

Keynote Address

Money, Power, and Sex

Viviana A. Zelizer[†]

During the late 1990s, John Bowe, Marisa Bowe, Sabin Streeter, and their collaborators were interviewing Americans about their work. Following the model of Studs Terkel, their book, *Gig: Americans Talk About Their Jobs*, reports how people in a wide range of occupations feel about what they do for a living. Among them is stripper Sara Maxwell. At twenty-two, Maxwell moved to San Francisco after graduating from a small Virginia college and strip-danced for men at a club called Lusty Lady. The most lucrative part of her work involved erotic performances without physical contact in a private booth occupied by one man at a time. Maxwell noted how her work experience affected her relationships to men in general:

Every guy I saw walking down the street turned into a customer in my eyes. Even my boyfriend exhibited customerlike qualities. He'd say something like, "You need to brush your hair." And I'd hear it as, "Brush your hair for me." With the implication being, in my mind, that he wanted to have some fun. And of course, he would also ask for sex, which further demoted him to the role of customer.¹

Similarly, any time one of her male friends, intrigued by her occupation, expressed an interest in watching her work: "I told them that if I saw them there, we really couldn't be good friends anymore, because then they'd turn into customers."² For Maxwell, the bridge from sex work to intimate relations crossed a very rocky stream. On one side, she engaged in sexual performances for pay, while on the other side, she tried to keep all suggestions of commercial payment out of her sexual relations.

During the same period when the authors of *Gig* were conducting their interviews on Americans' jobs, Gloria González-López began relevant interviews of her own. She examined, however, very different combinations of

[†] Professor of Sociology, Princeton University. This paper adapts a few passages from VIVIANA A. ZELIZER, *THE PURCHASE OF INTIMACY* (2005) and Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Purchase of Intimacy*, 25 *LAW & SOC. INQUIRY* 817 (2000). I am grateful for comments and criticisms to Charles Tilly and to participants in the 2006 *Sex for Sale* symposium at Yale Law School.

1. JOHN BOWE, MARISA BOWE & SABIN STREETER, *GIG: AMERICANS TALK ABOUT THEIR JOBS* 368 (2000).

2. *Id.*

money, power, and sex. González-López talked with immigrant Mexican women and men living in Los Angeles about their intimate lives. Among other things, she found that Mexican wives who earned independent incomes in the United States reported changed sexual relations with their husbands.

For example, forty-three year-old Azalea, an apartment manager, reported that when she and her husband first arrived from Mexico City, her spouse was the main provider. At that time, he forced her to have sex with him whether she wanted it or not. When González-López asked Azalea what she would now tell her husband if he pressured her to have sex, Azalea said emphatically, "I tell him "no" because I support myself. If he supported me and he gave me all the things that I need, then perhaps one might have to do what they [men] tell you. But since here, all we women work, we support ourselves and we help our parents."³

Life in Los Angeles, however, did not abolish moral concerns on the part of Mexican husbands and wives. Thirty-four year-old Victoria, a traditional full-time housewife, described sexual relations with her husband as a *compromiso moral*: a moral obligation, in which she exchanged sexual favors for her husband's material support.⁴ Meanwhile a number of Mexican men described their companions' economic bargaining over sexual intercourse as *chantaje*: blackmail.⁵ Both husbands and wives recognized how delicate was the mingling of economic exchange with sexual activity. Both worried about the uneasy triangulation of money, power, and sex.

The *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism Sex for Sale* symposium identified many instances of uneasy matching between sexual intimacy and commercial transactions. My own contribution is not to multiply examples, but to fit those particular sorts of difficulties into a more general pattern of negotiation between intimacy and economic activity. Let me stress four points:

1. The widespread belief that money corrupts intimacy blocks our ability to describe and explain how money, power, and sex actually interact.
2. The opposite belief—that sex operates like an ordinary market commodity—serves description and explanation no better.
3. The intersection of sex, money, and power does indeed generate confusion and conflict, but that is precisely because participants are simultaneously negotiating delicate, consequential, interpersonal relations and marking differences between those relations and others with which they could easily and dangerously be confused.

