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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Emotional Labor and Emotion Management: Power and Negotiation Among Female Laotian Migrant Sex Workers in a Karaoke Bar

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**Abstract:** The growth of the sex trade is connected with globalization and cross-border migration. There is an increase of young female Laotian sex workers who respond to the demand of Thai male customers. Emotion and sexuality are integrated as an essential part of sexual goods and services, and are essential tools for sex workers to generate business profits and customer satisfaction. The study's objectives are to study the expression of emotion and sexuality among female Lao migrant sex workers (FLMSWs) who work in one Thai-Lao cross border town, and to analyze the management and negotiation of emotion and sexuality in the commercial sex in karaoke bars by FLMSWs. Content and narrative analyses were conducted from an ethnographic study consisting of participant observations, five focus group discussion, 20 in-depth interviews, and 10 narrative interviews. The research used the concept of emotional labor and emotion management by Arlie Russell Hochschild during the data analysis. The key finding of this study are as follow: 1) the emotion is a tool of management and negotiated in sexual service; 2) emotion management was produced for sexual service as well as strategies of screening and choosing clients, including building zone about body and emotion; and 3) the emotion-related to social identity is manufactured for negotiation during work and everyday life. They are not merely victimized, but they have agency and power to seek life opportunities. These study findings contribute to the revision of migrant worker's policy and program, especially the destigmatization of migrant sex workers in Thailand and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** emotion management, emotional labor, female Laotian migrant sex workers, negotiation, transnational commercial sex

The growth of the sex industry and the commercial sex trade is connected with globalization and cross-border trade (Truong, 1990; Jeffrey, 2002). The inflow of young female Laotian sex workers responds to the demand of Thai male customers because of the myth that Laos girls are exotic, as spread all over Thailand through the media and other communication medium. Emotion and sexuality are integrated as an essential part

of sexual goods and services, and are essential tools for female Laotian migrant sex workers (FLMSWs) to generate business profits and customer satisfaction.

Emotion and bodily performance are the beginning of complex human behaviors; therefore, the understanding and study of emotional issues, expression of feelings, and emotional manipulation are important issues that link the behavior of the sexual

and occupational health risks of migrant workers. Also, this reflects the multifaceted fluidity of ethnic identity and sexuality in bargaining and definition of self-employment, sexuality, and life in the context of cross-border under the trend of globalization. Therefore, with the growing social inequality among countries and their development, the issue of emotion management should be addressed accordingly, as it is important to understand the tools and strategies used by Laotian migrant workers who offer sexual services in Thailand to adjust to negotiating business terms and living in the context of cross-border migration.

### ***Transnational Migrants: Work in Sexual Service and the Sex Industry***

Sex industry and sex tourism grow with the commoditization of gender and sexuality under capitalism and the exchange process, involving physical interactions, desires, and emotion (Brent & Hausbeck, 2010). The phenomenon of the sex industry during late capitalism creates service-based consumption-driven economic systems, which commoditize human interactions and emotional exchanges. According to other sex work research, the existence of global sex work labor market is a result of capitalism (Zen, 2016; Piscitelli, 2016; Lowther, 2018; Orchard, Vale, Macphail, Wender, & Oiamo, 2016).

Emotional labor among sex workers is, therefore, an intimate labor that uses body and emotional expressions for care. The power of the sex work market makes women enter the network of sexual relations that are emotional, sexual, and male-centered linked to love, affection, and female pleasure as well as health risks, social risks, stigma, family disapproval, and occupational violence (Pinho, Sampaio, Monteiro, Murray, & Bastos, 2016). Migration workers try to manage their emotion because they have to endure the pain and loneliness by being away from family for good life and better future. (Bolante, 2014).

In conclusion, previous studies have demonstrated that women decide to migrate for sex work in other countries because of the influence of global capitalism, which results in the commoditization of women's body and emotion, but new research direction focus on emotion and emotion labor in sexual service.

