

**Female and Male Escorts in the UK: A Comparative Analysis of
Working Practices, Stigma and Relationships**

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Abstract

The majority of sex industry research focuses upon the female seller and the male consumer. When research strays from this blueprint to include men as sexual service providers, it tends to be under the pretext of ‘homosexuality’; the client gender remains stable – male. Furthermore, very little research in this area compares the experiences of women and men working in the same sector of the sex industry (Weitzer, 2005b). I therefore seek to address these issues by asking ‘what are the experiences of female and male escorts (who work heteronormatively)?’ Using narrative research and storytelling, twenty in-depth interviews with escorts were conducted, from the perspective that sex work *is* work.

Analyses are divided into four areas: working practices; the role of power in the escort-client dyad; ‘stigma’, and lastly, interpersonal relationships. I suggest that the ‘straight’ male escort market occupies a more ‘casual’ position in comparison to the ‘professionalised’ female sector, and this is reflected in the struggles male escorts encounter trying to secure a steady income stream from escorting alone. I argue that although women and men discuss similar escorting experiences, women benefit from the well-established female market (with its associated ‘unwritten rules’ of standard practice), whereas men are more likely to enact their work in non-standard and sometimes ambiguous ways. Stigma, when discussed, is most often attached to the female body (hence the female sex worker), although I mount a more theoretical challenge toward the academic tendency to assume the presence of stigma in sex workers’ lives. I then position participants’ experiences within their broader networks of relationships, and offer the suggestion that attitudes toward sex (not necessarily toward sex work) in society and interpersonal relationships are instrumental in how escorting is negotiated relationally.

Lastly, I locate my findings within the recent shift toward recognising women as sexual consumers, set against a political backdrop of potential movement toward the decriminalisation of sex work in England and Wales.

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Preface

The female clients of MSWs [male sex workers] are nearly invisible in the existing literature. (Scott et al., 2014, p.165)

This research began five years ago with a different conception, and was entitled *Male Order: Women Who Buy Sex*. The aim of the project was to gather qualitative interview data from male escorts who supply their services to women, as well as from women who pay for male escort services. A third element, an attitudinal survey, was to provide some context to prevailing perceptions around sex work, particularly the women who choose to pay for sex.

To this end, in 2013, the quota of ten male escorts were recruited and interviewed. In 2014, an attitudinal survey was created via Bristol Online Surveys and over 500 completed questionnaires were gathered. However, despite utilising multiple avenues of potential recruitment, no female purchasers of sexual services were sourced. After one year of unsuccessful attempts (and two years into the PhD process), a decision was made to change the research focus. With ten completed male escort interviews and a large quantitative dataset, various options were considered. However, the qualitative experiences of male escorts and attitudinal surveys concerning sex work and female consumers felt like an uneasy fit.

Throughout interviews with male escorts, I was conscious of ‘clocking’ their experiences against my knowledge of the female sex industry. Although this was never verbalised on my part, three men made their own comparisons to female escorts. A comprehensive literature search returned scant gender comparative sex work studies, with the few that existed tending to focus upon male sex workers who offered their services to other men. Thus, the client gender remained stable, male. Although accepting that the thesis needed to change direction, I wished to retain the rationale of why women as sexual consumers were of interest in the first place: the dearth of recognition that women might buy sexual services too.

With this in mind, the quantitative attitudinal survey was disregarded. A new element, comparing the experiences of ‘straight’¹ male and female escorts, was introduced. I deliberated over the interview schedule used for male interviewees, and found it could be equally applied to female escorts. Therefore, ten female escorts were recruited and interviewed in the final months of 2014, using the same interview schedule male escorts responded to. Thus, the project switched from a mixed methods approach to purely qualitative, and the gender of the sex worker became the focal point of the investigation. The introductory chapter which follows offers a more comprehensive address of why such an approach is both timely and necessary.

Somewhat ironically, after the original research idea was abandoned, a British Academy/Leverhulme funded project conducted jointly by Lancaster University and Manchester Metropolitan University² sought to examine women as sexual consumers, alongside male providers of such services. I succeeded in securing a Research Associate position on the project, and faced the same difficulties in recruiting female sexual purchasers. However, the combination of greatly increased resources, and the shift from a burgeoning PhD topic to a fully funded post-doctoral investigation opened avenues of recruitment that were previously unavailable. For instance, a media press release resulted in coverage of the ‘Women Who Buy Sex’ project not only throughout the UK, but across the world. Over thirty local and national newspapers, including tabloids and broadsheets, printed stories about the research. Radio appearances complemented the strategy.

Despite the extensive ‘reach’ these media avenues enabled, female clients were still reluctant to come forward. The data collection for the project concluded with significant data asymmetry of male escort accounts in comparison to female consumer experiences. Despite these difficulties, the ‘Women Who Buy Sex’ project secured a book contract with Routledge (Kingston et al. forthcoming) and enjoyed a successful end of project conference. A diverse range of speakers contributed, with presentations from both a male escort and a woman who pays for sex.

¹ I use the terms ‘straight’ escort and ‘straight’ escorting as shorthand throughout the thesis. It represents male escorts who provide services to female clients, and female escorts who provide services to male clients

² With Dr Sarah Kingston and Dr Natalie Hammond as principal investigators

Therefore, despite the research focus mutating since its first genesis, the original research aim was fulfilled outside of the doctoral process. The presented thesis therefore benefits from the complementarity of two similar projects with substantial overlap. Certainly, a symbiotic relationship between the two has informed my own thoughts, position and analyses over the last eighteen months.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the preface I detailed how the focus of my research had shifted; evolving into a project which came to examine escorting through a gender comparative lens. In this chapter I move on to locate the project within the – scant - existing literature. In doing so, I argue that little attention is given to ‘straight’ male sex work, which in turn invisibilises the female purchaser of sexual services; or at least then invisibilises and dissolves her conceptual possibility. The wider political and socioeconomic landscape in which sex work is situated is also important here, because it provides insights into aspects of the social context in which my participants necessarily operated. In this chapter I therefore also trace the mutating prostitution policy discourse, with particular emphasis upon the last fifteen years or so, giving also an overview of the economic conditions under which participants of this research entered the escort market. In the second part of the chapter I frame the parameters of the research and address the research aims and questions. Finally, a brief synopsis of each chapter provides insight into the thesis progression as a whole.

1.2 Comparing gender in sex industry research

Almost all of the literature is divided into separate studies of males and females, with virtually no systematic comparative examinations of males and females at the same level of work. (Weitzer, 2005b, p.221)

There are very few studies that systematically compare male and female workers who work in the same sector of the sex industry. (Koken et al., 2009, p.205)

There is a demonstrable lack of gender comparative work in sex industry research. This has been previously noted in the literature - Petterson and Tiby (2003, p.161) ask, for example, if prostitution is ‘so closely associated with a male buyer and a female vendor that it becomes difficult to define alternative forms of prostitution?’. The paucity of research and theoretical engagement with gender in comparative terms was however already being noted as early as 1989 – Earls and David observe that ‘male and female prostitution are rarely discussed by a single author’ (1989, p.11). An exception to this general trend was Perkins and Bennett’s 1986 study, combining observation, survey and

interview data gathered from street sex workers in Sydney. This research examined motivations for sex work involvement, concluding that women and men differ in their reasons to enter sex work: whilst economic factors are a driver for both, women were understood to be more likely to suffer from economic inequality and have fewer resources, whereas for men sex work was conceptualised as also an extension of (homosexual) identity. So, here, sex work is understood as work for women, but for men it is also intertwined with sexuality, homoeroticism and its resulting marginalisation. This understanding has however been criticised; Mathews (1988) suggests that:

In focusing on male (homoerotic) prostitution...certain categories of male prostitutes have been excluded...Implicit here is that male prostitution is conducted only, or primarily, by gays. (1988. p.119)

Earls and David (1989), briefly mentioned above, also conducted a review of research on male and female sex work during this time. Voicing concern about the lack of consensus amongst the diverse strands of sex work research, they conclude ‘very little of the (...) literature appears to be useful in arriving at a general understanding of the phenomenon, or in guiding social policy’ (ibid., p.7). They conclude that women involved in selling sex were likely to be pathologised in terms of sexual deviance or mental health problems, whereas working men were largely un- or under-theorised. They suggest:

If we are to continue to conduct research on prostitution, it will be necessary to improve considerably the quality of research designs to include not only control groups of non-prostitutes but also comparisons between male and female prostitutes (Earls and David, 1989, p.23).

While this call did not result in an outpour of research projects, gender comparative research *did* feature in two notable studies in the 1990s, both of which focused on street sex work. McKeganey et al. (1990) compared HIV and risk behaviour according to gender in the UK, and Weinberg and colleagues (1999) examined gender in the US. The former study concluded that women are more likely to be injecting drug users than men; but also more likely to engage in widespread condom use with clients, in contrast, men were more sporadic in managing their sexual health. The latter study put forward that women are ‘more prone to occupational hazards’ (Weinberg et al., 1999, p.503) (for example, robbery and violence), and men are more likely to experience sexual pleasure in their sex working. What is notable in this body of work, and which has in turn motivated my research, is that female and male sex work is examined in the context of

offering services to *male* clients. The female sexual *purchaser*, again, is not considered. She is rendered invisible - or perhaps, impossible - betraying the researcher's own conceptual limits when making sense of sex work.

Koken et al. (2009) relocate the analytical focus from street sex work to indoor escorting, but their study was somewhat limited in its attempt to provide an *overview* of gendered sex work experience. Drawing upon two separate studies, they conclude 'escorting appears to be more socially acceptable within the gay community, relieving many men of the stress associated with leading a double life' (ibid., p.229). Vanwesenbeeck's (2013) discussion of female and male 'push and pull' factors (understood to catalyse entry into sex work) suffers similar (methodological) problems to those of Koken et al. (2009); conclusions are drawn from literatures with different analytical foci. Suzanne Jenkins' thesis (2009) also examines female, male and transgender indoor sex work (exclusively), offering an analysis with a focus on 'exploitation'. Jenkins' work is very much situated within feminist debates (detailed in the next chapter), and utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods to convincingly argue that sex work - in and of itself - need not be exploitative. Although a much-needed contribution to knowledge, as exploitation (and lack of) is understood as the central conceptual and analytical focus, it is difficult to move beyond this discourse in accounting for sex work.

A more contemporary feminist focus understands sex work through the lens of *labour*. Both Jane Pitcher (2014) and Kristofor Burghart (2015) again explore the indoor sector of the sex industry, and both include the experiences of women, men and transgender workers. Pitcher (2014) adopts a 'sexual labour' approach, and unlike Jenkins (2009) she seeks to move away from the central focus on exploitation that is so common in sex industry research. Instead, a framework of policy, state structures and personal agency inform Pitcher's conclusions. Burghart offers a content analysis of female and male escort websites in conjunction with qualitative interview findings. Burghart's work captures distinctions between how men and women advertise their escort identities on the internet (although in Chapter 4 I critique the inference of knowledge from advertisements alone). Throughout the qualitative analyses, Burghart draws upon the concept of 'risk', producing a criminological slant in the research.

In relation to this body of work, my own research focus differs in important ways. Unlike Jenkins, I am not concerned with the concept and substantive focus of *exploitation*, nor do I share Burghart's focus upon 'risk', or more superficial presentations of gender within sex work advertising. Whilst Pitcher offers a notable contribution towards advancing the agenda of viewing sex work *as labour*, none of the research discussed offers a comprehensive examination of gendered sex work both in the context of work *and* the wider perspective of participants' lives. Furthermore, although 'straight' male sex workers are included in these later analyses, crucially, they lack analytical and theoretical depth. Burghart provides a content analysis of websites as well as systematic comparisons between four different escort categories: women with female clients, women with male clients, men with male clients and men with female clients, but this presents quite a narrow understanding of gender and sex work – the complexity of lived experience is somewhat absent. What these studies collectively demonstrate is that - despite being comparative in nature - there is still no 'voice' of the male sex worker for women. Such accounts are side-lined, if not rendered impossible, in broader analyses. This is the substantive 'gap' that I seek to address by focusing comprehensively on only two categories of sex workers. Furthermore, the project offers a more holistic address to sex work: one that can consider worlds *beyond*, yet potentially influenced *by*, sex work. As I have argued, this is lacking in the current literature.

1.3 Beyond the individual: The wider political and socio-economic context

Hubbard et al. (2016) detail the prostitution policy landscape since the 1957 Wolfenden report and up to the present day, charting a shift from abolitionism to prohibitionism. Although unaltered for approximately four decades, in 2000, the government called for a review of prostitution policy in England and Wales (Home Office, 2000, cited in Scoular and Carline, 2014). The previous ideology of nuisance and public morality required an overhaul in response to the proliferation and diversity of commercial sex markets, and this overhaul engendered renewed concerns about trafficking and exploitation (Scoular and Carline, 2014).