3. GLORIA GONZÁLES-LÓPEZ, *EROTIC JOURNEYS* 190 (2005).

4. *Id.* at 198.

5. *Id.* at 283 n.2.

4. In everyday social life, people deal with these difficulties with a set of practices we can call "*Good Matches*."

At first glance, Sara Maxwell's experience and the Mexican immigrants' reports confirm the first belief: that commodification inevitably corrupts sexual intimacy. We should, however, be skeptical about any such absolute formulation. We should think instead about some of the complexities into which the mingling of sexual relations and economic activity leads us.

HOW TO MISUNDERSTAND MONEY, POWER, AND SEX

Even scholars who study intimate relations and economic activity often become confused about these issues. When it comes to the mingling of intimacy (both sexual and otherwise) with economic transactions we find widespread misconceptions blocking analyses of how intimate relations and economic transactions actually mingle. Most notably, many observers assume that any mixing of intimate personal ties with economic transactions inevitably corrupts intimacy, and that invasion of commercial activities by intimate relations corrupts those activities as well.

Where do these concerns come from? They draw from two complementary, but partly independent misunderstandings. We can call them "Separate Spheres" and "Hostile Worlds." Separate Spheres notions identify two distinct domains of social life that operate according to different principles: rationality, efficiency, and planning on one side; solidarity, sentiment, and impulse on the other. Economic activity belongs to the first sphere, sexual relations to the second.

Hostile Worlds beliefs say that when such separate spheres come into contact they contaminate each other. Their mixing, goes the argument, corrupts both; invasion of the sentimental world by instrumental rationality depletes that world, while introduction of sentiment into rational transactions produces inefficiency, favoritism, and cronyism. In this account, a sharp divide exists—and should exist—between intimate relations and economic transactions, since any contact between the two spheres contaminates both of them.

Separate Spheres and Hostile Worlds ideas appear in social science, where generations of analysts have deplored what they saw as the erosion of authenticity and intimacy by an encroaching market. Outside of social science, the same themes frequently resound in moral discourse, when people explain bad behavior as a consequence of greed and call money the root of all evil.

In American law, the doctrines of Separate Spheres and Hostile Worlds show up in new versions. Courts, for example, regularly rule that economic transactions between spouses must count as free gifts rather than *quid pro quo*

exchanges—at least until the moment of divorce.⁶ But practices based on Separate Spheres and Hostile Worlds figure in everyday life as well. Sexually intimate couples, for example, ordinarily take great care to signal (both to others and to each other) that they are not simply exchanging sex for economic rewards.

The notion that marketing intimacy corrupts it reappears across a wide range of intimate relations. In a 2005 *New York Times* column, for example, David Brooks laments the increasing use of separate checking accounts by married couples. He worries that husbands and wives are forgetting the distinction “between the individualistic ethos of the market and the communal ethos of the home.”⁷ As a result, Brooks warns, “a union based on love can easily turn into a merger based on self-interest, where the main criterion becomes: Am I getting a good return on my investment?”⁸

Social scientists who are rightly suspicious of those widely held ideas have often replied, “Nothing But.” They assert that intimate settings are nothing but special sorts of economies, nothing but arenas of power, or nothing but expressions of an underlying culture.

The most common version says Hostile Worlds thinkers are wrong because the whole world is nothing but a single big economy: There are markets everywhere. This includes families and intimate relations. In this Nothing But view, love, sex, and personal care are in fact commodities like all the rest.⁹

As descriptions and explanations, theories of Separate Spheres, Hostile Worlds, and Nothing But fail badly. Actual studies of concrete social settings, from corporations to households, do not uncover separate spheres, segregated hostile worlds, markets everywhere, or any of the other Nothing Buts.