### ***Emotion, Body, and Sexuality in Commercial Sex***

Emotions, bodies, and sexuality have become part of capitalism, whereby prostitution responds to the calculation of value. Sex workers manage their own expectations relative to the erotic expectations and cultural ideals of their male clients under the commodification of the female body process (Sanders, 2005). Expectations and ideals involve imagination about ethnic women, virginity, nature, or exoticness, which are reproduced and brought into workplace relations and the service economy. The body, when at work, is under complete capitalist production in relation to both emotional work and emotional labor, where female workers have to manage and manipulate their sexuality and bodies to match varieties and expectations associated with their sex workers' identities (Hoschild, 1983).

The capitalization of sexuality—using the body parts, emotions and feelings, and sexual acts as a business strategy—leads to the emotional relationship through identity manifestation and management. Workers become emotional laborers in a specific context of sex work. The identity of a sex worker embraces a variety of dimensions, such as sexual, technical, strategical, labor, and acting (Sanders, 2005). The fluidity of identity and sexuality is a tool to negotiate and resist a power relationship where a sex worker can be a subject and an object, revealing both oppression and resistance simultaneously. Human sexuality has its subjective component, and the personal needs and satisfaction of a sex worker are constantly negotiated in association with the social expectations of society. Thus, sexuality is a matter of emotions, behaviors, and patterns of physical expression.

Physical intimacy and emotional distance can be maintained by creating an identity under a different name, various modes of dress, and the separation between the functions of work/public life and private life. A person requires constant internal policing to maintain a balance between the mind and the emotions, through the creation of bodily exclusion zones; this technique is utilized by sex workers to separate the private from the public and to differentiate and categorize services they would face. This implies professionalism through differentiation of the body zones to accommodate heterogeneous spaces within a sex worker's perception. At the same time, it also creates a sex worker's agency (Sanders, 2005; Petro, 2010; Chen, 2003; Law, 2000). These previous studies

have focused on the creation of body, not emotional, exclusion or inclusion zone at work. Indeed, emotion is an instrument or the means of communication associated with various kinds of practices, feedback on a mechanism, and an agreement for a relationship as the display of differential power in interactions between people (Giddens, 2003). In this situation, the role of emotion management may play a significant role as the main strategy among FLMSWs within the transnational migration context.

### ***Emotion as a Source of Power and Agency***

Emotional work reflects the choices, autonomy, and consent of a sex worker to enter the sex trade (Kong, 2006). This is reflected in many studies that sex workers can maintain self-satisfaction, pleasure, and emotional well-being in their work because they create boundaries between work life and personal life. In their personal life, they can express their emotions. Thus, sex workers are agents and decision-makers (Kohen, 2010). Vanwesenbeeck (1994) agreed that sex workers can maintain physical and emotional well-being (including maintaining safer sex practices relative to personal history) and contextual factors (including job satisfaction as sex workers).

Studies regarding female sex workers often focus on health and the risk of sexually transmitted infection. For example, in Warr & Pyett's (1999) study on female sex workers in Western societies, it was found that despite the high rate of condom use during intercourse with clients, a low rate of condom use continued with intimate partners or special partners, thereby continuing the risk of STIs and HIV infection. The female sex workers still maintained an intimate private relationship while working as sex workers. Risks are often disregarded in private relationships through intercourse without a condom or unprotected sex to support fragile intimacy among female sex workers (Warr & Pyett, 1999).

Studies on sexuality and sex trade mainly focus on the negative impacts of sex work. Nevertheless, the studies of transnational sexuality among sex workers should cover sexual health and well-being rather than looking at suffering, negative impacts, and sickness, that is, HIV/AIDS transmission, unsafe sex, and sexually transmitted infections. Sexuality must be investigated with a focus on unequal power relationship and access to resources to highlight sexual rights, desires, feelings, emotions, love, and sexual

satisfaction that women may choose (The Southeast Asian Consortium on Gender, Sexuality and Health, 2006) (The Southeast Asian Consortium on Gender, Sexuality, and Health, 2005).

In conclusion, the previous studies on emotions of sex workers are mostly conducted in Western countries. However, among Southeast Asian countries, there is no study related to emotion and emotion management among sex workers, especially in the transnational commercial sex context. Existing studies mostly focus on explaining sexual services as a result of poverty and victimization of gender inequality, rather than being seen as sex workers and their agency and sex work as a choice. The study on the emotion of sex work in a transnational commercial sex work context is missing. Thus, studying emotional labor and emotion management among FLMSWs involves specific challenge that may account for the scarcity of previous research on this issue. The study of emotion management of FLMSWs in Thai-Lao cross-border town may shed some lights on understanding new phenomena of sex work in Southeast Asia.