The sector of the UK I focus upon, the indoor escort industry, can operate entirely within the remit of the law (if escorts work alone). Throughout the course of this research, the legal status of buying and selling sex from consenting adults in England and Wales

has remained constant. However, sex work legalities can be misunderstood and several sex workers interviewed demonstrated occasional confusion regarding the legal status of their work.³ These confusions are understandable, given the criminalisation of some connected sex work activity; there are no laws against the purchase or offering of sexual services but some activities are criminalised, such as soliciting, controlling prostitution or managing a brothel (Sanders et al., 2009). Prostitution policy concerns itself with the visibility of sex work, thus the street sex worker, the kerb-crawler and the high-street brothel become potential sites of intervention. Indoor sex workers, working privately from homes and hotels, are away from public purview and therefore work much more covertly.⁴ They are largely absent in prostitution policy documents of the last fifteen years, despite comprising the majority of sex workers throughout the UK.

Importantly, however, how sex work is treated in policy has implications for all sex workers, regardless of the legal status of particular sectors/workers. Despite a noticeable lack of attention given to the indoor markets of the sex industry, pseudo-criminal discourse reverberates across all markets. For example, the last fifteen years demonstrate a move towards protectionism, with the 2004 *Paying the Price* consultation paper concerned chiefly with tackling sexual exploitation. In the *Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* of 2006, this protectionism became a mission:

The strategy will focus on disrupting sex markets by preventing individuals, and particularly children and young people, from being drawn into prostitution. (Home Office, 2006, p.1).

All four key objectives of the *Coordinated Strategy* locate street sex work and exploitation as sites to be ‘disrupted’. Section 5 of the Strategy refers to off-street prostitution although again the focus is upon exploitation; a sizeable amount of space is dedicated to trafficking (ibid., pp. 62-64).

These interventionist approaches are further reinforced in the 2008 *Tackling the Demand* review, shifting to an ideology aligned with the Swedish model of criminalising the client. As a result, Section 14 of the Policing Crime Act (2009) came into fruition to criminalise anyone found to have purchased sexual services from someone under coercion (whether the purchaser was aware or not, as the offence was one of Strict

³ This confusion concerning legalities features in the 2014 policy document *Shifting the Burden*.

⁴ Although the high visibility of sex work online could challenge this assertion.

Liability). Scoular and Carline note how male purchasers of sexual services were now 'subject to the same pathologising definitions previously suffered by female sex workers' (2014, p.613). Although the purchase of sex between consenting adults remained legal, both *Paying the Price* (2004) and the *Coordinated Strategy* (2006) reinforced discourses of victimisation and oppression as intrinsic to sex work. Meanwhile, the UK suffered the financial crash of 2008, the most severe of its kind since the Great Depression, followed by a period of austerity measures; both therefore provide a particular backdrop to this research. In the wake of financial struggle, rates of self-employment in the UK increased:

While full-time employment has declined, there have been offsetting increases in other forms of employment. Self-employment has increased by 91000, while the number of temporary workers, who say they could not find permanent jobs, increased by 200,000. The number of part-time workers who say they cannot find full-time jobs increased by 400,000. (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010, R4)

Long-term male escort John, who has worked precariously as an escort for over a decade, commented how '...these days, with the way things are, if you have any sort of job you are lucky'. Several participants report redundancies, a failing business and 'not enough' money from mainstream occupations to live comfortably: Chapter 4 discusses these in more depth.

At a similar time, the political agenda marked a notable shift towards criminalising the purchaser of sexual services, articulated through the agenda of *Shifting the Burden*, an inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group 'to assess the operation of the current legal settlement on Prostitution in England and Wales' (2014, p.1). This agenda was ideologically driven and contends that 'the burden of criminality should weigh heaviest on those who purchase sex' (ibid., p.9). Elsewhere, Northern Ireland and France introduced the criminalisation of purchasing sex, following in the footsteps of Sweden and other Nordic countries (Sanders and Campbell, 2014; Scoular and Carline, 2014). Thus, the present research was conducted at a politically sensitive time where it appeared considerable shifts towards criminalisation were gaining traction.

Sex work politics rarely feature in escorts' accounts; however, the criminalisation of their clients impacts upon them considerably.⁵ Despite this worrying shift, 2015 and

⁵ Sex worker and activist Laura Lee is very vocal about the impact that criminalising the client has had upon sex workers in Northern Ireland.

2016 bear witness to two key surprising events. In 2015, Amnesty International carried out a sex work consultation and published a policy in 2016, stating support for the decriminalisation of consensual adult sex work, framing it as a human rights issue. More recently, the Home Affairs Select Committee (2016) held the first ever inquiry into prostitution and urged for the repeal of soliciting laws, as well as laws which prohibit sex workers from working together. Although these are welcome victories, due to the timing coinciding with the final months of my research, they are perhaps more relevant to the concluding sections of this thesis. Therefore, greater consideration will be given to these recent developments in the final thesis conclusion.

1.4 Parameters of the research

I first began researching sex work in 2008, in the wake of *Paying the Price* (2004); the *Coordinated Strategy* (2006), and at the start of the UK financial crisis. Although my research interests have been exclusively concerned with indoor commercial sex, I also volunteer with Manchester Action on Street Health, a charity that provides support and outreach services to female sex workers. Whilst indoor workers (who work alone) can do so peacefully, outdoor workers (and their clients) are criminalised, something I am acutely aware of in both my capacities as a researcher and volunteer. Weitzer reports irony in that ‘most research has been done on the least prevalent type of prostitution. All too often overlooked is the large population of indoor workers: escort, brothel, bar, and massage parlor’ (2005b, p.215). In the decade since this claim, substantial research examining the indoor sex markets has been undertaken, although with a distinct focus upon the female sex worker who provides services to male clients.⁶ Thus, the research net captures a gendered research object: women are sexual service providers whilst men are consumers. As earlier mentioned, a heteronormative bias is therefore produced, and this resonates throughout sex work policy, despite caveats that indicate gender neutrality. In some ways, my research could be construed as echoing this heteronormative bias; ‘straight’ escorting is the object of analysis. However, by addressing men who sell sexual services to women, the normative focus is both averted and subverted – it forces an

⁶ A great many examples could be included here: Sanders (2005; 2006b); Bernstein (2007a); Vanwesenbeeck (2005), Kontula (2008), Bungay et al. (2011); Buschi, (2014).

implicit recognition of the female sex purchaser. Therefore, although my original intent to research female clients was abandoned, in many ways the new focus still acknowledges their presence.

When recruiting participants via an online forum, some board members continually reinforced my research focus as quixotic; the ‘straight’ male sex worker so rarely utilised - indeed akin to a research unicorn - that any investigative endeavours would be rendered pointless. This raises an interesting point, however. Demonstrably, there are marked differences between the numbers of male and female sex workers who cater for heterosexual clients. I do not suggest, nor did I begin this research thinking that the markets for ‘straight’ female and male escorts are comparable. But this does not mean the male worker/female consumer dyad should not be recognised. Weitzer observes ‘female customers, a small but theoretically important fraction of the market, have been almost totally neglected’ (2005b, p.25). The male sex worker ‘for women’ is *theoretically important for the same reason*. His presence and capacity to obtain female clients offers a direct challenge to the radical feminist idea of prostitution as a gender regime (whereby men are the oppressors and women the victims) detailed in the following chapter. The recent policy of Amnesty International (2015, p.6) recognises that ‘cisgender men also account for a significant proportion of sex workers in many states’ – adding further weight to the need to heed male inclusion within sex work considerations.

The decision to focus upon indoor sex work - escorting in particular - was constrained somewhat by the change in research focus. I had already collected a substantial amount of quantitative and qualitative data (the latter relating exclusively to the straight male escort), and as such, examining ‘escorting’ instead of other sectors was pre-determined. I considered focusing exclusively upon straight male escorting, and this would have been an entirely original area of investigation. However, the frequent comparisons I found myself engaging in, coupled with the action calls (by researchers) for more comparative research led me to examine the role of gender in escorting. Beyond gender, and the indoor escort sector of the UK, I sought to be as flexible as possible. Therefore, these were the only parameters, or variables, guiding the research.

1.5 Research aims and questions

Throughout the first two years of this research I was considering the female sex purchaser and the male escort who provides services to women. My rationale, first and foremost, was concerned with exploring this under-researched aspect of social life. For example, I had no pre-existing framework for examining interactions, i.e. through the lens of deviance, or subversion, or even dichotomies of emancipation and exploitation. Instead, I prioritised the ‘story’ (Plummer, 1995 - detailed in Chapter 3) - stories of motivation; of ongoing engagement with sex work; of positive and negative experiences; stories of the more mundane and stories of wider connections beyond the realm of work.⁷ I refrained from imposing a tight theoretical agenda beyond the three broad arenas the interview schedule encapsulates. By this, I mean that although I position myself firmly in the research camp that construes sex work as work, I did not wish to *only* allow constructions that confirm my position. Further detail on my ‘perspective’ is provided in the next chapter. Upon shifting the research focus to gender comparison, this approach was maintained. First to ensure research consistency, but beyond this, because it reflects most accurately how I wished to theorise sex workers’ experiences, moving away from the well-trodden frameworks. Below Weitzer discusses how gendered sex work should be undertaken:

At present, we can propose the following hypothesis: Male and transgender workers experience less exploitation and victimization, and exercise greater power and control over working conditions, than most female workers. If this proposition is corroborated, the next step would be to explain these differences, with a view toward identifying the factors that help to reduce victimization and increase worker’s power. At the theoretical level, further investigation of male and transgender prostitution, as well as female escort and call girl prostitution, will help to demonstrate the fallacy of reifying “prostitution” and underscore the need to base conclusions on findings drawn from multiple levels and incorporating workers of different genders. (Weitzer, 2005b, p.223).

Weitzer’s point reflects a much broader pressure within sex work research; that it ought to be useful, political even. This is systemic to other research arenas where the target population suffer marginalisation and stereotyping, and I echo the need to engage in sex work research wisely. However, I reject that the agenda needs to be so narrow as to speak

⁷ Mundane experience here means aspects of work such as ongoing maintenance of that deemed to be work-related. For example, answering emails, advertising, dealing with work-related annoyances that apply to many work domains, not just sex work.

only to the well-researched dimensions of choice and exploitation. Even the concept of ‘power’ is problematic; which I elaborate on in Chapters 2 and 5. Instead, I wished to explore a more neutral ground.

With these issues in mind, the main research question I pose is: ‘What are the experiences of female and male escorts (who work heteronormatively)?’ Purposefully broad, I address this overarching question through four sub-questions, detailed below:

1. What motivates women and men to become escorts?
2. What similarities and differences exist between the working practices of women and men?
3. Does gender influence experiences (or lack) of ‘stigma’?
4. What impact does escorting have beyond the realm of work, extending to interpersonal relationships?

To some degree, these questions were data-driven: 50% of the interviews had already been conducted. The first two questions reflect the narrative approach I utilise. In question 3, I enclose quotation marks around ‘stigma’ because I steered away from using the word within interviews, something I return to in the methodology (Chapter 3) and again in Chapter 6. The last question has always been of immense interest to me, particularly because of the paucity of discussion surrounding the lives of sex workers beyond the work itself. Relationships comprised the sole focus of a previous sex work academic project I conducted (Redman, 2011a) and since then, more pockets of research focusing on intimate relationships (and motherhood) have been developed. Thus, I engage in both micro and macro detail; the micro practices of work combined with the macro view of a life outside of work.

1.6 Thesis progression: outlining the remaining chapters

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth examination of the extant literature including the interactions between intimacy and commerce – the ‘desire economies’. Here, consideration is given to the theoretical perspectives that guide knowledge about the sex industry, composed along a spectrum. The gendered sex industry ‘actors’ are explored and the review concludes with the recognition of the rise of the concept of the ‘sex work

story’; a narrative which shows sex work realities as distributed in increasingly enterprising and creative forms.

This ‘creative turn’ continues thematically into the methodology of Chapter 3. Utilising narrative, this chapter explains the focus upon the ‘story’, telling its own story of hostilities faced in the data collection phases of research. Alongside the expected inclusions typically found in chapters detailing the research process, some insights and thoughts are offered concerning perceptions of sex work research, how we approach it, even how we speak (or do not speak) about it in certain contexts. Reflexivity permeates this chapter, and concludes with pen portraits of participants’ accounts.

Chapters 4 and 5 launch the first empirical discussions of female and male escorting. The former begins with the ‘start’ of the escort journey: the motivations for first entering sex work. The more practical aspects of work are considered, including setting rates, deciding how (and where) to advertise (and work). Through systematic analyses of working practices, I draw tentative conclusions about the ‘state’ of the gendered escort market, offering a visual depiction of how women and men ‘use’ the internet for their work. Chapter 5 continues to explore the gender dimensions of escorting, but specifically addresses the role of ‘power’ in sex work. Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate ‘power’ as more complex than pop-cultural conceptualisations of sex work and some radical feminist arguments: ‘power’ is more than ‘property’; i.e. as *either* lacking *or* possessed. In relation to this, I also complicate neat conclusions of gender and power, casting the net more broadly toward the structure of escort work, examining how this might be instrumental in creating power positions.

Chapter 6 marks a shift towards a specific theoretical critique concerning the role of stigma in both sex workers’ lives as well as sex work research as a research field. Throughout this chapter, an in-depth review of sex industry ‘stigma’ combines with the empirical accounts given by participants. Discontented with the available theoretical frameworks concerning ‘stigma’, I both mount a challenge and propose an alternative way of conceptualising stigma within research, particularly sex work research.