The surprising thing about such views is their failure to recognize how regularly intimate relations coexist with economic transactions without apparent damage to either one: couples buy engagement rings; parents pay nannies or child care workers to mind their children; adoptive parents pay lawyers and agencies to obtain babies; divorced spouses pay or receive alimony and child support payments; parents give their children allowances, subsidize their college educations, help them with their first mortgage, and offer them substantial bequests in their wills. Friends and relatives send gifts of money as wedding presents, and friends loan each other money. Immigrants dispatch hard-earned money as remittances to family back home.

6. VIVIANA A. ZELIZER, *THE PURCHASE OF INTIMACY* 284-85 (2005); JOAN WILLIAMS, *UNBENDING GENDER* 115-120 (2005); Reva B. Siegel, *The Modernization of Marital Status Law: Adjudicating Wives' Rights to Earnings, 1860-1930*, 82 *GEO. L.J.* 2127 (1994).

7. David Brooks, Editorial, *To Have and to Hold, for Richer for Poorer*, *N.Y. TIMES*, Mar. 1, 2005, at A19.

8. *Id.*

9. *See, e.g.*, GARY BECKER, *ACCOUNTING FOR TASTES* 148-55 (1996); RICHARD POSNER, *SEX AND REASON* (1997).

Indeed, people who maintain intimate relations with each other regularly pool money, make joint purchases, invest shared funds, organize inheritances, and negotiate divisions of household work. Yet such relations are in no way similar to stock exchanges or retail markets.

In contrast to *Hostile Worlds* and *Nothing But* arguments, I propose an alternative explanation for the mingling of economic transactions with intimate relations: *Good Matches*. *Good Matches* replies to both that economic activity and intimacy do intersect all the time, do not behave like mini markets, but only work well when people make good matches between the two. By a good match I do not mean that you and I would approve of the bargain or that the match is equal and just. Instead, I mean that the match is viable: It gets the economic work of the relationship done and sustains the relationship. A set of economic transactions that would reinforce a husband-wife bond, for example, could ruin a relationship between boss and secretary. Relations matter so much that people work hard to match them with appropriate forms of economic activity and clear markers of those relations' character.

Good matches between intimate relations and economic transactions are interesting to watch. Seen close up, they depend heavily on negotiation between the partners, such as husband-wife, boss-secretary, doctor-patient, or call-girl-customer. Matching practices also vary significantly from one class, ethnic, or cultural setting to another.

Still, three main features stand out in good matches:

1. The economic transactions distinguish the relationship from others that it might be confused with, and thus damage the relationship itself. An example is confusion between a prostitute's fee and the economic contributions of occasional lovers.
2. Good matches demonstrate and enact agreements between the partners in a relationship. They share an understanding of what that relationship is. For example, wealthy courting couples, in which each person can easily afford to pay for all their joint expenses, usually work out an understanding of what constitutes an equitable share of the costs. When going on a vacation, for instance, who pays for the hotel, or the restaurants, or for travel?
3. Good matches identify the relationship clearly to any third party that is involved. An example is which third party pays for what in an engagement or wedding party: the ring, the dress, the dinner, the band.

In any particular situation, obviously, good matches depend on the stock of meanings, markers, and practices actually available in the local milieu. Beyond cultural particularism, however, we can identify some regularities that apply very widely.

INTIMACY: NARROW OR BROAD, DURABLE OR FLEETING

Think of intimate relations as varying along two dimensions: breadth and duration. A narrow relationship involves only one or a few shared practices, including economic practices. A broad relationship involves a wide range of practices, including economic practices. Speaking of relations that involve sexual intimacy, we might place prostitution at the narrow end and membership in a promiscuous community at the broad end.