To address and help close these gaps, we focus on FLMSWs' emotional labor and their emotion management as well as an instrument or strategy used in both working and daily life. It includes sexual and emotional expression, which reflects the flow of sexuality in the context of living in private and working areas of female Laotian migrant sex workers who work in karaoke bars in the global and cross-border contexts. This study, therefore, focuses on the following questions: what are the forms of emotional labor and emotion management among female Laotian migrant sex workers in the context of transnational commercial sex? How is the sexual and emotion management of their sexual service seen in their negotiating strategies, source of power, and agency to achieve sexual health and well-being?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this paper, we use the emotional labor perspective to cover the body, sexuality, work, and emotion. Emotion is connected to social structures and can be defined as the existence of social relation. The social meaning system reflects those relationships that induce an emotion based on social behavior and social structures (Lutz & White, 1986). Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor, or emotional work, as

an invisible inner process with an outcome of internal feeling management. The processes are interrelated and construct a process of emotional labor, reflecting practices and expressions through the body, language, and visible work. Hochschild (1983) further said that emotional labor is sold for a wage and, therefore, has exchange value. Modern capitalism takes advantage of labor and the expression of emotions as a commodity that satisfies customers and business gain. Emotions and feelings have become parts of professions, especially any work that requires interactions with other individuals when compared to the work interacting with machines (Hochschild, 1983). Service work is constructed, and the interaction sale becomes a part of the job. Hochschild (1983) called this “emotion script” or “feeling rules,” which are socially specific. Feeling rules are what guide emotion work by establishing a sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges.

Hochschild (1983) contended that female workers use emotional labor in many service industries associated with their roles at home, such as cleaning, serving, and caring for family members. Thus, women are required in the labor force for emotional labor more than men. Hochschild (1983) used alienation theory to describe the phenomenon of present-day workers and emotion management and reduce the feelings that workers are being exploited and oppressed under working conditions. Emotion management in the workplace, compromised of personal emotions and expressions in the customer service setting, are the processes of negotiation and alienation reduction among workers from their emotional output.

Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labor helps us see the relationship between emotions and capitalism associated with commoditization and emotional services. Besides, she theorized that emotion is the strategy or tool that sex workers use for power negotiation in their sexual service. Arlie Hochschild’s (1983) theory tried to bridge the gap between the macro and the micro level (structure vs. agency) and explores emotion and emotion management in a social institution and everyday life.

The objectives of this study are to analyze: (1) the process of building and negotiating sexual identity and sexuality among FLMSWs in a karaoke bar; (2) the way in which FLMSWs express their sexuality and emotion using emotion management tool and emotional navigator (relationship building, emotional

expressions, expression of desire, and identity); (3) the connections between work and life space in term of emotional labor and emotion management.

## Methods

We used ethnography approach to unfold the complexities of emotions and emotion management among FLMSWs who work in one Thai-Lao border town. The ethnographic observation was used to extract the context, events, and life narrative by living in the studied community, conducting field participation in community events and activities and at karaoke bars to understand the main target population: the female karaoke workers. Eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 40 female karaoke workers (five persons in each group), and further in-depth interviews with 20 women (drawn from FGDs). Then, narrative analysis was implemented with 10 women’s sexual story-telling (drawn from FGDs). Key-informant interviews and ethnographic interviews were conducted with five informants (client, village leader, health worker, karaoke bar owners). The total number of informants is 45 persons. Multiple methods were used, and the high number of informants were covered to ensure the validity of the data using data and method triangulation. The data collection took place in the field over a period of 14 months during 2014–2016. In this period, the National Council for Peace and Security (NCPO) intended to regulate workers through the migrant workers’ registration policy. After a registration, FLMSWs can enjoy the freedom of movement and free from fear and hidden life.

