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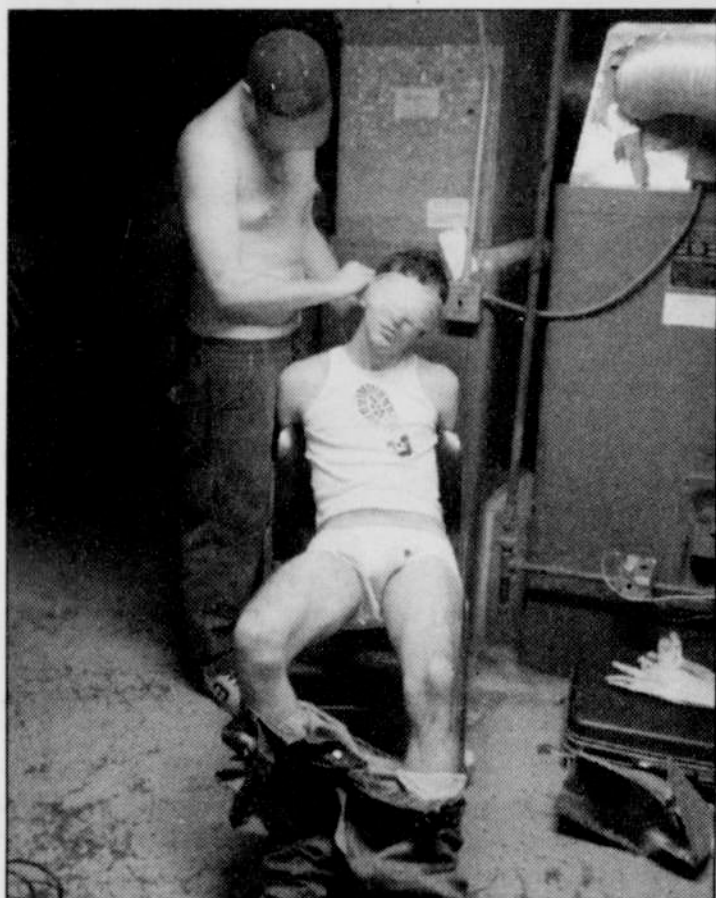
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Portland escorts Travis (seated) and Ryan demonstrate a typical fetish play session.



Taking Care of Business

A glimpse into Portland's thriving queer sex industry
by Aaron Scott and Jaymee R. Cuti • Photos by Xilia Faye

"I spend more time talking about their pets and family than going down on them," says Doug, 24, in the flickering neon light of Scandals. Doug calls himself a "service provider" and "whore." Others might use "prostitute," "hustler" or "escort." Insisting he is not from a broken home, Doug left at age 14. He scored a ride from his rural Oregon town by having sex with the driver and worked the streets until he turned legal and was able to strip and work the bars and the Internet. His clothes pledge allegiance to gutter-punk cum hipster—tight pants, tight, worn shirt and a thick belt lined with bullets. With a dancer's posture and an activist's rage, Doug speaks of prejudice, hypocrisy and injustice surrounding the industry. "I'm a sex worker. I'm a worker," he says. "I like music, I ride my bike, I have friends. I'm a person. I just have a job with a low amount of respect."

Given Portland's reputation for strip clubs and porn stores, there is little surprise that it enjoys a thriving and historic queer sex work industry.

For those who no longer regard sex as the traditional dirty secret or penultimate intimacy, a modern landscape has emerged in which sex work is just that—work. As in any profession, there are specialists, marketing tactics, job hazards, slumps. Successful sex workers are creative entrepreneurs.

Though outside the law, sex work nonetheless mimics American capitalist hierarchy. Loitering in the alley is street prostitution—the desperate and dangerous profession prone to trashy whore stereotypes. On the second floor live the hustlers, prostitutes and strippers who work from bars and clubs. On the third floor is the newly accessible, lucrative and even enjoyable profession of Internet-based escorting and its classic counterpart, agency-based escorting. Porn stars party in the penthouse.

The Exploited Class

A slight boy of 18 rushes across Stark Street, fat raindrops soaking his stylish coat and dirty shoulder bag. Headed nowhere in particular, Juan has slept on the street or in youth shelters since getting kicked out of his home at 16. Though eyeliner and choppy bangs frame a child's face, his lips speak of crystal meth addiction and two years of homelessness, sex work and thievery. "My mom knows what I do out here to get high," he states simply, claiming he now mostly steals and resells clothes. But he admits to a time when he and other street friends would sell sexual favors to gain entry into homes to steal credit cards and other valuables. Kicked out of rehab and stuck in a cycle of homelessness and addiction, shifting and mumbling from meth, Juan says he'd rather be in school designing clothing.

Perhaps no other film better embodies the zeitgeist of 1980s Portland than Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*. The characters illustrated both the vitality and destitution of Portland's homeless youth culture, representing boy prostitution as an act of survival.

Van Sant, who first considered the topic for a possible film while living off Hollywood Boulevard during its 1970s hustling heyday, stated that Portland's long history of boy prostitution "is interesting because it is an alter-world, an alternate universe."

Portland's history also inspired his film. The undeveloped block on Southwest Taylor Street between Third and Fourth avenues was known as "The Camp" during the '20s and '30s because of the homeless families camped there.

"Rich men from the West Hills would cruise down in their Model Ts or Studabakers, and the kids would hop in their cars," Van Sant explained. "The