The empirical analyses conclude in Chapter 7 by addressing the wider networks of families, friendships and support systems in the lives of the women and men interviewed. The evidence provided throughout the chapter is best aligned with the concept of relationality proposed by Smart (2007), and like the conclusion of Chapter 6, warns

against the uncritical ‘top down’ imposition of existing theoretical knowledge onto empirical data.

Finally, Chapter 8 offers a systematic address of the proposed research questions. Here, significant cross fertilisation of ideas from different parts of the thesis merge to create a wider encapsulation of gendered experience in escorting. Precise contributions to both sex work literature and sociological theory are discussed more broadly. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the recent shifts that have indicated a potential sex work policy change, and here I situate and align the findings of my research within this broader context of similar work and policy. Some suggestions for future research (and an accompanying rationale) are presented as final thoughts.

2. Women, Men and the UK Escort Industry

2.1 Introduction

As the introductory chapter outlined, this thesis revolves methodologically around ‘narrative’ and storytelling. The review of literature presented in this chapter, in parts, tells its own story of sex industry research; beyond the participants’ stories lie further stories – meta-narratives – of what the sex industry is, and what the people within it might ‘be’ like. These narratives are instrumental in creating, sustaining, and also challenging the status quo knowledge we have access to regarding commercial sex. I begin by examining the range of positions available to theorise sex work and position myself (and therefore this research) theoretically. A sociological address of the sex industry more broadly follows, considering the ‘mainstreaming’ of the sex industry, the rise of the internet, and the place of escorting within this landscape of commercial sexual exchange. Next, I consider the gendered ‘actors’ who sustain the sex industry, locating the ways in which women and men are theorised as service providers and consumers. The review concludes with a discussion of how sex work ‘stories’ have proliferated contemporarily, enabling not only the sex worker’s voice, but a diversity in sex workers’ voices. I turn first, however, to the range of voices that characterise sex work *theory*, and address the centrality of power across these positions.

2.2 Theorising sex work – positioning myself

A continuum of theoretical stances in relation to sex work reveal both polarised positions and more nuanced understandings. At either end of the ideological spectrum lie the abolitionist, (or radical feminist) approach, and its opposite, the ‘empowerment’ paradigm. Between the two camps rest the ‘sex work’ and more recently ‘sexual labour’ positions. Weitzer (2005a, p.934) comments that ‘*in no area* of the social sciences has ideology contaminated knowledge more pervasively than in writings on the sex industry’; these ideologies and associated power positions inform the discussion below.

Radical feminism inspects prostitution⁸ through the prism of patriarchy; sexual commerce equates to sexual exploitation and the very existence of prostitution inflicts violence – symbolic or actual – upon *all* women. In *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, Barry writes:

The facts of women's subordination often lie in realities that are obscured in silence or normalized in acceptance but that nevertheless dehumanize and brutalize us as women, even when we do not directly experience their most extreme manifestations – unless we bring them to the consciousness of women's condition as a political reality. (1996, p.84)

Here, Barry outlines the underlying logic of the abolitionist stance: irrespective of experience (or reality), all women are ideologically subordinated within a patriarchal system, and the means to address this is necessarily political. For abolitionists, individual and localised contexts of prostitution are irrelevant because the macro identity politics of gender still speak to the oppression of women. In this sense, prostitution is a patriarchal institution that remains 'one of the most graphic examples of men's domination over women' (Pateman, 1983, p.561). For Pateman (and similar radical / abolitionist proponents), the commercial sexual contract revolves around the 'sale'⁹ of women's bodies, which affirms the male 'right' to sexual access under capitalist conditions. Thus, the power relations within prostitution are necessarily gendered – the exercise of masculine economic power enables access to the comparatively economically powerless female. Barry asks 'can women choose prostitution? As much as they can choose any other context of sexual objectification and dehumanization of the self' (1996, p.85).

The 'story' promoted through the abolitionist position is highly emotive – feminised accounts of desperate poverty, horrific working conditions and graphic violence characterise the evidence base. Rubin (1984, p.301) challenges the marshalling of 'worst available examples' perpetuated throughout radical feminist discourse, whilst Weitzer (2005a) draws attention to the variety of methodological flaws apparent in key works, including a lack of transparency concerning recruitment and participant sample,

⁸ My preferred term is 'sex work' and reflects where I position myself as a researcher, however there are instances where this term is not suitable (for example, historically, prior to the term being invented, or to reflect the position of other authors e.g. radical feminists)

⁹ Sex workers in the public domain take exception to this term, and wry responses appear frequently on social media: a recent example from Twitter states 'worked last night. Woke up, checked my body was still there'.

and the ‘foregone conclusion’ starting point that prostitution is ‘violence against women’ (found, for example, in the works of Dworkin, 1981; Farley, 2004; Jeffreys, 1997; MacKinnon, 1987,1989; Raymond, 1998). In this context, then, ‘male dominance (...) is a dyadic power relation in which a male super-ordinate commands a female subordinate. It is a master/subject relation’ (Brace and O’Connell Davidson, 2000, p.1045).

Millett argues ‘it is not sex the prostitute is really made to sell; it is degradation’ and that the sex buyer, normatively constructed as male ‘is not buying sexuality, but power, power over another human being, the dizzy ambition of being lord of another’s will for a stated period of time’ (Millett, 1975, p.56). The empirical accounts given by men who purchase sex offer myriad challenges to such extreme statements (and theoretical positions), and the works of Sanders (2008) and Hammond (2011) are discussed in a later section concerning the male identity of commercial sexual consumers. Gillian Abel (2016) notes the ‘purchase’ that abolitionist ideology can engender throughout policy, and suggests that the absence of a ‘strong’ abolitionist discourse in New Zealand resulted in comparatively little resistance to the decriminalisation of the sex industry. In the UK, however, abolitionist rhetoric is pervasive and its influence can be found in the policy documents of *Paying the Price* (2004), *A Coordinated Strategy* (2006), *Tackling the Demand* (2008) and more recently *Shifting the Burden* (2014).

At the opposite end of the continuum sits a perspective that celebrates a sex-positive approach, most often described as the empowerment paradigm. In *Live Sex Acts* (1997), Wendy Chapkis initiates an argument for commercial sex work to be defined as erotic labour. Chapkis draws upon interviews conducted with sex workers who self-define as ‘empowered’ by their work. The recently published *Sex Work and Female Self-Empowerment* (Hunter-Jones, 2016) draws upon the sex-positive writings of Chapkis and Queen as a corrective measure to ‘add balance’ and ‘propose some alternative ideas about the positive effects of sex work’ (Chapter 4, no pagination). A far cry from the victimising discourses of abolitionist feminists, positioning sex work as ‘empowering’ offers a different theoretical problem. Weitzer argues that:

[using] typically upscale call girls and escort agency workers—to argue that prostitution is or can be empowering and lucrative. For some workers, this is indeed the case, but these “best examples” are no closer to the norm in prostitution than the “worst examples.” Again, prostitution varies significantly by type, and it is disingenuous to generalize from one type to prostitution as a whole. (2005a, p.946)

The ideology of sex work as liberatory offers an altogether different conception of power, shifting it from a male to a female resource, as Pendleton (1997, p.79) states ‘the act of making men pay is in fact quite subversive. It reverses the terms under which men feel entitled to unlimited access to women’s bodies’ because sex workers can control and limit bodily access on their own terms. O’Neill summarises the sex-positive stances of commentators such as Pat Califia and Annie Sprinkle as intended to ‘subvert the cultural order from within’ and that ‘the entire debate is used to show that the position of the prostitute cannot be reduced to passive object’ (2001, p.24). Although acknowledging sex itself as a site of gender struggle, this perspective celebrates the role of the prostitute as ‘a symbol of women’s authority and a threat to patriarchy’ (O’Neill, 2001, p.24). The concept of agency is particularly important here; whereas abolitionist discourse erases the possibility of agency in the (female) prostitute, positioning her as a victim of gendered structural inequality, discourses of empowerment celebrate the agency taken back by women in the sexual exchange.

Hitlin and Elder however warn against glib discussion of the agency concept, particularly in the social sciences:

Sociologists place themselves against a naive psychological reductionism in an effort to combat a (rather American) tendency to reduce social phenomena to the level of the individual. However, this has led to simplistic, straw versions of human actors within larger, structural models about institutions and societies (...) To maintain that social actors make decisions, no matter how socially circumscribed, is a fairly banal statement from a micro-analytic perspective. (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p.170).

To counteract this conceptual murkiness, the authors suggest greater attention ought to be given to *time* and its role within social processes. Agency is best examined in the broader temporal contexts of one’s life, because agency fluctuates within the requirements of social interactions, and as individuals become ‘more or less concerned with the immediate versus long-term life goals, they employ different social psychological processes and exhibit different forms of agency’ (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p.171). Meanwhile Gatrell (2010) investigates agency as a gendered concept, and examines the gendered nature of agency in the context of how female sex workers ‘set the rules of the game’ (2010, p.214), i.e. the extent to which women are able establish their working boundaries with clients. I return to working boundaries in Chapters 4 and 5, however it is worth noting here that Gatrell distinguishes between the levels of control, or agency, women have access to

depending on the sector of the sex industry occupied. She also argues that agency is a gendered concept because it is women's bodies, and women's work, that underpin discussions of agency. Drawing upon the gender pay gap and the working limitations placed upon women once they become mothers, Gatrell's analysis positions agency as a site for struggle not only within sex work, but wider economic constraints.

Between the polarised stances of commercial sex as 'violence against women', or as an agentic act of subversion to patriarchal relations, lies a space which is occupied by the more nuanced positions of 'sex work' and 'sexual labour'. The term 'sex work' was the invention of Carol Leigh; a reactionary measure to the victimising discourses she witnessed at a conference in the early 1980s. Although it took several years for the term to enter mainstream parlance, it marked an ideological shift towards identifying commercial sex *as work*. Explaining the term, Leigh argues that it 'acknowledges the work we do rather than defines us by our status' (1997, p.230). O'Connell Davidson observes that 'power' is implicit to both abolitionist rhetoric and the sex-as-work position and is 'equally uni-dimensional. The former offers a zero-sum view of power as a 'commodity' possessed by the client (...) and exercised over prostitutes, the latter treats the legal apparatuses of the state as the central source of repressive power that subjugates prostitutes' (O'Connell Davidson, 1998, p.16). Although I do not disagree, in Chapter 5 I extend the boundaries of O'Connell Davidson's assertion; I suggest that the structure of the escort sector, particularly for women, engenders positions of power.

I position myself firmly within the 'sex work' perspective, therefore this research is conducted and analysed in accordance with this starting point. Although the recent moves toward examining sex work as 'sexual labour'¹⁰ (and therefore distancing from the feminist politics of the 'sex work' movement) is an ideological shift I support¹¹, I feel that investigating knowledge that treats sex work as labour uncritically is problematic. Chapters 6 and 7 reflect the ways in which sex work 'stigma' circulates, coupled with the potential impact it can have on relationships. Although sex workers may (and many of the participants I interviewed *do*) view sex work as purely work, the same cannot

¹⁰ See Borris, Gilmore and Parrenas (2010) and Pitcher (2014)

¹¹ Hardy (2013) asserts that the commodification of sexual labour ought to be examined within the broader patterns of labour commodification. Similarly, Brents and Hausbeck (2010, p.16) contend that 'it makes little sense for scholars to continue to examine sex work as if it were unlike any other forms of work'.

necessarily be applied to the wider social context in which they are situated. I position my research in this way, too, as it illustrates the ways in which the male sex worker is under-theorised; the matrix of sex work, power and agency applies (ideologically at least) to female workers, erasing male sex workers from the debate.

2.3 Economies of desire: Sex and commerce

2.3.1 Contextualising the sex industry

Moving beyond the ideological debates surrounding sex work, the socio-cultural context of sex and its myriad commodification is considered next. Capitalism, Marx argues, creates and sustains (requires, even) the increasing commodification of existence (Constable, 2009). And commodification occurs on a global scale, indeed realms once regarded as local, as personal, are now increasingly mediated by processes of capitalism within the political economy. Sex, domesticity, caring and other traditional household intimacy-related acts have now entered the market as commodities ‘to be bought or sold; packaged and advertised; fetishized, commercialized, or objectified (...) and linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration echoing a global capitalist flow of goods’ (Constable, 2009, p.50). Capitalism’s intrusion upon that which might typically be deemed ‘private’ is described by Zelizer as academically understood to be:

An old, influential tradition[that] asserts the existence of separate spheres and hostile worlds (...) a sharp divide exists between intimate social relations and economic transactions (...) contact between them [the two spheres] produces moral contamination. (2005, p.22)

Discussions denigrating the blurring of boundaries between what might traditionally be deemed ‘the private’ set against the ‘commercial’ risk presenting a romanticised view of pre-capitalist life, or at least a dichotomous appraisal whereby representations of home are ‘good’ and commerce is ‘bad’. Monto and Julka (2009, p.3) note that the processes of commodification are most often construed as ‘highly negative, resulting in the dehumanization of the participants’ because human qualities ought not to be treated as commodities. They warn that if sex is conceived as a commodity, then resultant ‘disturbing’ attitudes could negatively impact on the lives of all women, sex workers and otherwise (ibid., p.11).