## *How to Study Sexual Emotions?*

Sexual emotions occurring during work and their lives were investigated and examined through verbal expressions in the female karaoke workers narratives that signified different emotions. The verbal cues included: “thinking about,” “love,” “longing,” “happiness,” “wanting to meet,” “wanting to talk,” “wanting to sit close to or be near to,” “shy,” “daring not to make eye contact,” “smile,” “faster heartbeat,” “red face,” “quivering” (applicable to a bodily part, such as, the torso, an arm, or a hand), “glad,” “mental discomfort,” and “sadness.” Emotions expressed through facial expressions were also observed when participants talked about events and feelings, such



as shyness, and smiles, that represented happiness, sadness, suffering, surprise, and so on.

Emotions reflecting pleasurable and passionate sexual expressions and sexual emotions used other verbal cues, for example, "I want to have a longer duration intercourse," "I want to hug," "I want to kiss," "I want touches," "It's not dry," "It's wet and slippery," and "Not hurt." Conversely, there were expressions concerning passionless feelings because of vaginal dryness and painful sex. Then, emotional words used and expressed in experiential sexual story-telling and categorized emotions, contexts, and situation in the setting that ignite emotions were analyzed. Stories were translated from Laotian to Thai in this process of analysis.

## Results

### ***Border Context: Imagination and Desire of Thai Men Towards Laotian Women***

*Eighty percent of the female sex workers here are "Lao Theung" or "Khamu" people. They persuade each other because of the good money. At home, they earn 80-100 baht, unlike here where it's easy to make money. (Papa Kham, pseudonym, 55 years old, karaoke bar owner)*

The phenomenon of importing female ethnic-Lao migrant workers into the karaoke entertainment business in the border area of Northeast Thailand has been flourishing over 10 years. This is the result of the changing attitudes and the lower number of Thai women entering the sex services and entertainment business. The trend of marrying Westerners became popular among many Thai women, which caused more women to migrate overseas or to work in other provinces of Thailand.

The FLMSWs are deemed as exotic, charming, and attractive. These traits are created through a discourse presented by the media, such as magazines, song lyrics, and films. It reinforces certain perceptions of Laos women being natural, innocent, conventional, caretakers, and wives who look after their husband and family. Moreover, because of their bright skin and pretty faces, they are usually compared to Korean or Chinese women, but "cheaper" and "more available" at karaoke bars.

*They are like Chinese girls or Korean girls but cheaper. Most of them come from the North. They belong to ethnic groups. Some of them live on the border to China or Vietnam, so their skin is whiter. They are young and pretty. (Chan, pseudonym, 65 years old, a karaoke bar client)*

Virginity and customer's sexual preferences are linked to the sexual services of karaoke workers, which result in the practice of "taking virginity" and "unsafe sex." The women's "purity" is referred to their lack of sexual experiences, and "freshness" implies "unsafe sex" or "sex without condoms." This reflects the desire and belief that customers strive to have sex in natural manners or unprotected sex.

*It's up to the customers if they want to try freshly open (no-condom sex) or purely opened (virgin) girls. Both of them are expensive. These girls are not like the others because they are newcomers. Some of the girls who have just started working decide to sell their virginity because they need money, and they think that they might as well do it here since they are already here. (Nun, pseudonym, 15 years old, karaoke bar girl)*

### ***Work and Earning of FLMSWs***

"Serve-talk-off" defines the roles of FLMSWs. Their work is mainly a function of service, from inviting clients into bars to taking orders for drinks. They also exchange coins for the karaoke machine, pour beer, and feed clients when asked. They dance and sing for clients as well as chatting with them, then, after clients agree to the sex services, the girls have sex with clients. The sex service is provided in the small motel room either at the karaoke bar area (their own bedroom) or some distance away in the neighborhood.

*I earn money from going out and having sex with clients and tips from sex service and entertaining service at the bar. I earn money from selling drink. The cost of a drink is 30 Baht, I earn 15 baht from the drink's value in the bar. (Dtip, pseudonym, 18 years old, karaoke bar girl)*

The bar work reflects the art of conducting work and live in the cross-border context. The next section portrays how the female migrant karaoke bar workers

use emotional strategies or emotion management processes in the cross-border karaoke bars.