Intimate relations also range in duration from almost instantaneous to very long term. At the fleeting end of this dimension we might find college students' one-night "hook-ups;" at the durable end, stable marriages. So far as I can tell, broad but short term relations are either rare or nonexistent. Yet a relationship can remain narrow over a long period, as is the case of some sexual liaisons. Or it can be both broad and durable, as in many forms of cohabitation. Duration does not necessarily produce broadening of an intimate relationship. Breadth, however, requires duration.

Why do breadth and duration matter? A relationship that involves a wide range of activities, including economic activities, poses greater problems of management than a narrow one; performance or malfeasance in one regard has repercussions across other shared activities. A long-term relationship, whether broad or narrow, casts shadows of both past and future on current interactions; both the relationship's accumulated meanings and the parties' stakes in its future affect what happens today. Although breadth and duration by no means guarantee harmony and happiness, they make the ramifications of current interactions much more extensive.

For our purposes, the implications are clear. A wide variety of interpersonal relationships combine sexual and economic activity. Where the relations are narrow and short term, we tend to call them sex work.¹⁰ Where they are broad and long term, we tend to call them households. Participants in these different relations take care to distinguish them from other relations with which they might easily and hurtfully be confused, share definitions of the relation, recognize practical implications of their shared definitions, and identify their relationship clearly to relevant third parties.

Our conceptual space thus identifies four quite different kinds of relationships: narrow and brief, narrow and durable, broad and brief, broad and durable. Let us look closely at concrete examples drawn from three of these four types: narrow and brief, narrow and durable, broad and durable.

In the narrow, brief type, we find people working hard to produce good matches. Here we see sex workers who earn their living from the sale of explicitly sexual services, including telephone and cyber-sex, production of

10. See generally Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Prostitution, Kinship, and Illegitimate Work*, 23 CONTEMP. SOC. 856 (1994).

pornography, live sex shows, erotic massage, escort services, and a wide variety of prostitution. One might imagine that a single relationship underlies this diverse range of occupations: a short-term quid pro quo exchange of sex for money. But that would be wrong.

Contrary to the Hostile Worlds line that whores will do anything for a buck, in fact both providers and consumers of sex work make impressively fine distinctions among its many varieties. Sex workers care about differentiating what they do from the activities of other sex workers as well as from their nonprofessional sexual relations. To take just one example, listen to how Heart, a phone sex operator, describes her job:

We're not like those streetwalkers—crawling down the street in the middle of the night . . . We work in an office. I never touch a cock. I can't get a single disease. I can't get attacked. I'm not a prostitute. I can sit here, read a magazine and just moan occasionally . . . and still get paid.¹¹

Sex workers don't simply distinguish the sexual service itself, but who their clients are, their relationship to them, its duration and breadth, the amount and forms of payment, and the overall meaning of their work. Indeed the monetary payment itself signals the form of the relationship to both provider and consumer. Annie Sprinkle,¹² an erotic masseuse interviewed by Wendy Chapkis in the early 1990s, reflected on how money mattered in her relations to clients:

The money is important. And it's not because we are desperate for it, like we're on drugs and need the money, 'cause we aren't, or that we are money hungry . . . But somehow when the money is there we can have a fabulous time with these people, really give and be loving and totally be of service. And if the money isn't there, forget it, don't want you in the same room with me. It's so weird . . . What is it that the money provides? Maybe it's just a clear exchange, especially when you are with someone that you don't like that much, somehow if they give to you, you can give to them. You've been compensated in a clear, clean way. I mean I can actually like a person if they pay me that I wouldn't if they didn't. It's amazing.¹³

Not only the form of payment but also the location, dress, personal style, and practices of the service provider identify the special properties of the relationships between sex workers and their clients. Street walkers, for example, differentiate sharply among clients, their relationship to them, sexual

11. Grant Jewell Rich & Kathleen Guidroz, *Smart Girls Who Like Sex: Telephone Sex Workers*, in *SEX FOR SALE: PROSTITUTION, PORNOGRAPHY, AND THE SEX INDUSTRY* 35, 43 (Ronald Weitzer ed., 2000); see also AMY FLOWERS, *THE FANTASY FACTORY: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF THE PHONE SEX INDUSTRY* (1998).

