to use force to get sex, and they are more likely to believe popular misconceptions about rape. Not all male clients are the same, and clients may not be more dangerous than men who do not patronize prostitutes, but some clients may be riskier than others.

Criticism of the discourse of prostitution as a form of benign and healthy “sexual therapy and healing” has been offered by contemporary feminists (O’Connell Davidson 1998). Mansson (2006, 90) notes that one of the key narrative themes in men’s images and fantasies of the sex worker is “prostitute as kind-hearted comforter.” Not all men subscribe to this perspective, but this narrative, argues Mansson, permits the client to tell himself that it is not lust but rather his loneliness that makes him seek out prostitutes. She argues that behind those motives there can be dangerous sexual scripts which have as much to do with vengeance and control as those enacted by any other client. Mansson notes:

[A]s the client sees it, in his inner world of illusions, it is the duty of the prostitute to make him feel potent and to support his sense of being in control. This is one of the keys to his vulnerability, but also to his potential dangerousness. Transferring the opportunity to become potent (and sexually released) on to the prostitute, also means that he projects his possible impotence on her. . . . A man who cannot get an erection can become a dangerous man. In such cases there is a close connection between sexual inadequacy and violence. (p. 90)

Thus, it is important to recognize that some clients may be seeking out the services of sex workers for reasons that have as much to do with gendered masculine fragility

and insecurity with respect to women as they do with experiences of male power, privilege, and authority. Although men may be the beneficiaries of masculine privilege in relationship to women as a class, individual men do not always experience that privilege as a feeling of power—and may be dangerous as a result of this lack of success in relationship to women. Men who are thrill seekers, desire a variety of sexual partners, and are not looking for an emotional connection with women as their key motivation for seeking out sex work may be more secure in their masculinity, and thus less dangerous to women. Men who hold more of a consumerist view of sex and pleasure, who see sex as simply another commodity that can be purchased for experimentation, diversion, and sexual release, may be expressing their male privilege to spend their money as they see fit. Yet, as we see here in a quantitative exploration of these associations, the commodification of sex is not inextricably linked to negative views of women, and consumer masculinities men are shown to pose less of a risk to women based on their reported beliefs and attitudes.

Just as there are many types of sex workers, there is more than one type of client. There are dominant and nondominant, exploitative and nonexploitative clients, as there are in other nonsexual service-sector businesses (Peng 2007). The challenge for sex workers is to be able to distinguish between these types of men and their motivations for purchasing sex work and to be aware of the dangers associated with them. There is a complex relationship between masculinity, gendered experiences of power and insecurity, and violence against women, which should be considered when thinking about clients. This quantitative study, using survey data collected directly from male clients on their attitudes and beliefs, has allowed us to identify distinct types of male clients that patronize street prostitutes. The sooner we can deconstruct the essentialist link between the consumption of sex work and men's desire to enact the domination of women, and examine wider cultural patterns of masculinity as part of the labor of sex work, the better we can prepare sex workers to identify and deal with clients who are dangerous to them. Instead of totalizing sex buyers as problematic, we should distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable clients and practices within prostitution (Peng 2007, 334). This distinction between types of clients—fragile masculinities clients and consumer masculinities clients—may help both sex workers and advocates for sex worker safety to identify which types of clients are more and less dangerous to women, and to enable them to protect themselves more successfully on the streets.

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