### ***The Use of Emotion at Work: Faked Love, Faked Sexual Arousal and Enjoyment, Love and Happiness***

For the emotions expressed in their work to satisfy the clients, LFMSWs knew what each customer wanted. Some people wanted them to be emotionally involved and showed their sexual expertise with clients to stimulate or to arouse them, whereas some clients do not like too experienced sexual partners; thus, the expression of innocence or naive with men was an essential tool. Most of the time, they must use emotional expression with their clients. For example, Deer makes clients feel that she was scared and embarrassed during sexual activities, such as not being proactive with clients or let clients initiate sexual activity. Deer said that the more she uses erotic accents, such as cuddling, moaning, or expressing sexual enjoyment in bed, the more her clients are pleased and she often earned extra money from these emotional expressions.

*Some people prefer me to arouse them by embracing, kissing, or touching them. Some are flaccid, and I have to touch and stroke his penis before they could penetrate me. I must perform this arousal for clients, especially old people.* (Deer, pseudonym, 18 years old, karaoke bar girl)

In affective emotion, FLMSWs express special feeling by being single, lack of sexual services experience, and by being chaste or naive on sexual activity. They use the identity of being a wife or a girlfriend of their clients and choose not to use a condom to express a close relationship and trust. At the same time, they may use all of the above identities for business benefits, although in reality, they only pretend to love their clients to create long-term client support or to receive support from customers in the future.

*For now, I go out with very clients because I honored him as a boyfriend. When I met him, I still feel embarrassed, flushed, quiet, shy, and my heart heated fast and strong. When he took my hands, I was shaking all over. When I first met him, I knew he's the one, I like him, and he*

*has everything I want.* (Deer, pseudonym, 18 years old, karaoke bar girl)

Happiness is expressed when the FLMSWs is waiting to go out to relax like shopping in the market, go visit tourist attraction area like a waterfall, and going to *Morlam* (Northeast Thai traditional dance). These events happen with the accompaniment of the karaoke bar owners. Happiness is explicitly shown when they are taken to *Morlam* festival by their boyfriends.

*Life outside is like liberating. I go out for clothes and cosmetic at the Wednesday bazaar. If there is a morlam concert, it would be more fun. I want the bar to close sooner and call my boy to pick me up. If I go out, I get to see handsome young men, unlike old men at the bar.* (Deer, pseudonym, 18 years old, karaoke bar girl)

### ***Client Searching and Screening as a Form of Sexual Emotion Management***

Emotion management, through client searching and screening process and the interpretation of a client's appearance, is related to an expression of emotion at work, specifically desire and pleasure between a client and the workers leading to an agreement of sexual service. Preferable clients look physically nice, pleasant, sweet-mouthed and friendly, or they simply look rich, financially well-off, or sporty (not stingy). Other features that ignite the lust and pleasure emotion for the bar workers are a nice smell, a perfume smell, fine clothing, and expensive accessories. Client searching and screening process for preferable clients can be strategies for FLMSWs to express affective emotion during work.

*The work is important, but I have to look for the right guy to fulfill my heart's desire, I am looking for him, and I hope one day I will find a good client that can take care of me. I am not here for work only; I am looking for Mr. Right for myself.* (Nun, pseudonym, 19 years old, karaoke bar girl)

### ***The Use of Fake and Reject Strategies***

The fake and reject strategy is an emotion management tool used in a negotiation when the karaoke workers have to face fear, annoyance, displeasure, and unwillingness to be with or to be out

and have sex with a client. FLMSWs were concerned that their treatment would affect the bar's business and business interests. As a result, they used the emotion management strategy by faking and rejecting clients through varieties of physical expressions, such as leaving, turning to serve other customers, requesting leave to pick up a call, or call a regular client to pick them up. They used verbal expressions such as, "I feel sick," "I am having a period," or claimed that they had an appointment with a regular client. The rejection was used when they met clients with a certain physical appearance that diminished their feeling of lust or the client caused negative affectivity such as panic, fear, uncertainty, irritation, and dislike.

*When a customer looks dirty, with long hair and a beard, or is a stranger, I am afraid and get startled every time. I do not want to serve them, and I will refuse to go out with them. I need to keep him satisfied because I do not want to damage the bar and the business where I make an income. I will only serve him at work and choose someone who looks safe. (Dtip, pseudonym, 18 years old, karaoke bar girl)*

### **Space Building and Exclusion of Space Zone**

Emotion and emotion management is related to the place and the settings that are shaped by the categorization of clients, emotion building, emotional expression, and patterns of emotional expression in a particular area. For example, the separation of emotions expressed in a physical space versus a bodily area, and the separation of emotions expressed in a private versus a public space. The designation of private emotions and workplace emotion during work results in an emotional expression and power negotiations in different physical spaces. For example, a karaoke bar is connected to the bodily space and the emotional space where the bar workers control and separate their emotions at work from their private emotions. These are technically used to build and exclude the space zone.