12. The articulate Annie Sprinkle is of course far more than an ordinary sex worker. Successively prostitute, porn star, performance artist, sex expert, and activist, she is the author of at least four books, including *Dr. Sprinkle's Spectacular Sex*, not to mention websites, DVDs, and sexually-related products.

13. WENDY CHAPKIS, *LIVE SEX ACTS* 92 (1997).

acts they will or won't perform, forms of payment, and locations of work. In all these cases, of course, one or both of the partners sometimes seek to broaden or lengthen the relationship involved. At that point further distinctions come into play. Sex workers live in a world of highly differentiated and well-marked social ties.¹⁴

LONG BUT NARROW SEXUAL RELATIONS

Some sexual relations, however, maintain their narrow character but last a long time. The most obvious example are kept women and kept men. Although such relationships almost always cover a wider range of economic activity than the sex work I have just been describing, in general the parties focus their relationship on sexual activity.

Consider the case of Deborah Vandavelde and Thomas Colucci, a fifty-three year-old wealthy Long Island businessman, married with two teenage children. In 1999, smitten by Vandavelde's beauty, Colucci showered her with gifts and set her up in a couple of Manhattan apartments. They signed a contract by which Colucci paid her as if she were an employee of one of his businesses. Two years later, however, after he suspected that Vandavelde was seeing another man, Colucci stopped paying the rent and all other expenses.

At that point, Vandavelde sued Colucci in a \$3.5 million breach-of-contract suit. Vandavelde asserted that while their relationship lasted, Colucci "enjoyed

14. See, e.g., JOANNA BREWIS & STEPHEN LINSTED, *SEX, WORK AND SEX WORK* (2000); KATHARINE FRANK, *G-STRINGS AND SYMPATHY* (2002); MARILYNN WOOD HILL, *THEIR SISTERS' KEEPERS: PROSTITUTION IN NEW YORK CITY, 1830-1870* (1993); KAMALA KEMPADOO, *SEXING THE CARIBBEAN: GENDER, RACE, AND SEXUAL LABOR* (2004); MARY V. MECKEL, *A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CALIFORNIA TAXI-DANCER: THE HIDDEN HALLS* (1995); ARA WILSON, *THE INTIMATE ECONOMIES OF BANGKOK* (2004); Elizabeth Bernstein, *Desire, Demand, and the Commerce of Sex, in REGULATING SEX: THE POLITICS OF INTIMACY AND IDENTITY* 101 (Elizabeth Bernstein & Laurie Shaffner eds., 2005); Elizabeth Bernstein, *What's Wrong with Prostitution? What's Right with Sex Work? Comparing Markets in Female Sexual Labor*, 10 HASTINGS WOMEN'S L.J. 91 (1999); Kathryn Hausbeck & Barbara G. Brents, *Inside Nevada's Brothel Industry, in SEX FOR SALE, supra* note 11, at 217; Janet Lever & Deanna Dolnick, *Clients and Call Girls: Seeking Sex and Intimacy, in SEX FOR SALE, supra* note 11, at 85; Joseph E. Massey & Trina L. Hope, *A Personal Dance: Emotional Labor, Fleeting Relationships, and Social Power in a Strip Bar, in TOGETHER ALONE: PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PUBLIC PLACES* (Calvin Morrill et al. eds., 2005); Alexandra K. Murphy & Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Vice Careers: The Changing Contours of Sex Work in New York City*, 29 QUALITATIVE SOC. (forthcoming June 2006); Lisa E. Sanchez, *Boundaries of Legitimacy: Sex, Violence, Citizenship, and Community in a Local Sexual Economy*, 22 LAW & SOC. INQUIRY 543 (1997); Mary Nell Trautner, *Doing Gender, Doing Class: The Performance of Sexuality in Exotic Dance Clubs*, 19 GENDER & SOC'Y 771 (2005).

