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Paper: Intimate Labors Conference, October 4-6th, 2007, University of California, Santa Barbara

'Bounded Authenticity' and the Commerce of Sex

My contribution derives from my forthcoming book, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (U. Chicago Press, 2007), which is about the ways in which recent transformations in economic and cultural life have played themselves out at the most intimate of levels: the individual experience of bodily attributes and integrity, and the meanings afforded to sexual expression. The lens through which I examine these transitions is sexual commerce, the exchange of sex for money in the late-capitalist marketplace. By detailing the relationship between money and sex on the “micro” level of bodies and subjectivities, I aim to reveal the relationship between economy and desire more broadly. I argue that the global restructuring of capitalist production and investment that has taken place since the 1970s has had consequences that are more profound and more intimate than most economic sociologists ever choose to consider. The desires that drive the rapidly expanding and diversifying international sex trade have emanated from corporate-fueled consumption, an increase in tourism and business travel, and from the symbiotic relationship between information technologies and the privatization of commercial consumption. At the same time, a rise in service occupations and temporary work, an increase in labor migrations from developing to developed countries, and the emergence of new paradigms of “family” and “community” have fueled the growth and diversification of sexual labor. For many sectors of the population, these shifts have resulted in new configurations of intimate life as well as in new erotic dispositions ones which the market is well poised to satisfy. In particular, I highlight the emergence of what I term “bounded authenticity” (an authentic, yet bounded form of interpersonal connection) as a particularly desirable and sought after sexual commodity.