Commentators such as Illouz and Zelizer argue against this idea that capitalism has created a world in which economic behaviour conflicts with intimate relationships. Instead:

Throughout the twentieth century middle class men and women were made to focus intensely on their emotional life, both in the workplace and the family, by using similar techniques to foreground the self and its relation to others. (Illouz, 2007, p.4).

Suggesting there is an ‘emotional capitalism’, Illouz draws upon the role of emotion in consumerism stating that emotions ‘are an essential, albeit insufficiently acknowledged mechanism explaining how consumer needs and desires connect to the system of production of wants’ (2009, p.379). Instead of a ‘separate worlds’ approach, Illouz argues that public and private spheres are intertwined in symbiotic relationships.

Introducing gender into the economic-private nexus, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) propose a theory of sexual economics that applies to heterosexual communities. Within these communities, sexual exchange can be likened to that of a marketplace whereby women are sexual ‘sellers’ and men are ‘purchasers’. The authors are not talking about sex work, but sexual relations more broadly. Through their use of marketplace analogy, Baumeister and Vohs describe a patriarchal system in which women possess the sexual capital and men the economic. This ‘sexual capital’ is reconfigured in the work of Hakim, who proposes ‘erotic capital’ (2010). Erotic capital, she asserts, is the fourth ‘asset’ humans can possess, building upon Bourdieu’s previously three-part typology comprising economic, cultural and social capital. Erotic capital comprises six strands: beauty, sexual attractiveness, social skills, liveliness, social presentation and sexuality (ibid., pp.501-502). This erotic capital can be possessed by both women and men, although women much more so. Hakim acknowledges the creation of attractive physical exteriors is increasingly a male pursuit too, although women have longer histories of concern about, and judgement of, physicality, an idea I return to in Chapter 5. Arguing against dominant feminist perspectives, Hakim notes how such standpoints are ‘so infused with patriarchal ideology that they seem unable to perceive heterosexuality as a source of pleasure and entertainment, and of women’s power over men’ (ibid., p.512). For Hakim, erotic capital is advantageous for women because of its advancing social and economic importance, where it can be instrumental in changing the status of women within the economy, most notably in the industries of leisure and entertainment (ibid., p.512).

In 'Mainstreaming Sex', Attwood catalogues the ways in which sex is becoming increasingly 'mainstreamed' within contemporary Western societies 'in which sex and technology are stitched together so that we become sexual cyborgs', suggesting that 'commercial sex is gaining a toehold in the high street and being gentrified' (2009, xiv). Throughout Attwood's volume, academic analyses range from the 'pornification' of culture through to a sexualised mainstream media and an attendant 'striptease culture', each offering nuanced understandings of the integration of sex into everyday existence. Comella notes the 'mainstreaming' of sexually-oriented adult products that 'at one time could only be purchased at adult stores', yet are now 'making their way onto the shelves of Wal-Mart' (2009, p.297). These trends toward a mainstreaming of sex toys, she contends, are enabled by efforts to make sexual aids 'respectable' (and consequently more acceptable) to people who might not otherwise procure these items in specialist adult stores (ibid., p.298).

It is no coincidence, then, to see greater visibility of commercial sex within this broader context. For Brents, these shifts are part of a wider liberalising trend since the 1960s, where discourses of individual freedom of choice and expression have 'helped dismantle many anti-obscenity, sodomy and anti-pornography laws that once constrained sexual behaviour and consumption' (2016, p.402). Brents and Sanders (2010) consider how the sex industry is becoming increasingly 'mainstreamed', offering comparative examples between Las Vegas, USA, and Leeds, UK. For mainstreaming to occur, economic integration and social integration need to merge, which is further enabled against a backdrop of 'acceptability of bodies as commodities' (ibid., p.44). Economic integration is evident when sex-based businesses mimic the mainstream practices of non-sexual commercial businesses, whilst social integration 'shifts cultural attitudes toward the acceptability of sexuality as a legitimate form of commerce' (ibid., p.43). Complementing the stance of Constable, Brents and Sanders reiterate the global context of leisure consumption, remarking how sex work and other forms of work are becoming progressively similar, and this is a direct consequence of wider social acceptability concerning the advertising (and utilisation) of bodies as commodities (2010, p.45). Although Brents and Sanders discuss the ways in which purchasing indirect and direct sexual services share increased visibility in public spheres, it should be noted this is not uniformly so. McNair (2002) cites an increased respectability both in how sex-related businesses 'look' as well as how they are perceived, but Laing and Cook (2014, p.507)

comment that lap dancing venues and upmarket sex shops have garnered acceptability in some public (city) spaces, whilst on-street sex work, noticeable brothels, and other ‘sex on premises’ clubs have not.

Hausbeck and Brents (2010) utilise Ritzer’s (1993) McDonaldization thesis as a framework to examine its theoretical purchase when applied to the sex industry. The McDonaldization process describes the ways in which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are transposed (and achieve dominance) across other spheres of life. McDonaldization comprises: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Hausbeck and Brents systematically apply Ritzer’s four components of McDonaldization to various parts of the sex industry, demonstrating instances of acquiescence (and also resistance). They conclude ‘a McDonaldized sex industry is convenient for some consumers, safer and more lucrative for some workers, and profitable for owners’ (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010, p.116). However, Hausbeck and Brents warn of ‘greater dehumanization, less diversity of desires and more stratification’ (2010, p.116). In Chapters 4 and 5 I offer some empirical challenges to this, evidenced specifically with examples of increased diversity of desires, alongside genuine emotional responses and connections experienced in sex work contexts. However, I also extend some support to the McDonaldization model, particularly in relation to managing ‘work time’ and elements of the encounter for predictability purposes.

Collectively, these accounts demonstrate a variety of contextual change. Creeping neoliberalism and the emphasis upon ‘the individual’ and ‘free choice’ in contemporary Western thought (Brents, 2016), coupled with capitalism and consumerism, create the environs in which sex and commerce intertwine outside of the sex industry. The sex industry itself thus more readily slots into, and adapts with, the changing cultural landscape. The next section considers how technology, specifically the internet, has increased both the visibility and availability of sex, as well as enabling new forms of sexual expression.

2.3.2 The internet and sex work

The global growth of the sex industry, argues Bernstein (2007b), has ‘been driven in large by developments in technology, and that the diversification and changing forms of

commercial sex are reflected in women's roles within the industry' (cited in Hamilton, 2009, p.89). Some commentators have focused upon the internet as a growing sexual playground, advancing precisely because of the anonymity and convenience it affords.

Waskull (2004) observes:

From the comfort of one's home and under a dense veil of anonymity, an enormous range of sex is readily available at one's fingertips – and no one is embarrassingly exposed for their curious cyberpeepings. (cited in Brickell, 2012, p.33).

In the main, both women and men that I interviewed emphasised the centrality of the internet to their work, although interestingly, women and men utilise the internet differently throughout the course of their work (expanded on in Chapter 4). Van Zoonen (2002) addresses some key debates relating to the internet and gender – precisely, whether gender influences internet communication, or inversely, if the internet impacts upon gender. Citing the inventions of the telephone and computer as the 'Mother' and 'Father' of technology, the internet is thus the child 'some 40 years old then, but its gender is still undecided' (ibid., p.9). Arguing from a feminist perspective, Turkle asserts the typical characteristics of internet organisation revolve around an 'ethic of community, consensus and communication' (van Zoonen, 2002, p.9), and for Turkle, these are domains where women excel. To elucidate this point in a more contemporary context, the collective female internet giant represented by 'Mumsnet' is testament to this. However, equally masculine spaces of exclusion abound too. Perhaps early theorisations around a gendered internet were pertinent in its infancy, and have become less relevant with mainstreamed use in leisure, commerce and business across gender (and the globe). As van Zoonen postulates, perhaps the internet has no gender, or is a gender laboratory (2002, p.12), a place where gendered identities can escape the essentialism provided by a physical body.

In 'Prostitution 2.0', Cunningham and Kendall seek to uncover the extent to which the internet augments, as opposed to displaces sex work markets (2011, p.274). Online proliferation of sex work, they add, lowers the demand for street-based workers. Prior to the internet, selling sex typically involved adverts in newspapers, cards in phone boxes, the street market and the communal working environments of parlours. One woman, moving from a decade of parlour working to independent escorting, relates that 'we don't need go-betweens any more to organise our work, we don't need anyone who will make decisions about who we should or shouldn't see' (Redman, 2011b, no pagination).

Drawing upon Roberts (2007), it is observed that:

The Internet uniquely benefited sex workers in the escort and call girl categories, because of those subtypes' unique advertising challenges. Specifically, because these workers provide companionship in addition to sexual services, personality match with the client is a key element driving demand, and Internet technology enables greater preassignment communication to facilitate compatible matching. (Cunningham and Kendall, 2011, p.275)

In conjunction with the greater affordance of working autonomy, sex workers advertising online can now capture a much larger audience. Profiles on permanently accessible advertising platforms enable online advertisers to reap some time benefits; sex workers no longer need a 'physical' presence to engage with potential clients. In addition, the availability of 'review sites' – online spaces where sex workers are 'rated' by clients – can bolster (or undermine) their working reputations (Pettinger, 2011). The mimicry of more mainstream economic business practices is discussed by Brents and Sanders (2010, p.40), who assess the expansion of sex work in a broader context of policy, attitudinal change and social ambivalence. Direct sex work and all its peripheries are streamlined into practices synonymous with acceptability, precisely because 'sexuality has become a central component of late-capitalist consumer culture' (ibid., p.45). The boundaries between sex work and other work are now commercially blurred.

The internet is often described in positive terms, facilitating safety amongst sex workers Chatterjee (2005). This is particularly so when compared to the previously available avenues of procuring clients; although to assert that the internet has offered unfaltering positivity for sex workers' independence, safety and profit margins belies 'new dangers' that have emerged from online advertising (Jones, 2015). The current 'Beyond the Gaze'¹² project examines mediated 'new' problems online sex working can present. These include online stalking, image and profile theft, unsolicited searching for and disclosure of sex worker's identities and 'doxing', the practice of recording webcam sessions illegally (Sanders and Matt-at-Lotus, 2016). Jones warns that the previously narrow literature focusing on the affordances of internet-facilitated sex work (2015, p.567) needs to engage with nine areas, including:

The diversity and complexity of sex work online; the rise of individualized erotic labor; how local contexts shape migration into online sex work; issues related to danger and privacy; the reactions by

¹²Beyond the Gaze: The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK. A three-year study conducted by the universities of Strathclyde and Leicester.

law enforcement to online sex work; the racialization of erotic labor; and further use of intersectional analysis to study the experiences of people who sell sex online. (2015, p.567)

In Chapter 4 I implicitly address some of the above issues, presented through participants' trajectories into sex work (which were often internet-mediated). Although advertising on the internet allows an enduring sex work profile presence which can alleviate some of the extra labour that might arise in other sex work sectors, for example the need to convey available services and prices, there are some obvious hindrances, the most obvious being the risk of being 'discovered' (for those who work in relative secrecy). These new potential risks apply to escorts specifically, and with this in mind, the focus turns now to the 'place' of the escort in the UK sex industry.

2.3.2 Escorting

All twenty participants within this study identified as, and advertised their services, as 'escorts'. Cameron et al. (1999, p.1523) describe the term 'escort' as 'something of a euphemism which enables the market for prostitution services to operate in a way that minimizes litigation or police interest'. The term 'escort' is used somewhat euphemistically too in the UK, although without the added concern of criminalisation that 'escorts' in the US face. Escorts can work independently, or through third party management in the form of an escort agency. Independent escorts could be described thus:

The independent escort is differentiated from other forms of sex worker, firstly by her direct sexual and social contact with her clientele, secondly by her general manifestation as an organiser of her own working space (be it a hotel room, a long term lease, or intermittent room rentals), her own marketer, often using the cheap and available means provided by the internet, and the sole communicant between her and her clients. (Story and Jankowski, 2015, p.57)

I would add here that independent escorts advertise their services in relation to *time*, contrasting with other sectors of the sex industry which operate on a payment-for-service basis (for example, in some parlours, and on the street). The language used by escorts mimics that of mainstream business parlance, and preferred terms include 'booking', 'client', or 'appointment'. Escorts can visit clients in their homes or hotels (defined as outcalls), or provide 'incall' services to clients, which can be privately hired hotel rooms

or apartments, or dedicated longer term premises such as an ‘incall’ flat. Some escorts allow clients into their homes, with dedicated ‘work rooms’ whilst others live and work from a one bedroomed apartment. Escorts’ sexual labours are described as ‘services’. Clients can contact escorts through dedicated booking systems, or can email or telephone to enable direct access. Pitcher (2015) positions escorts as similar to other sole traders who must organise their own work, setting their own rates of pay and working conditions. In the past (although some continue to still do so), escorts advertised their services through magazines and newspaper adverts. It is more usual now for escorts to advertise their services on the internet. For example, a multitude of online escort directories allow sex workers to list their profile either for no charge, or for a small fee. Adultwork, now the largest directory of escort services in the UK (and other parts of the world), is structured such that women and men can create an online escort profile in a matter of minutes.