On sexual payments among men, see, for example, MEN WHO SELL SEX (Peter Aggleton ed., 1999); PETER BOAG, *SAME-SEX AFFAIRS* (2003); GEORGE CHAUNCEY, *GAY NEW YORK* (1995); LAUD HUMPHREYS, *TEAROOM TRADE* (1970); T. DUNBAR MOODIE WITH VIVIENNE NDATSHE, *GOING FOR GOLD: MEN, MINES, AND MIGRATION* (1994); George Chauncey Jr., *Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era*, 19 J. SOC. HIST. 189 (1985); Albert J. Reiss, Jr., *The Social Integration of Queers and Peers*, 9 SOC. PROBS. 102 (1961); and Sanchez, *supra*.

unrestricted sex . . . while promising her financial security.”¹⁵ On October 1, 2002, the *New York Post* ran a story on the case under a characteristically sassy headline: *Mistress: More Sugar, Daddy*.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in an affidavit filed in Manhattan State Supreme Court, Colucci argued that since their contract was an agreement to facilitate adultery, it was illegal.¹⁷

The judge in this case, Manhattan State Supreme Court Justice Leland DeGrasse, struck a delicate balance between commercial and moral considerations. First, he separated Vandeveldel’s breach of contract suit from a different suit for unpaid rent by the owners of the building in which Vandeveldel lived. In the latter case, he ruled against Colucci, ordering him to pay more than \$50,000 in back rent.¹⁸

Many legal cases deal with this sort of delicate interplay between business and pleasure. Other longer term but narrow sexual relations raise many of the same moral and legal questions. For a different perspective, we might consider the relationship between a woman and her gynecologist or a man and his urologist. Although some might wonder whether these qualify as sexual, the parallels and differences with other long-term narrow relations are revealing.

In the case of gynecologists, practitioners take great care to limit their relationship with patients to the strictly professional. Consider the elaborate efforts to assure that the vaginal inspection, certainly a sexually connected event, remains within proper boundaries. James Henslin and Mae Biggs offer a detailed description of the vaginal exam, identifying the extent to which physicians and nurses depersonalize the situation, thus keeping it as far removed as possible from other similar sexual situations with which it could be confused.¹⁹

The gynecologists’ official code of ethics, furthermore, forbids any confusion by barring interactions that others might construe as sexually improper. Among the code’s guidelines are:

- Sexual contact or a romantic relationship between a physician and a current patient is always unethical. . . .
- Examinations should be performed with only the necessary amount of physical contact required to obtain data for diagnosis and treatment. . . .

15. Samuel Maull, *Businessman Must Pay Ex-Girlfriend’s Rent*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, Sept. 26, 2002, LEXIS; *The Abrams Report* (MSNBC television broadcast Sept. 27, 2002).

16. Dareh Gregorian, *Mistress: More Sugar, Daddy*, N.Y. POST, Oct. 1, 2002, at 9.

17. *The Abrams Report*, *supra* note 15; Helen Peterson, *True Love or Just Lust?*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS, Sept. 27, 2002, at 5, available at <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/v-pfriendly/story/22141p-20999c.html>.

18. Peterson, *supra* note 17.

19. James M. Henslin & Mae A. Biggs, *Dramaturgical Desexualization: The Sociology of the Vaginal Examination*, in *STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF SEX* 243 (James M. Henslin ed., 1971). For a critique of this analysis, see TERRI KAPSALIS, *PUBLIC PRIVATES: PERFORMING GYNECOLOGY FROM BOTH ENDS OF THE SPECULUM* 13-30 (1997).