The physical zone is a creation of space and emotions such as fear, distrust, and risks associated with the spatial area and the service delivery, for instance in a bar where the women work rather than outside in a hotel or resort where they are concerned that they would face the client's power and violent abuse. They associated the karaoke bar as a space linked to the sense of belonging, family, home, and

safe feelings. The physical zone will change with their level of experience. If they have a regular client, they prefer going outside of the bar. This reflects the division between the working space and personal space, such as between the bar and a private bedroom. The bar workers have more freedom and less control when they are outside; thus, they are happier. The physical space is connected to the interpretation of the bar workers' bodily space associated with sexual pleasure and satisfaction. As a result, feelings and meaning-making are fluidly connected with space and are ever-changing.

*When I was a new bar girl, Mama told me to assess a client carefully. If I do not know a client, I should not go out with him. If he wants sex, he has to sleep with me at the bar. It is safer because I do not have to risk the police. Mama allowed veteran and experienced women to go out on their own. I want to go out with my regular clients. I don't want him in my bed. My bedroom is not a workspace. I am uncomfortable and unhappy for clients to be in my bedroom because it is not a workplace. (Tick, pseudonym, 18 years old, karaoke bar girl)*

The karaoke workers create the bodily zone to enact a rule, a regulation, a control, or a limit on the sexual services to a client. The bodily zone designates permitted and prohibited sexual acts. For example, no oral sex, no anal sex, no unprotected sex, specific duration, and how many times a client can have sex in connection with the fee. The rules include condom use during sex as a must for every client during sexual services.

*When I agreed to have sex with a client, I do not follow his demands. I have my restriction of what I can, and I cannot do during a service. For example, we may take a shower together, but sex is only once. If he wants to have intercourse twice or more, he has to pay more. I explain and have him agree on what I cannot do in advance. I will not perform oral sex, anal sex, and he must use a condom. Only my boyfriend can have sex without a condom. (Nun, pseudonym, 19 years old, karaoke bar girl)*

The emotional zone is the worker's compromise between her personal emotions when she is not in the



mood and the client's emotions of clients of wanting to have sex. Women might have negative affectivity with a client, such as being disgusted (disgust, creeping) or dislike. The women have to manage these emotions for their well-being in work and life.

*Some client ordered me to do anything even I detest or am disgusted, like oral or anal sex. I refused by saying that you are a client, and I even refuse my boyfriend if he asks me to. If he ejaculates outside, I can cope. If the semen is inside, I feel disgusted. I don't want a child from a client.* (Nun, pseudonym, 19 years old, karaoke bar girl)

The extent of emotions and the associated bodily sensation can bring suffering, uneasiness, discomfort, and unhappiness. The foul and dirty smell can make the workers feel uncomfortable to serve. It is important to change the feeling of being dirty to clean. The women have to manage semen or sperm that contains germs by using condoms during their sexual intercourse. They also maintain distance and avoid direct bodily contact between themselves and their clients.

### ***Emotional Script (Feeling Rules) and Superficial and Deep Emotion Management***

The emotion management among karaoke workers is governed by the emotional patterns or emotional rules under the concept that "the customer is God" and "the patron is a benefactor" capitalism, which reduces the workers to a product and service. They have to mitigate real emotions and desires. Also, they must suppress personal pleasures, facial gestures, and emotional expressions by employing the emotions at work, especially the feelings needed to serve and be caring for clients when they go out or having sex with customers. They need to flirt with the client and act as a wife or a girlfriend who is in servitude to her husband or boyfriend. Furthermore, they have to use the emotions of love, in particular, fake love or pretending as if they love a client. In a way, it is not the love for any client, but the love for the job they are doing.