Although the ease of advertising sexual services is viewed positively by many escorts, for commentators such as Jeffreys (2010), the phenomenon of escorting is viewed negatively. Jeffreys bases her arguments upon the legalised prostitution system of Melbourne, stating that ‘escort prostitution is overtaking brothels as an industry sector’ (2010, p.211). Growth of the escort sector, she argues, is detrimental to workers’ safety:

the escort industry is beyond regulation. It operates through mobile phones and delivers women to private houses, hotel rooms, and even cars by the roadside or in carparks, worksites which cannot be made ‘safe’. (ibid., p.216)

Some escorts prefer to work for an agency. In these instances, the escort agency is responsible for the marketing and advertising of the escort, and becomes the facilitator of the escort-client booking. Pitcher (2015, p.116) details that agency workers can usually choose their working hours, their rate of pay and the services they are willing to provide.

In relation to services, Sanders observes that independent female workers offer an extensive repertoire of available experiences to clients including ‘domination services (with facilities such as dungeon rooms) and various other role play and fantasies (...) and also other services such as tantric massage, destressing services, socialising and holidaying with clients’ (2006b, p.102). Lucas (2005, p.540) describes indoor sex workers as ‘elite prostitutes’ whereby this sector of the sex industry has ‘room for

specialization, rewards professionalism and can offer job satisfaction. Noting a gender disparity, Lee-Gonyea et al. (2009) analysed male escorts' websites (who catered to male and female clients) and found that the sites aimed at female clientele were less graphic and explicit than those aimed toward a male audience; 'the presentation of the male escort was more subtle, giving the feeling that women were simply arranging a date with a man' (ibid, p.342). The male escorts within my sample corroborate this, veering away from explicit sexual advertising (revisited in Chapters 4 and 5).

A recent survey of (mostly) internet sex workers found that independent escorts experienced a high degree of control over their work, and that job satisfaction is high within the escort sector, with reports of mainly positive feelings about their working conditions (Sanders et al., 2015). My empirical analyses lend further support to this, with women and men implicitly and explicitly detailing the ways in which they control their work, and how it complements their chosen lifestyle both in terms of finances, and freedom of time. Attention now turns to the gendered 'actor' in the sex industry, beginning with the normative construction – the female as sexual service provider.

2.4 The gendered sex industry 'actor'

2.4.1 Women as sexual service providers – 'the norm'

Constructions of the woman who engages in commercial sex vary according to the historical time period. For instance, Sanders et al. (2009, p.1) recognise that prostitution was not always classified as deviant; indeed, early records show evidence of temple prostitution as 'sacred'. O'Neill charts the constructions of the prostitute woman through art, literature and women's narratives (2001, pp.124-149), arguing that their representation is inextricably linked to the representation of women more generally. Historical commentators such as Lombroso viewed prostitution as biologically determined, the 'born prostitute' who differed physiologically from non-prostitutes, whilst others review the depictions of prostitutes as connected with disease (for example, Corbin, 1990). Recent decades have witnessed shifts toward examining sex work, structural constraints and the role of women in society, therefore examining commercial

sex as an economic choice made in the context of few available alternatives. McLeod argues:

One of the most significant aspects of contemporary heterosexual prostitution is that prostitutes, women are grappling with their disadvantaged social position in the context of a capitalist society. Recruitment to the ranks of prostitute is not appropriately characterised as concerning only a small group of highly deviant women. It is secured by women's relative poverty still being such that for large numbers sex is their most saleable commodity. (1982, p.1)

Similarly, Vanwesenbeeck (2013, p.12) describes how economic factors, coupled with the demand for female sex workers (compared to the demand for male sex workers) results in the 'pull' of women toward the sex industry. Katie Cruz (2013, p.482) describes the stance that the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) advocate, that 'the remuneration of care and domestic work [should be] on a par with paid employment, [the 'caregiver parity' model] understands the problem in terms of the inadequate compensation of 'women's work.'" This turn toward theorising the female sex worker within her broader cultural and economic context is now well-established, widening the scope of enquiry beyond conclusions of individual deviance.

Because of this, there is increasing recognition of sex workers as mothers – although interestingly, the body of literature investigating motherhood and sex work in and of itself is surprisingly thin – and some studies offer implicit acknowledgment of the benefits sex work can offer to mothers. Sophie Day's *On The Game* (2007) includes one chapter addressing infertility, pregnancy and future motherhood, drawing upon the discourse of the 'barren prostitute' (Simmel, cited in Day, 2007, p.148). For sex working women, (construed as 'public women'), infertility could result because 'their reproductive organs bore such heavy traffic'. (Laqueur, 1990, cited in Day, 2005, p.148). The work of Megan Rivers-Moore (2010) focuses explicitly on sex work and motherhood, although in the context of Costa Rica, whilst Susan Dewey's (2011) book charts erotic dancers' experiences of love, sex work and motherhood in a 'rust belt' American town. I return to motherhood in Chapter 7, where I extend analyses to include fatherhood and the tensions escort work poses for parent-child relations.

Beyond accounts of women economically disadvantaged in mainstream society, Bernstein describes the increasing visibility of what she terms 'the middle class sex worker'. Both in *Temporarily Yours* (2007a) and 'Sex Work for the Middle Classes'

(2007b), Bernstein locates sex workers in the broader context of mainstreaming sex (discussed in a previous section) and the late capitalist marketplace. Moving away from totalising accounts of suffering, she describes her rationale thus:

Part of the message I wish to convey revolves around the way that relatively privileged people – women as well as men – have entered into commercial sexual encounters in response to new subjective social meanings that append to market-mediated sex. Although the global sexual economy continues to draw participants from the most disadvantaged strata of the working poor, it increasingly incorporates members of other social classes as well – in particular, individuals pertaining to what has been variously termed the “new” middle class, the “creative class”(Bernstein, 2007a, pp.3-4)

Whilst I refrain from locating my own participants similarly (I doubt many would align themselves with Bernstein’s ‘new petite bourgeoisie’ sex worker), their circumstances speak to her analysis of shifting relational values and an expanding landscape of (potential) sexual labour in an increasingly mediated world. For example, in Chapter 4 I discuss the ways in which escorts proactively exploit the internet for their business and Chapter 7 presents some interviewee accounts where sex work is part of a wider lifestyle that embraces sexual openness.

The turn toward researching the indoor sex industry (instead of the previously more popular on-street sector) signifies a shift, too, in the analytical foci. Disengaging with discourses of desperation, drugs and poverty enabled the exploration of conceptual and experiential nuance. For example, Teela Sanders’ (2005) *Sex Work: A Risky Business* provides a detailed overview of how female indoor workers (who comprised the majority of her research sample – only five of 55 interviewees worked on the street) navigate both the physical and emotional risks of sex work. Conclusions from earlier work (Sanders, 2004) found that, contrary to mainstream ‘thought’ concerning the place of physical risk in sex work, emotional safety posed the biggest threat to women within the study. In later work, she argues that sex workers can also serve as sexual health educators to male purchasers of sex, advancing discourses of sexual responsibility and its importance in the indoor sex markets (Sanders, 2006a). Buschi (2014) expands upon the idea of responsibility within the indoor sex industry, focusing upon the ‘managers’ of sex work in the legalised system of Switzerland. She puts forward a typology of management ‘styles’, and how each contribute to allaying potential violence in sex work, leading her

to the important conclusion that organisational working conditions impact upon the risk of violence (ibid., p.735).

The socio-emotional aspects of sex work are now researched as substantive topics in their own right. For example, since the work of Sanders (2005) and Bernstein (2007a;2007b), analyses have coupled Arlie Hochschild's concept of 'emotional labour' (1983) with the intimacy exchanged within the sex industry. Kay Hoang (2010) investigates emotional labour across three sex industry sectors in Ho Chi Minh City, and concludes that 'mid-tier and high-end sectors engage in different expressive forms of emotional labour' (2010, p.255). Her analyses deduce that the higher the social standing of the sex worker, the greater the requirement for her to capitalise on 'expressive and repressive' (ibid., p.270) emotional labour. Women occupying the highest paid tiers also engage in less sex than women working in the 'low-end' sector, the latter engaging in more direct *only* sex-for-money interactions. Meanwhile, Pinsky and Levey (2015) complicate normative understanding of emotional labour in sex work, as shown by the emotional labour performed by the female dominatrix. Whereas female sex workers are most often expected to feign interest in their clientele, the pro-domme combines 'intimacy, trust, respect, and mental and physical dominance [which] is not found among other sex workers' (ibid., p.439). The authors contend that their understanding of dominatrices and emotional labour 'resists simplistic connections between gender and power, such as masculinity and aggression, or femininity and nurturance' (ibid., p.453). I disagree with Pinsky and Levey's first assertion, that the pro-domme occupies a unique position in the sex industry; in Chapter 5 I discuss the role of fantasy play (including domination) across female and male escorts' repertoires. However, I support the view that reductive links between gender and power need to be challenged. Indeed, my interpretations presented throughout Chapters 4 and 5 argue that escort work (and not the sex worker's gender) commands what might be construed as emotional labour.

Concluding this review of focus on the female sex worker, I now present academic knowledge pertaining to the male sex worker, observing Smith's words that 'continued categorisation of sex work/prostitutes as 'women's work' serves to render male and transgender bodies invisible' (2012, p.587).

2.4.2 Men as sexual service providers – pseudo-homosexuality

For Smith, researching male sex work ‘warrants closer attention not only on its own terms but also as a means to recontextualize the meanings, practices and politics surrounding commercial sex more broadly’ (2012, p.591). As the earlier section discussing how sex work is theorised shows, the potentiality of the male sex working body is ignored. Smith argues that male sex work invisibility ‘is central to – not accidental to – the perpetuation of women-as-victims discourses’ (2012, p.591). Following the same trajectory as the female sex worker section above, I begin by briefly locating male sex work historically.

In Minichiello and Scott’s (2014) edited collection *Male Sex Work and Society*, Kaye offers a brief examination of male sex work progression over the last three centuries. Questioning whether ‘male prostitution’ is indeed the correct or accurate terminology, Kaye uses the example of ‘fairy’ men from the 1800s. These men would seemingly best fit the category of transsexual, therefore muddying the ‘male’ prostitution definition because workers existed in a time where the language and politics failed to allow their identities as trans, or as women – the idea of transsexuality was yet to be conceived (ibid., p.36). Kaye cites the importance of recognising this conceptual murkiness, advancing to behaviours of ‘normally identified’ (heterosexual) male soldiers from the 17th to 20th century who engaged in sexual transactions with homosexual-identified clientele.¹³ These exchanges, Kaye argues, did not always mimic the more straightforward encounters of female prostitutes. Instead, longstanding relationships involving intimacy between soldiers and ‘clients’ existed, once again troubling the boundaries of what is and is not a transaction of prostitution. In some ways this opaqueness appears within my own research, and Chapters 4 and 5 offer insights into the permeability between straight male escorting and a casual sex ‘hook up’ culture more generally.

Young heterosexual men taking part in paid sexual transactions with other men was viewed historically as a poverty alleviation measure for the working classes, serving a primarily middle class client base who may have otherwise struggled to procure sex. The

¹³Likewise, Logan (2010, p.679) finds that from his quantitative analyses of male escorts in the US, ‘distribution of male sex workers is more strongly correlated with the general population than with the gay male population’. In other words, male clients of male sex workers do not necessarily identify themselves as homosexual.

gay liberation movement of the 1960s catalysed a shift enabling gay men to sell sex to each other in larger numbers (and with greater visibility) than before, and in turn, the practices between service provider and customer changed and proliferated (Kaye, 2014, p.46). Tyler (2014) extends these shifts and incorporates the role of modern technology, mobile phones and the internet as mediators of the purchased sexual exchange between men. Modern day sexual commerce, he argues, is difficult to reduce to neat categorisation and instead uses ‘M\$M’ to refer to men who sell sexual services to other men, because this ‘highlights the transactional element of the interaction; moves away from derogatory, legalized or politicized signs; and reflects [...] informants’ own constructions of what is and is not “sex” or “work.”’ (Tyler, 2014, p.85). Recapping the most recent research of M\$M workers and the seemingly concomitant emphasis upon HIV prevention, Tyler relocates enquiry instead toward the advertising mediums and practices of men who engage in sexual commerce with other men. Online chat rooms and internet profiles allow men to ‘experiment’ with sex work ‘with little or no investment, financial or social’ (Tyler, 2014, p.95) – again, an idea echoed within my own findings, to be discussed in Chapter 4.

