

## Negotiating Moral Boundaries: The Use of Gender and Sexuality in Hostess Work

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Migrant hostesses play with their gender and sexuality. In the club, customers pay per hour to receive care, accolades, sexual titillation, entertainment, and servitude from the hostesses, who feed, praise, touch – sometimes even massage, perform for – by singing or dancing, and playfully flirt with them. Yet, hostesses do not perform this work uniformly but instead abide by particular moral regimes. Based on 61 in-depth interviews with migrant Filipina hostesses and three months of participant observation working in a Philippine pub in Tokyo, my paper describes the moral boundaries of migrant Filipina hostesses whose views on paid sex fall into three groupings of moral puritans, moral rationalists, and moral in-between-ers. Puritans morally condemn paid sex, rationalists do not, while in-between-ers reject the direct purchase of sex but not the practice of compensated romance. My paper examines how the use of gender and sexuality by hostesses involve the construction and negotiation of their moral boundaries. For instance, I show how moral puritans play on the discourse of the virginal Maria Clara;<sup>1</sup> moral rationalists present themselves as needing rescue (i.e., from poverty and the financial burdens of a ‘dutiful daughter’) and moral rationalists and in-between-ers frequently *intimate sex*. By establishing the different moral boundaries of migrant hostesses, I show how hostess work constitutes of multiple experiences. In the process, I question the common construction of migrant hostesses as trafficking victims who are not in control of their labor.

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Clara is the symbolic figure of ideal femininity for women in the Philippines. She represents purity and martyrdom.