*We must love what we do because it is the duty. A customer is a customer, not a boyfriend. It is not easy to manufacture love if he is not the right guy. Nevertheless, when I go out with a client,*

*it is my duty to make the customer happy.* (Nun, 19 years old, karaoke bar girl)

Emotion management is the ability to suppress feelings that are an obstacle at work and to cultivate emotions to be used on the job. Experienced karaoke workers viewed the work as a duty. Thus, they must serve clients as a part of their responsibility in the same way they minister a husband in the household context and fulfill the imagination of genre division of labor linked to their sexuality.

*The job is a duty. I have to bring smiles to the clients' faces and make them happy. If the clients are satisfied, they come to the bar every day. When I serve a customer, I have to be attentive in the same way I did at home. Similarly, the duty resembles the task of a child to look after her parents, greet and welcome guests in my house, or merit-making during the festival. I serve to find beer or liquor to my parents' guest in merit festival.* (Nun, pseudonym, 19 years old, karaoke bar girl)

At the same time, the migrant workers experience conflict with emotional rules when they work at a karaoke bar, which clashes and violates their cultural norms. They have to negotiate cultural rules of emotion acculturated, constructed and connected to the body, and the ideology, thinking, and childhood experiences from their country of origin. For example, monogamy is culturally practiced, where sexual intercourse is reserved for the person with whom she is married. Additionally, there is fear embedded in the customary lifestyle that has constructed the emotional body of a Laotian woman. The male emotional body is constructed and managed by fear, such as fear of sex outside the scope of the custom, poverty, strangers, being oppressed by superior people, and so forth. This emotion did not happen in the transnational context but was cultivated in the country of origin.

This emotional or feeling rule is related to the cultural, ideological ideology controlling the lives and emotional expression incubated and cultivated since the woman was born. Laotian women are assigned gender roles according to their biological sex and birth order, such as a daughter or a mother. However, when they are in Thailand, these gender rules clash with the work rules for karaoke and sex workers. Nevertheless,

they can compromise between the new rules and the traditional rules to work and adopt both rules as a part of sex work.

*In the village, it is wrong to hold hand with a man. An unmarried man and unmarried woman cannot be alone in a secluded space. Sex before the marriage, before informing one's parent(s), or without the parental consent is prohibited. I have to take care of my body cleanliness.* (Noi, pseudonym, 23 years old, karaoke bar girl)

### ***Manufacturing of Several Identities: Negotiation With Multiple Social Identities***

The FLMSWs use emotion at work to commoditize themselves as emotional labor, to sell a commodity involving emotional expression, service manner, speech, greeting, and service provided to customers. Furthermore, they adjust and suppress negative emotion and behavior that could have adverse effects on their work. For example, they perceived that customers are benefactors because they manage emotions, at the same time, they also construct the karaoke worker's identity, especially, sexual identity—a part of the fluid and ever-changing sexuality identity. In a given situation, they can manifest their traditional identity—being a daughter, a wife, or a mother—in the service work to give attentive care, tenderness, and expressing love and gentle concern to their customers.

The karaoke workers construct their identities so that they can imply emotion management. In case they feel disgusted during an interaction with an undesirable client or a dirty customer, the sense of disgust is a connection to physical and emotional threats and risk factors. They use emotion management to deal with the prudential emotion, the bad feeling they have when facing an undesirable client. At the same time, they manage customers by helping clients to wash and foster aesthetic emotion so they can be passionate. The workers show their professionalism in providing sexual services. They also use their talents and abilities to manage any emotions arising at the time, which may compromise profits and their sexual desires.

Employment of diverse identities through the use of multidimensional life stories during their working and non-working lives has become one of the strategies to blur the image of the karaoke women as sex workers. The aspect of having multiple identities helps diminish the negative perception associated with sex work, and

stigmatization from those around them who perceived karaoke workers as evil women, sinister, or husband stealers. Furthermore, karaoke workers defined sex work as a fair and uncorrupted career or job. Through sex work, they express their gratefulness by remitting money to their parents and siblings as emotion management for sex work. One karaoke worker said, "Even if I am an evil woman, I am a good daughter to my parents" (Dao, pseudonym, 19 years old, karaoke bar girl).