The research focus on male sex providers and male clientele poses a conceptual difficulty according to Logan (2014, p.108), because the current theorising around prostitution rotates around economic, social and gendered analyses. Ashford (2009, p.261) and Whowell (2010, p.130) elaborate on how the appropriation of the female body in prostitution has resulted in male-for-male sex workers being rendered invisible in the government’s policy framework. Furthermore, the sometimes-blurred boundaries between male sex work and male ‘hook up’ culture more broadly complicate ideas of what is, and is not, sex work:

Male-for-male sex work often has a physical proximity to other gay space venues whether it is sex workers outside bars or saunas/bathhouses. It is noteworthy that a similarly symbiotic relationship exists in the online world. (Ashford, 2009, p.267)

Whowell (2010) confirms this, detailing the ways in which male sex workers ‘cruise’ the streets of Manchester’s Gay Village, managing to blend in to the fabric of urban street life, yet also ‘facilitate sexual transactions’ (2010, p.133). Noting that female sex workers in the same area were displaced when it underwent significant redevelopment (Atkins and Laing, 2012), Ellison and Weitzer (2016) nonetheless observe that male sex work in the

Village is now being perceived as a nuisance, and that groups of young men use the spaces of male sex work to rob sex workers as well as those seeking sexual services. Although my research focuses exclusively on the indoor sector, there are parallels to be found, particularly in relation to ‘scams’, which I detail in Chapter 4.

Just as female sex workers have been theorised in terms of ‘risk’, so too are male sex workers. Furthermore, this has been (and continues to be) researched within indoor settings where the internet is the primary tool used to obtain clients. Bimbi et al. (2005) examined the sexual health practices of male escorts advertising on the internet. The study is framed in medical discourse, and participants were asked about their sexual behaviour as well as their HIV status. The authors found that male escorts engage in ‘barebacking’ at rates similar to those found in non-sex working men, concluding ‘Internet-based male sex escorts [...] may more closely resemble other gay men as a whole’ (rather than other male sex workers, such as those who work on the street (ibid., p.101)). Similarly, Blackwell and Dziegielewski (2013) report inconsistency concerning condom-use in paid encounters for male sex workers advertising on the internet, leading them to assert the need for targeted public health interventions aimed at this population of men. Already, some differences are beginning to emerge between the working behaviour of indoor-based sex working women and men; as detailed earlier, sexual health is a central concern for female sex workers, whereas the literature highlights a less stringent approach for men. I return to this topic in Chapter 4, examining it from the different vantage point of men who sell sex to women, not other men.

Moving on to the social-emotional aspects of male escorting, the work of Walby (2012) considers the role of touch in commercial encounters. Focusing upon the intimacy created within commercial sex transactions, Walby’s *Touching Encounters* (2012) is perhaps comparable to Bernstein’s (2007a) *Temporarily Yours*. Both research relatively ‘privileged’ sex workers and engage theoretically with the meanings created within paid sexual liaisons, complicating ideas of clear distinctions between working and personal life. Smith et al. (2014) adopt a somewhat different starting point (although they examine the social and emotional aspects of male escorting), and instead address the role of the escort agency as instrumental in fostering social support for male workers. Again, I return to these ideas in Chapter 4, and also consider networks of support across gender in Chapter 7.

Thus far, the focus has been upon the male sexual service provider for male clients. As highlighted in the introduction, the ‘straight’ male escort for women is significantly un(der)-theorised academically. Beyond academia, however, there are various ‘testimonies’ and ‘memoir’ accounts, some of which I detail further in the penultimate section of this chapter concerning the rise of the sex work ‘story’. Briefly, *Gigolos* by Taylor and Newton-West (1994) offers ‘informal’ printed interviews conducted with men who are paid for their companion and sexual services by women, explaining:

Since the dawn of time there has been an abundant supply of men who’d be happy to be paid for doing what they best like to do. Only rarely, however, and in special circumstances, do any of them get the chance (1994, p.176).

Instead, the man who is sexually available to women in a commercial capacity is most often researched at the periphery of the sex industry, as male strippers (for example, Pilcher, 2011, and Scull, 2013), and this serves as my point of departure. Whilst the role of hegemonic masculinity in male to male sex work is fascinating, I believe that male to female sex work should be an equal imperative; as the next section addresses, the landscape of female sexual consumers and male service providers is sparsely populated and public doctrine continues to reinforce men as sexual consumers of female sexual services. Scott and Minichiello (2014, p.150) observe that ‘women hiring male escorts is also becoming fashionable in some Western and affluent societies’, yet very little is known about motivations, and if they are comparable to those of men. The recent ‘Women who Buy Sex’ project, described in the preface, goes some way toward addressing this paucity of knowledge, whilst the male interviewees of this present research contribute some secondary knowledge through their recounted experiences. Attention now shifts to a review of what we currently know about women who engage in sexual commerce as consumers.

2.4.3 Women as sexual consumers: peripheries and invisibilities

To date, only the ‘Women Who Buy Sex’ project focuses substantively on women as purchasers of direct sexual services in the UK, and is a work-in-progress (Kingston et al., forthcoming). Beyond this, academic knowledge of how women engage as consumers in sexual commerce with men is limited to the spheres of strip nights and strip clubs, or

female sex tourism. Beginning with the former, the work of Pilcher (2011) investigates the experiences (and behaviour) of women at a male strip show venue, whilst Wosick-Correa and Joseph (2008) examine women as consumers in the traditionally male environments of female-performer strip clubs. Both query the idea that only men can ‘gaze’ or be ‘sexual scrutinisers’ in public leisure spaces (Pilcher, 2011, p.217). Some of the women in Pilcher’s study found that the male-performer strip club served as an empowering space which engendered their ability to ‘be sexually aggressive’ (ibid., p.217), abandoning traditional notions of female passivity. However, the author observes that the club space, management and male dancers all combined to create and therefore *enable* the circumstances under which women could act out sexual aggressions.

Whilst appearing to be ‘subversive’, the club was ultimately constructed along ‘traditional heterosexist lines’, and some women reported not finding the space very sexy at all (Pilcher, 2011, p.217). Despite this, Pilcher recognises the ways in which female pursuit of commercial sexual pleasure is being legitimised:

If spaces are not ‘fixed’, and are vital to constituting identities at different times in different ways, we can think about the role of sexualised spaces in constituting new heterosexual identities. The male strip show represents an important space for assessing this idea. Designed to allow women to watch naked male bodies in a public venue, the existence of the male strip show suggests that women’s ‘entitlement’ to sexualised spaces is becoming more legitimate. (2011, p.219)

This female entitlement to ‘sexy spaces’, where women are encouraged to sexualise the male body in public, tentatively speaks to a resurgence in feminist politics which celebrate female sexuality and sexual autonomy, albeit within the constraints of reproducing masculine/feminine identities. Scull (2013, p.574) warns that ‘in short, traditional gender norms are not magically suspended just because it is men, instead of women, who are stripping on stage’. This idea is complicated further by literatures concerned with female sex tourism, to which I now turn.

Although academic attention is given to both men and women as sexual tourists, strands of research describing women as sexual consumers vary in how they theorise the female sex tourist. Discourses of exploitation (of the often developing-world male sex worker, but also the exploitation of the ‘naïve’ female sex tourist) clash with escapism

from the gendered and structural constraints of the Western world. Sanchez-Taylor supports this latter stance, stating:

Where at home they [female sex tourists] would be stigmatised for having legitimate or casual relations with black men, younger men, 'womanisers' or for having many sexual partners, in holiday resorts such as Negril, they're permitted to 'consume' the black male, the younger boy, the playboy (...) while maintaining their honour and reputation back home (2000, p.100)

For Clift and Carter (2000, p.46), sex tourism allows 'some Western women to sexualise their bodies in ways which would be difficult to achieve back home', suggesting that women who fall outside of the stereotypical Western preconceptions of beauty pertaining to youth and slenderness can enjoy themselves as sexual beings once more; 'women who feel rejected in the West for being 'sort of fatter or older' (...) find that in Jamaica all this is reversed as they are chased and romanced' (Sanchez-Taylor, 2000, p.46). I mount a challenge to this (somewhat patronising) deduction in Chapter 5, where I present female escort accounts of working successfully outside of these 'beauty standards'.

Beyond women 'escaping' the gender constraints of the Western world lies the perspective that female sex tourism is 'romance' tourism. Dissociating from exploitation, the female traveller pursues romance, and 'a primitive masculinity which can no longer be found in the West' (Phillips, 1999, p.189). In this sense, women are not seeking a straightforward sexual exchange but an experience with an exotic man based on wistful longing. Radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys argues against the concept that women might engage in sex tourism in a similar fashion to men, and utilises examples from sex tourism literature to argue the opposite, that actually, female sex tourists are denigrated by the men they seek out. Quoting a passage from Phillips (1999) in which a Barbadian beach 'hustler' speaks of sexually voracious tourist women, she argues 'in this case the sex tourist is servicing the local man rather than the other way round', asserting that 'this sexual practice is not one meant for women's satisfaction but for that of men' (Jeffreys, 2003, p.230). For Jeffreys, the harm caused to women by male sex tourists is not comparable to that of female sex tourists (if they exist); the purchasing power of women in the West does not 'trump' (2003, p.230) the dominant position of men in the global gender hierarchy.

Arguing against models of female victimhood, Kempadoo (2004) and O'Connell Davidson (2000) locate the position of power as economic. Drawing upon racialised discourses of power, Kempadoo describes the ways in which 'Caribbean governments are subservient [to the] foreign exchange brought by tourists, and a person holding a greenback or Euro commands service and deference' (2004, p.120). For Kempadoo, the purchasing power of the West allows (usually) white tourists, female and male, to perpetuate inequalities of old in a modern-day context. Racialised fantasies are echoed in discourses whereby women pursue the 'hypersexual' black male body, which Phillips describes as the male hustler's 'defining characteristic' (1999, p.185) in an otherwise marginalised identity. For Sanchez-Taylor (2000), the imbalance of wealth between rich and poor nations allows Western women to exploit their economic power to access sexual encounters they might otherwise struggle to obtain. Whereas feminist theorising of sex work locates female sex workers along a spectrum from gendered oppression and exploitation to agency and empowerment, some of the more Marxist stances evident throughout sex tourism literature expand the debate beyond gender, to the global economic conditions and the 'sexual currency' this creates.

2.4.4 Men as sexual consumers – 'the norm'

The male sexual consumer, unlike their counterparts discussed above, are theorised much more precisely, and are (mis)represented in prostitution policy as a 'problem'. Men who buy sex have been theorised in recent decades through the vehicles of deviance and 'threat', health discourse, and oppression. A detailed historic overview of men as sexual consumers is beyond the remit (and indeed overall utility) here, however for a summary spanning medieval periods to the early 2000s, see Brooks-Gordon and Gelsthorpe, 2003, pp.437-443. Instead, I will attend to men as sex workers' clients in the modern day, within the context of recent decades which have seen both a HIV crisis as well as client-focused policy changes within the UK. Although female sex workers have received the lion's share of academic attention, significant shifts of late create a picture of the men who purchase sex, often in relation to motivations, often implicitly asking: who are these men, and what compels them to buy sex? Typologies geared toward answering these questions have been composed by Pitts et al. (2004), Mannson (2006) and Sanders (2008). Each of these offer a several-point analysis of motivations to explain male patterns of involvement

in commercial sex. For Pitts et al. (2004), the motivators revolve around ease of procuring sex from within the sex industry (compared to outside it), the company and emotion paid encounters can provide, and the desire for arousal. Mansson, too, (2006) focuses upon motivations ineluctably concerned with what sex workers can offer, ranging from fantasies of ‘the whore’ through to comfort, consumer entitlement, and the prospect of ‘different’ sex and/or ‘different’ women. Sanders (2008), meanwhile typifies emotional need, life stage, unsatisfactory sex life and avoidance of more ‘mainstream’ avenues of procuring sex as motivators. Latterly, Sanders moves beyond the immediate attractors female sex workers might embody, progressing to male patterns of involvement across the life course. These trajectories vary from the permanent purchasers at one end of the spectrum through to ‘explorers’ and ‘book-ends’ (men in their 20s, and again in their 50s and 60s). These accounts are instrumental in recognising diversity, both motivationally, but also with regards to the stage of life when commercial sexual consumption occurs. Through these analyses, the male sexual consumer resists being reduced to a single category of age or motivation, thus aiding the construction of men who buy sex as ‘ordinary’.

I focus upon the possibility of male clients as ‘ordinary’ to reflect my own position – I am not approaching this research with illusions of perversion, deviance, symbolic violence or other negative preconceptions often found in academia, public parlance and even government policy. Moreover, the normalcy of men who purchase sex is now increasingly recognised, and even reflected in government ‘deterrent’ campaigns. For instance, the Home Office released three ‘stories’ to be displayed on billboards warning of the risks and repercussions of kerb crawling. The stories describe the lives of three ordinary ‘respectable’ men, whose lifelong achievements are erased after being caught kerb-crawling (Sanders et al., 2009).

Constructions of the male client, in ways harmonious to the proliferation of how women and men as service providers are now theorised, are examined academically within the broader context of human relating. Natalie Hammond (2011) positions men who buy sex in the context of masculine identities and heterosexuality. She later entwines these findings to detail the ways in which male clients can engage in a collective identity, which assists some clients in navigating the political and media constructions of the male client figure (Hammond, 2014, p.93). Through internet-mediated connections with other

men who buy sex, the male client can be reconstructed as a consumer instead of an ‘abuser’ of women (ibid., p.98). Pettinger (2013) observes the online male-consumer oriented community Punternet, interpreting the ways in which male clients use the language of consumerism as evidence that men normalise their ‘punting’ behaviour, aligning it with other activities of consumption. Work prior to this (Pettinger, 2011) analyses the ‘review’ culture men take part in, where paid encounters with female service providers are rated and described in field reports. Pettinger positions her discussion within service work more broadly, and argues that the ‘ideal’ female sex worker is one who can combine erotic, aesthetic and emotional labour whilst simultaneously disguising the paid nature of the encounter (2011, pp.233-237). In Chapter 4, I detail the ways in which female escorts tend to be more immersed in the online aspects of generating good feedback from clients, and utilise online spaces to increase their market appeal (and therefore their earnings) whereas for male escorts these aspects are absent.