- Physicians should avoid sexual innuendo and sexually provocative remarks. . . .
- It is important for physicians to self-monitor for any early indications that the barrier between normal sexual feelings and inappropriate behavior is not being maintained. These indicators might include special scheduling, seeing a patient outside of normal office hours or outside the office, driving a patient home, or making sexually explicit comments about patients.²⁰

Thus, long term but narrow sexually tinged relations exist and, like sex work, have their own distinct properties. No doubt it's already obvious that the two differ significantly from durable, broad relations involving sexual activity. Long-term cohabitation—straight, gay, or lesbian—provides the prime example. Here we find couples engaged in a multitude of economic transactions without which their households would not survive.

Contradicting Hostile Worlds visions of households as exclusive domains of sentiment and solidarity in which any intrusion of economic calculation threatens intimacy, household members routinely share in production, consumption, distribution, and transfers of assets. Living together necessarily produces shared economic problems, opportunities, rights, and obligations for everyone who takes part. Once a household contains more than a couple, things get more complicated: Relations to third parties such as children, care workers, or aging parents start influencing household dynamics significantly. Inside complex households, relational work never ends.

Households differ from other sites of economic activity, however, in three crucial regards. First, continuous cohabitation creates more extensive mutual knowledge, influence, rights, and obligations than usually develop in other economic settings. Second, negotiations within households take place with a longer future in view and with greater consequences for long-term reciprocity than characteristically occur within other economic settings. Third, in American law economic transactions within households occupy a substantially different position from those that take place among households, between households and other economic units, or entirely outside of households.²¹

Sexual relations connect strongly with most households' other interactions. Meg Luxton offers a surprising insight into these links. In her 1980 study of three generations of working class housewives from a mining town in northern Manitoba, Luxton documented the women's extensive and intensive domestic labor, which included washing, ironing, vacuuming, dusting, tidying up, planning meals, cooking, baking, sewing, budgeting, shopping, and caring for

20. AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS, ETHICS IN OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY 102-03 (2d ed. 2004), available at http://www.acog.org/from_home/publications/ethics/ethics101.pdf.

21. See, e.g., ZELIZER, *supra* note 6, at 263-65.

children. In this traditional setting, where women worked hard at home while men brought in the cash, sex often turned into a bargaining chip. As one woman reported: "When I want something for the house, like a new washing machine or something, then I just make love like crazy for a while and then stop. Then I tell him what I want and say that if he wants more loving he has to buy it."²²

From Canadians in northern Manitoba to Mexicans in southern California, then, a range of studies documents the interplay between sexual relations and household economic activity.

Kenneth Feinberg, the lawyer who administered the United States government's 9/11 fund, had to recognize that interplay indirectly. Although at first he tried to base awards to survivors of 9/11 victims exclusively on loss of the victims' financial contributions, he soon found himself considering the economic value of unpaid domestic labor and of companionship. That involved him in deciding which sorts of survivors from broken couples did and didn't qualify for compensation, and what losses those survivors had actually sustained. Feinberg reached his limit, however, when a bereaved husband essentially requested funds to hire prostitutes as replacements for his lost wife's sexual services. Feinberg reported the man's request: "I don't want to sound gross, but there is something else that I pay for, or can pay for. You can figure that out . . . there are other services that could be replaced, but we're not going to go into that either."²³

At that point, even the cool-headed, generous Feinberg drew a Hostile Worlds line and rejected his request.

SEX IN BETWEEN

In the space defined by duration and breadth, intermediate cases exist. Some relations involve broader ranges of economic activity and greater duration than sex work but far less of either than cohabiting households. In *Making Ends Meet*, their landmark study of how low-income and welfare single mothers survive financially, Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein provide unusual glimpses into how these women carve out a whole range of economic ties to the men in their lives.