These identities and identity-based roles are used as part of the job for karaoke workers' profits in the sex services business. Through the selection and promotion of various identities to blur certain other identities, they can select the identities of "good woman," "good daughter," "good mother," or "family-oriented woman" as descriptions to obscure or conceal other identities and to manage degrading emotions, such as guilt, shame, and inferiority, or from being considered bad (corrupted) women. Finally, the choice of emotion selection and management reflects the dynamic and fluid characteristics of emotions that connect transnational life and work.

## **Discussion**

Hochschild's (1983) concept emphasizes on gender in the workplace under emotional labor among service workers, which is often associated with a static social organization of gender system, rather than showing its fluidity and diversity. She bridged gender and sexuality with emotions to change the use value in daily life to exchange value at work. Hochschild (1983) criticized Karl Mark's wage labor in capitalism, using the concept of exchange value and use value in the commodification of emotion that demonstrate the relationship with emotional labor—the process of managing feelings and expressions to an overt expression visible to the public through bodily display. Emotional labor is sold for a wage and contains exchange value. Emotional work is akin to emotion management that employs emotion used in the private context for the benefit of use value.

We want to argue one important point that Hochschild left out in her explanation. In reality, work emotion and private emotion are not completely separated. The two sets of emotions are fluid and ever-changing. Emotion at work can be transformed into private emotion. In the case of FLMSWs, when

their relationship with a sexual partner in their sex work service has a deeper and intensified bond, the emotion at work can be transformed into private emotion. On the other hand, the private emotion may be displayed at work for successful exchanges, such as when FLMSWs make customers feel “like a boyfriend,” “having boyfriend-like sex,” “share mutual passions,” or sharing the same desire and sexual needs. Finally, the workers can restrict private emotion and show only emotion at work. Interestingly, the theoretical perspectives should not only transcend the standpoint of the use value to the exchange value in the commercial sex trade among FLMSWs; it should also investigate the symbolic value that arises from the construction of the body and identity to accommodate the sex trade, which connects the desire and the imagination of beauty, virginity, and youthfulness in the context of transnational commercial sex.

The focus of this study is to investigate sex workers from victimization to agency. Sex workers can be upgraded from the level of manual labor to professional work under identity construction and sexualization of their work. Teela Sanders (2005) referred to this fluidity of identity that sex workers use to show different identities under sexual labor, and who manipulate sexuality by using body parts and sexual acts to capitalize on sexuality. Thus, sex work requires the construction of a variety of identities, as strategists, sexual technicians, laborers, actresses, and so forth (Sanders, 2005).

Although the commercial sex industry and capitalism transform sex workers to emotional labor in the sex trade (when the sexuality, the body, feelings, and emotions have been objectified), it results in indifferent emotion like robots, non-intimate intercourse, and having sex for work. This phenomenon may not reflect genuine emotion, desire, satisfaction, and freedom in sexuality. At the same time, the sex trade is a virtual space for opportunity and pursuit, including fulfillment of sexual desire and joy that reflects FLMSWs’ agency, emotions, sexuality, and sexual freedom linked to social structure, namely, the ideology of a lover and a member of the family. Karaoke workers look at sex as a commitment to intimacy-building, marriage, and having children. Sex is more than physical intimacy, but an emotional and mental connection, which also involves attentive care between sexual partners.

## Conclusion

The key finding we have presented in this paper reflects the emotion management and emotional labor as strategy tools to generate business interest and to negotiate power relationship in sexual service and everyday life such as screening client, faking client, space dividing (body and emotion), and manufacturing identity. FLMSWs can enjoy, be happy, and fulfill desires and needs in the cross-border space. They are the self-employed workers with freedom and choice in sexual service. Laotian karaoke girls use emotion and sexuality to connect with identity under the scheme of identity fluidity. They are not merely victimized, they have agency and power to seek life opportunities. These study findings contribute to the revision of migrant worker’s policy and program, especially the (1) destigmatization of migrant sex worker in Thailand and elsewhere; (2) understanding the complexity of emotional labor and emotion management as a survival strategies among migrant sex workers; and (3) use it in designing empowerment program for them, recognizing human rights, dignity, human justice of migrant sex workers, and mainstreaming right-based approach into transnational sex work policy, program, and implementation.

## Declaration of ownership

This report is our original work.

## Conflict of interest

None.

## Ethical clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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