Pettinger’s analyses (2011, 2013) are founded on the observable data harvested from online sex work communities. Although offering interesting insights, it invisibilises the experiences of male clients who choose not to write reviews of their paid encounters. The work of Milrod and Monto (2012) alleviates this problem somewhat; male clients of indoor sex workers were invited to take part in a survey aimed at assessing their motivations for buying sex, as well as what they seek from paid encounters. Many men reported valuing the Girlfriend Experience (to be discussed in Chapter 4), which the authors describe as more complex than an enjoyable encounter with a friendly sex worker:

At first glance, the idea that the client is interested not only in the sexual body of the provider but also her friendship, companionship, and partnership in experiencing mutual pleasure as well may seem reassuring to those concerned about the objectification of women and the tendency to see them only as sexual bodies. However, the challenging performance now required from providers means that they must not only sell various sex acts but also persuade the client that they are personally interested in him, even amid the obvious contradiction of payment. (Milrod and Monto, 2012, p.806)

The emotional labour of the indoor sex worker, in keeping with Bernstein’s (2007a, 2007b) conclusions, is a valuable resource. Male clients value experiences that mimic physical and affective sexual encounters outside of the commercial exchange. In the first

two empirical chapters, I return to the types of experiences women and men feel they are expected to provide, in addition to the emotional toll that results.

2.5 The rise of the sex work ‘story’

As the next chapter explains in more detail, this thesis uses the vehicle of narrative and storytelling to elicit accounts from women and men working as escorts in the UK sex industry. Therefore, attention will be given to the increasingly visible ways in which stories surrounding sex work exist, documenting traditional print such as books and magazines; documentaries, film and theatre; photography art, and social media. Ken Plummer considers the growth of personal (particularly sexual) stories and is worth quoting in full:

What has happened over the past few decades is the proliferation of an array of different audiences willing to hear some different voices and some different stories – and some of these audiences may then become tellers themselves, adding to collectives’ communities of story telling. I do not wish to suggest some inevitable determined cause of such story telling, but an imaginary instead of facilitating conditions, stumbling affinities, precarious media, new social movements – can perhaps best be seen through the shifting of social spaces in which listeners and audiences break down traditional boundaries around stories. Whereas once stories were largely part of a localised oral culture, told in small bounded worlds, the nineteenth century witnessed stories moving into mass print – into the tabloids, penny press and scandal sheets; and the twentieth century has seen them become television docudramas, talk-show fodder and self-help manuals available for mass consumption. Modern mass media organisation has shifted access to worlds that may not have been visible, accessible or even thinkable before. (Plummer, 1995, pp.120-121)

In the two decades since Plummer’s *Telling Sexual Stories*, technological shifts have furthered this proliferation, resulting in myriad ‘sex work stories’ being publicly circulated. Although not an exhaustive review, I document some of the stories that have emerged contemporarily, and through a variety of mediums; in doing so, I offer some cultural context to both my own research, and the wider landscape of storytelling available for participants to draw from.

In previous sections, perceptions and discourses of the gendered sexual ‘actor’ within the sex industry were considered, and noticeably, these ‘ideas’ and ‘stories’ were *imposed upon* those involved in sex work. Corbin notes how it was not until the 1970s

that ‘the prostitute began to tell her own story (...) explain her own point of view, and in doing so challenged the notion of sexual privation’ (1990, p.363). Although largely skewed toward the female sex working story, in the latter 1980s and throughout the 1990s, edited collections of sex workers’ stories appeared in print as books. For instance, the text of Delacoste and Alexander (1987) provides accounts of sex work by sex workers, just as Nagle’s *Whores and Other Feminists* (1997) extends a volume of self-identified feminists recollections of working throughout the sex industry. Whilst sex work anthologies largely acknowledge the female voice, pockets of writing by male sex workers appear individually. For example, Andrew Rosetta’s memoir *Whatever She Wants* (2009) charts his experiences as a male escort for women in London, and Dean Saunders *Nice Work if You Can Get It* (2008) details his work escorting ‘bored’ women in the Costa del Sol. These volumes differ in their political purchase. For instance, individual memoir books are perhaps created for a different audience than activist-aligned collections such as Nagle’s (1997) *Whores and Other Feminists*. Maggie O’Neill highlights a central concern with the latter volume:

The major problem with Nagle’s text is that she does not develop a clear enough description or critique of what she calls ‘traditional feminism’. And, in failing to provide this, her aim to try and facilitate discussions between ‘traditional’ feminism(s) and whore feminism(s) falters. The possibilities for developing a discursive space for feminists working in the sex industry and feminists not working in the sex industry are dashed. (2001, p.19)

The above chimes with the pressure for sex work research, in its myriad forms, to be political and warns also of some problems that can arise when ‘collecting’ sex workers’ stories for activism purposes. Other collections of sex workers’ stories are less theoretically inclined, for instance the three-part series *Prose and Law* created by the ‘Red Umbrella Project’. In the first volume, Melissa Petro (2012, iii) writes simply ‘we exist, and our writing proves this’ whilst the second volume details a further radical form of storytelling taking place:

Since starting to produce monthly sex worker storytelling events in New York City in 2009, I have had the pleasure of being witness to the stories of dozens of sex workers as they have told them, in their own words, before audiences that were sometimes amused and sometimes horrified by – but always supportive and receptive of – the stories and their tellers (Audacia Ray, 2013, p.4).

Movement from the written to the spoken word is evident in film; more academic research now engages with the medium of film to convey messages. For example Nicola Mai has created several ethnofictional films to chart the experiences of migrant sex workers. Likewise, The Student Sex Work project conducted by Swansea University created ‘Fog of Sex’, a film that captures the testimonies of students who currently work in the UK sex industry.

Internet-mediated sex work ‘stories’ are abundant, perhaps the most well-known account being the blog by Belle de Jour, who later transpired to be Dr Brooke Magnanti, an academic who worked as an escort whilst completing doctoral studies. The Belle de Jour blog became so popular that a book deal was offered, and the stories were later serialised for television in the form of ‘Secret Diary of a Call Girl’ which was broadcasted from 2007 to 2011. Interestingly, Dr Magnanti now engages in sex work activism across online social media (for example Twitter) and within Parliament. Twitter and online blogs provide platforms for sex workers, sex work activists and sex work academics to engage with significant numbers of the population (in the UK and beyond). Consider #Whoresofyore¹⁴, a Twitter account created by postdoctoral researcher Kate Lister, who describes it as a ‘catalogue of jilts, cracks, prostitutes, night-walkers, whores, she-friends, kind women, and others of the linen-lifting tribe’ (Frauennfelder, 2015). Lister’s account has generated immense interest, with almost 60000 followers, who are given daily snippets of historical ‘whore-related’ information.

The voices of sex workers are being heard in theatre productions. ‘The Hooker Monologues¹⁵’, are a Vancouver based collective whose mission is to ‘engage the general public with stories, to open their eyes to the wide-ranging experience that makes up sex work, and through doing so, to decrease stigma and encourage support for decriminalization’ (The Hooker Monologues, 2016). Similar initiatives have followed in the UK, with the creation of ‘The Sex Workers’ Opera’¹⁶, and the very recent short film ‘Make Mum Safer’¹⁷ on behalf of the English Collective of Prostitutes. Currently, Poison Apple Theatre are engaged with service users at Manchester Action on Street Health¹⁸ to

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/WhoresofYore?lang=en-gb>

¹⁵ <http://hookermonologues.blogspot.co.uk/p/about.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.sexworkersopera.com/>

¹⁷ <http://makemumsafer.com/>

¹⁸ <http://www.mash.org.uk/2016/11/04/poem-about-manchester/>

co-create a play depicting the experiences of female street sex work in Manchester. Meanwhile the arts-based initiative ‘Whoretography’¹⁹ is described as ‘the intersection of imagery, technologies, society & the sex worker rights movement.’ (Whoretography, 2016). Carrie Hamilton details that ‘observers of internet culture have argued that the web [...] provides a new platform for proliferation of first-person narratives in confessional mode’ (2009, p.87). It would seem, given the examples above, that online culture enables *collective* narratives also, and these narratives are being told in increasingly diverse forms.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the commercial sex industry, locating it within broader changes to social and economic practices. I detail the rise of the internet as an enabler of sexual commerce generally, but more particularly for the independent escort. Situating ‘the escort’ within wider sex industry relations, I have argued that technology shifts allow women and men to sex-work without the need for third party intervention. Funnelling focus specifically to the gendered sex industry actor, I observe the demonstrable gender asymmetry apparent in the knowledge production theorising the women and men who serve and sustain the indoor sex industry. This asymmetry is founded upon heteronormative discourses of essentialism (that men, not women, need sex), and political investment. As Smith surmises:

It is no accident that the image of the ‘injured prostitute’ is that of a female prostitute, for it is an image that depends on, and sustains discourses surrounding gender violence that would lose their political purchase (and indeed, their discursive intelligibility) if framed in terms of the ‘sexually exploited men’ and ‘sexually predatory women’ (2012, p.591).

Agreeing with these words, I hope the empirical findings contained within this thesis go some way toward offering conceptual alternatives. In keeping with my theoretical position that sex work is work, attention was given particularly to the social-emotional aspects of commercial sex (as opposed to the discourses of damage and oppression),

¹⁹ <http://www.whoretography.com/>

alongside the ways in which the sex industry adopts the principles of other more mainstream service work.

Whereas the focus of section 2.3 remained with the constructed knowledge *of* the gendered sex industry actor, the final section surveyed the rise of the sex worker ‘story’, as told *by* sex workers contemporarily. Acknowledging this discursive ‘turn’ is crucial in understanding the cultural context in which men and women consider ‘becoming’ escorts, as Chapter 5 details. So too has the (sex worker driven) circulation of cultural discourses given rise to the myriad *voices* in increasingly creative and diverse ways. These voices tell their own stories of working in the sex industry, and I turn now to the methodological place of narrative and storytelling within this research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Investigative approach

3.1.1 Research parameters and research questions

To recap the specific research questions and rationale detailed in Chapter 1, I aimed to interview escorts, male and female, who engage in, or have a history of engaging in ‘straight’ escorting in the UK – women who escort male clients and men who escort female clients. The rationale for this was outlined fully in Chapter 1 and supported with evidence throughout Chapter 2. Beyond gender, no age or location restrictions were imposed, however I was concerned with researching the *indoor* sector of the sex industry, escorting specifically, due to the relative lack of research in this realm. The previous chapter discussed escorting and its place in the UK; I chose to include escorts who work independently, as well as for escort agencies.

The main question this thesis hopes to answer is: ‘what are the experiences of female and male escorts (who work heteronormatively)?’ Purposefully broad, I address this overarching question through four sub-questions, detailed below:

1. What motivates women and men to become escorts?
2. What similarities and differences exist between the working practices of women and men?
3. Does gender influence experiences (or lack) of ‘stigma’?
4. What impact does escorting have beyond the realm of work, extending to interpersonal relationships?

The remainder of this chapter engages with the methodology employed to investigate these questions. It aims to offer transparency concerning the research approach, process and interpretation, and begins with the place of narrative research and storytelling.

3.1.2 Narrative Research and Storytelling

Without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other.

(Lewis, 2011, p.505)

This thesis is exploratory and inductive in nature. Exploratory work in a qualitative domain presents myriad methodological avenues, however, the concepts of story-telling and narrative have served as key drivers since the inception of this research. Momentarily embracing my own standpoint here, my academic interest in narration is traceable to almost two decades ago, the schooldays of studying Arthur Miller's tragedy play *A View from the Bridge* (1977). The play relates the story of Eddie, a longshoreman who falls in love with his niece. A lawyer named Alfieri provides a narrative throughout, a metaphorical view 'from the bridge', and although Alfieri's expected position is that of impartiality, we see his growing identification with Eddie. He is simultaneously drawn in to Eddie's story, and powerless to stop it unfolding to its inevitable conclusion. In many ways, this present research (and indeed, much of qualitative inquiry more generally) mimics the structure of Miller's play described above. As researchers, we ask questions, listen as stories unfold, prod for further detail before interpreting and re-presenting these stories as best we can. Although the expectation, the 'gold standard', is that of impartiality, this is as achievable for us as it is for Alfieri.