Edin and Lein make three observations of great consequence for this paper's topic: first, that relationships to men played a significant part in the household finances of these mothers; second, that the women made strong distinctions among their various relationships to men who are or have been their sexual partners; and third, that they developed distinct systems of payment

22. MEG LUXTON, *MORE THAN A LABOR OF LOVE* 64 (1980).

23. KENNETH R. FEINBERG, *WHAT IS LIFE WORTH?: THE UNPRECEDENTED EFFORT TO COMPENSATE THE VICTIMS OF 9/11*, at 154 (2005).

and obligations corresponding to these different relationships. In field observations and interviews of almost four hundred mothers, Edin and Lein identified a whole system of categories distinguishing the women's different relationships to men, from absent fathers to live-in boyfriends to prostitution, with other distinctions in between.

Perhaps the most remarkable are the ties to live-in boyfriends: These men—not legally married to the mother and usually not the father of any of her children—are expected to contribute regular amounts of cash and in-kind goods. In addition to weekly cash outlays of twenty or thirty dollars for incidentals, for instance, one Chicago mother's boyfriend helped pay her phone bill and pay for her furniture; he also bought gifts for her children. In return for their contributions, boyfriends get a place to stay, sexual companionship, some meals, and the opportunity to "play Daddy" for the women's children.²⁴

The arrangement is clear: Boyfriends who don't pay, mothers repeatedly told Edin and Lein, "can't stay."²⁵ Occasionally the boundaries between "serial boyfriends" and prostitution blurred: one mother explained for instance that her reliance on boyfriends "isn't for love, and it isn't just for money. I guess I'd call it social prostitution."²⁶ Nevertheless, most mothers set clear distinguishing markers between real prostitution and their relationship to a boyfriend. "Turning tricks" or "street walking" meant one-night stands without a long-term relationship to the man; they involved short-term cash in exchange for short-term sex.²⁷ To each form of sexual relationship corresponded a somewhat different set of monetary transfers.

In a follow-up study with Maria Kefalas of 162 low-income single mothers, Edin further demonstrated that the women insisted on regular financial contributions from their longer-term male companions. Edin and Kefalas found, furthermore, that a large number of couples' blowups resulted precisely from the incompatibility of the men's economic performances with their household privileges and demands.²⁸

The comparison of long-term cohabiting households with the more fleeting households described by Edin, Lein, and Kefalas yields an unexpected bonus. It shows us that the matches are by no means automatic consequences of cultural understandings or coercion but emerge from incessant bargaining among household members, especially sexually-related couples. The bargains involve exercises of power.

24. KATHRYN EDIN & LAURA LEIN, MAKING ENDS MEET: HOW SINGLE MOTHERS SURVIVE WELFARE AND LOW-WAGE WORK 155 (1997).

25. *Id.*

26. *Id.* at 157.

27. *Id.*

28. KATHRYN EDIN & MARIA KEFALAS, PROMISES I CAN KEEP (2005).

GOOD, BAD, AND UNCERTAIN MATCHES

Not that all matches work, or that any economic transaction is compatible with any sexual relation. On the contrary, people work hard to negotiate the right match between economy and sexual intimacy, looking for economic arrangements that confirm their understandings of what the relation is about, and that sustain those relations. Is this person a gold-digger or a real lover? Does this sexual relation involve caring or exploitation? When is it acceptable for a man to give a sex worker gifts instead of cash? And what does it mean for a sex worker to turn down a customer's fee? When a courting couple becomes sexually involved, how should they manage their entertainment expenses? When relations go sour, furthermore, people start begrudging their economic contributions, to the detriment of those relations. Sometimes they end up in court.

In the last analysis, the matching of sex, money, and power turns out to have common properties with a wide variety of interpersonal relations that involve economic activity. In everyday social life and in legal proceedings as well, people undertake serious efforts to match forms of economic activity effectively with relevant social relations, and to distinguish those relations from others with which they might easily and hurtfully be confused. The matching process always involves some exercise of power by the immediate parties to the relationship, and sometimes by third parties. Yes, managing the intersection of sex, money, and power presents serious problems. But they are problems we and other people solve every day. Far from being taboo, that intersection belongs to life itself.