Ken Plummer's (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories* provides the footstool for the present exploration. He observes how popularity of story *types* wax and wane, in keeping with cultural appetites:

Different moments have highlighted different stories: puberty stories, marriage-bed stories, perversion stories, coming out stories, abuse survivor stories, women's fantasy stories, men's tribal fairy stories, stories of living – and dying – with Aids. And more. Once outside the world of formal story-telling, we are all being enjoined to do it daily to each other. Somehow the truth of our lives lies in better communication. In telling all. [...] If once, and not so long ago, our sexualities were shrouded in silence, for some they have now crescendoed into a cacophonous din. We have become the sexual story tellers in a sexual story telling society. (1995, p.4)

The sex industry is no exception to this. Indeed, stories by and about sex workers continue to multiply not only in popular media imaginaries but throughout academia. Storytelling can be situated in many academic disciplines, and like Plummer, I lean mostly towards a

sociology of stories (1995, p.19). However, elements of psychology and literature occasionally pepper the analyses, particularly in the domains of relationships and stigma. The increasing academic attention given to reaping sex work stories is not lost on sex working communities; in an initial recruitment thread on an internet forum, one man notes with sarcasm ‘it’s about time we had some research into why there’s so much research’. Hostility to this research will be covered in a later section.

Of course, if emphasis is placed upon storytelling, then it ought to be acknowledged that people vary in their capacity (and desire) for self-narrative and disclosure. This is especially salient when researching what are typically deemed to be ‘sensitive’ (Lee, 1993) areas. Consider the words of three participants below:

Well, without going into too much detail (...) like it’s weird sitting here saying this stuff when half an hour ago we were complete strangers.
(Zack)

I hope I don’t offend you... (Carla)

I had to fucking put her across the tumble dryer and handcuff her to these pipes at the back and turn it on full speed (...) But that fucking spin dryer, and my balls were fucking catching on the bloody, it was quite sensitive for a bloke. She’s laid out on the corner and she’s got on full, and this tumble dryer’s going like that, so she’s getting the vibration. I’m coming in behind her like that, my balls kept banging this fucking... I’m like, fucking hell, wish this cycle would finish.
(George)

For Zack, the strangeness of disclosing sex-related information hinders his narrative, whilst Carla demonstrates elements of self-consciousness relating to how her stories may impact negatively upon me, as a researcher (and ‘outsider’). George, however, demonstrates neither and the outcome is a very detailed account of delivering one client’s fantasy. In Gerrig’s (1999) text *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*, the concept of *transportation* is used. Transportation is the metaphorical way in which readers can journey into the narrative and is easily transposed to the spoken word. For instance, compare the scarcity of information offered by Zack with the micro-detail given by George; it is the micro-detail of the latter ‘bringing’ the listener (me) and now the reader (you) into the story. The elicitation of stories is rarely a ‘simple matter’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997, p.35) and narrative research is thus a ‘contingent and unfolding process’ (Farrant, 2014, p.463).

For Plummer, storytelling is gendered. Consider his position below:

Women's stories may actually be told in a different way – and have a different outcome, they may 'stumble' more, be told with less assuredness and boldness, be more qualified and hesitant, and hence (initially) sound less convincing. Women may generally find it harder to consider their stories as possessing 'authority'; harder to express themselves in public, harder to believe that others will respect their story. There is almost certainly a gender skew to sexual story telling. (1995, p.35)

It is easy to understand why Plummer has drawn the conclusions above, given the legacy of female subordination in the gender hierarchy, these words however do not resonate with my own research. I found female escorts told their stories confidently and elaboratively in comparison to the often hesitant ways in which men relayed their experiences. There are perhaps several reasons for this: differences between how 'established' women and men are in their escort roles (elaborated on in the next chapter); the availability of similar discourse for female escorts (but lacking for men); gender dynamics within the storytelling process (female to female, compared with male to female). Despite these potential differences, I found the narrative method employed invited a rich exploration of experience for participants who were more comfortable speaking at length.

Elliot (2005) condenses themes that permeate narrative research into five areas: an appreciation of lived experience; allowing participants to determine themselves what are most salient features to be discussed; examining process and change over time; the self and representations of the self and finally, an awareness too that the researcher serves as a narrator. The first four of these features can be found in the final interview schedule (Appendix B) and the final point, the researcher as narrator, is interspersed throughout the chapter (and thesis) more generally. Returning to Plummer, I iterate his stance that storytelling is *political*, that 'these stories work their way into changing lives, communities and cultures' (1995, p.145). I also acknowledge Wengraf's (2001, p.117) nod towards potential self-interest in how research participants present themselves within their accounts, although I consider this to be the case for qualitative research more generally. Kearney beautifully explains the intrinsically human essence and experience of story thus:

Storytelling invites us to become not just agents of our own lives, but narrators and readers as well. It shows us that the untold life is not worth living. There will always be someone there to say 'tell me a story' and

someone there to respond. Were this not so, we would no longer be fully human. (2001, p.156)

Research participants invest in a presentation of self, which in turn is re-presented to academic communities and beyond. Borrowing here from the literary traditions, I propose a sociological loop of knowledge based upon Hoersterey's (1987) 'intertextual loop', which is described as instances where:

The reader uses new insights from her current inner text to revise the composition and configuration of past texts, and then loops these revised perceptions back to understand the current text. This (...) makes it possible for the reader to generate meanings that are constantly under revision and being reconstructed *ad infinitum*. (Shuart-Faris and Bloome, 2004, p.357)

If we replace 'text(s)' for 'perceptions' in the above, the quotation creates a space for storytelling knowledge (and process) *beyond* texts. In Part A of the interview schedule, I ask the recruited men and women what their thoughts and perceptions of the sex industry were, prior to their first involvement. What transpires is a sociological loop based on a range of knowledge sources. Television programmes, newspaper headlines, folklore, health / medical discourse and religious doctrine all contribute to 'ideas' of sex work, sex workers and the sex industry (as Chapter 6 considers in relation to 'stigma'). Participants sometimes add the experiences of people known to them - a cousin or friend. Perceptions alter upon working, occasionally minimally, but mostly significantly, and continued engagement with sex work feeds these new perceptions. As such, although interviews were singular, I wanted to capture a variety of narratives that are likely to alter over time and experience; the storytelling approach achieved this aim.

3.1.3 Comparing female and male experience

Throughout history, gender seems to have been a key organising metaphor – through legend and myth across time and space. (Plummer, 1995, p.157)

A cursory glance at comparative research reveals bodies of work, mostly on a substantial scale which largely veers toward comparing populations of people. Charles Ragin first proposed qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) in 1989, its purpose being to examine

data sets comprising binary variables (Ragin, 1989). Medical and cross-cultural comparison research appears to be popular, however this has little relevance to the present methodological approach. Switching to a more precise examination of comparing gender, further obstacles appear. Again, there has been a tendency to favour comparisons of populations, resulting in mass data collection and analyses. Smaller, more nuanced qualitative inquiry risks being lost in the sea of broad-scale interpretation and assertion.

However, in the current focal shift towards the specifics of male and female ‘straight’ sex work, casualties of nuance are similarly present. Why limit the parameters of a research project to the binary of men and women? How can this be justified in the context of increasing recognition of gender fluidity, particularly when there are already numerous sex industry studies which speak to heteronormativity? My response to these questions is three-fold:

1. To date, men as sex workers are largely considered against a backdrop of homosexuality, or ‘gay for pay’.
2. Women as sexual consumers remain non-existent²⁰ in policy considerations and political debate concerning the sex industry.
3. Some comparative work *across* gender currently exists, but to date none has an explicit (or detailed) focus on men who escort female clients, or how this can be aligned with the abundant knowledge we now possess concerning the gender inverse.

This research stretches beyond a simplistic filling of research gaps. A bigger aim exists, and this is political. By disrupting and dismantling dominant discourses of women as sexual service providers and men as consumers, the hegemony of sex industry knowledge (and argument) is challenged. One could argue that all forms of nonheteronormative sex work research do this also, and to an extent I agree. However, I also contend that a greater recognition of the role of women in sexual consumption is instrumental to this challenge. This is an occasion where a heteronormative study has the capacity to be subversive beyond gender politics.

²⁰ Or marginalised to the extent that women as consumers do not ‘count’ in the bigger picture of commercial sex. However, there is potential for change, as evidenced when Dr Sarah Kingston presented findings from the Women Who Buy Sex project recently at the Home Office (September, 2016).

Returning to the three-fold rationale above, male sex work research exists in a paradigm of ‘queer’ or pseudo-homosexuality, as Chapter 2 discussed. Recent challenges have been mounted in the theses of Jane Pitcher (2014) and Kristofor Burghart (2015): both theses engage with male sex work beyond the male consumer, however both lack analytical depth concerning the dynamics and experiences of men who see female clients. Their parameters of analyses encompass breadth and gender diversity. Because my thesis lacks the breadth offered by Pitcher and Burghart, it can offer substantial depth throughout the ensuing four empirical chapters. Had the analytical net been cast wider, a lack of interpretive depth would likely result.

The second challenge, that female consumers of male sexual services exist, is critical to the unwavering abolitionist stance that categorically and unapologetically defines sex work as ‘violence against women’ (Farley, 2004; Jeffreys, 2008). Finally, the third point of gender comparison is salient for all the reasons cited thus far, with the addition of specific links to already established bodies of knowledge concerning female sex workers. A solitary focus upon men as service providers to women risks a disparate analysis, at a politically sensitive time where coherent and cohesive narratives are important. To this end, the project was not conceived with the intention of *seeking* difference. Instead, the knowledge accrued from male escort interviews *led me* to consider the value of comparison. In many ways, although this thesis commenced with a different object of knowledge in mind, the resultant changes have been data driven from the collected accounts of men already interviewed – an unintended bonus adding strength to the research value.

Although critiques of gender essentialism are beyond the scope of this particular research (and indeed might detract from the primary agenda), I offer here that participants’ accounts overtly and covertly speak the language of gender as socially constructed; many female interviewees offer evidence in support of de Beauvoir’s (1968) assertion that we are not born, but *become* women. Similarly, men (and women) engage with the language of masculine discourse, allowing an emergent complementarity with the narrative inquiry employed. As Chapter 6 attests, the *language* of sex work stigma is gendered.

Beyond the theses of Pitcher and Burghart referenced above, there is scant research comparative in nature in this area. Distinct but relatively small pockets of knowledge can

be found, for example in relation to gender (Koken et al., 2009), sex work markets (Della et al., 2009) and more broadly, concerning different sex work regulatory models (Kelly et al., 2009), comparison to non-sex work (McCarthy et al., 2014) and differences between advertising sites in differing geographical locations (Pajnik et al., 2015). The hoped-for outcome for the narratives I present here is that they join and contribute to the grand narrative of evidence-based ‘indoor’ sex work research currently proliferating within the UK.

3.2. Collecting stories

3.2.1 Ethicality and safety in sex industry research

Throughout this section, the more commonplace ethical discussions will intermingle with specific ethical concerns I faced during this research. In this context, the ethicality of this doctorate is presented as a training ground and occasional battlefield, always contingent upon the evolution of experience.

The first significant hurdle came in the guise of the University Ethics committee. I was advised to offer counter arguments for all possible eventualities, given the assumption that topics sexual in nature tend to be automatically deemed ‘risky’ – commercial sex even more so, despite a hearty proliferation of investigation in the last two decades. As Faberow (1963, cited in McGarry, 2010, p.18) observed, topics traditionally deemed to be ‘sensitive’ in nature are also those likely to be ‘taboo’. Researching men who pay for sex, Natalie Hammond (2011) relates how a collective mistrust of male clients (from the university through to conversations with family and friends) seeped into her own thoughts, causing her to question her research methods and creating anxiety at being alone with male interviewees. Whilst I had no concerns of interviewing men alone, I was very conscious of presenting my work in a manner most likely to receive approval from the Ethics Committee. I chose not to offer a token incentive to participants. Research methods training undertaken at postgraduate level instilled ideas around the use of participation incentives as problematic. Offering incentives to people engaged in selling sex could have been perceived negatively, particularly if those with the decision-making power had little knowledge about the topic area, and / or harboured stereotypes of sex work. With hindsight, I wish I had not

sidestepped this issue. Recompense for the time given to take part in research is necessary, and decreases the inherent exploitative dynamic of the paid researcher harvesting information from target populations with no benefit aside from listening to their accounts. This is not to belittle the poignancy of allowing typically marginalised voices to be heard, but to instead acknowledge a more concrete exchange of token for time is also appropriate.

Hammond also divulges the measures she took to decrease the chances of unwanted sexual intention, from location choices through to the presentation of self via clothing. Although she reports no problems with male participants, including no feelings of discomfort or danger, it appears that attitudes and a culture of fear caused the researcher to ‘dread undertaking interviews’, leaving her ‘fearful’ of the encounter (Hammond, 2011, p.193). Interestingly, I read Hammond’s thesis a considerable length of time after my own data collection, and could not relate to elements of fearfulness. Similarly, I had no such concerns when interviewing male partners of sex workers previously. My approach reflects the precautions I might take outside of the prescribed research context, based on common sense and acceptance that flirtations, inappropriate comments and awkwardness arise in many aspects of existence and are not ‘threats’ to be assuaged or feared in advance, but potentialities to be managed if and as they appear.

The above considerations rarely mattered, however, because most participants chose the telephone as mode of communication. Only four interviews were undertaken in private homes, and one person was interviewed in a café bar. Expected precautions commensurate with interviewing in private spaces were adopted, including use of a ‘buddy system’ with my primary supervisor for safety. Returning to the most popular interviewing medium, the telephone, I found unexpected invitations can arise outside of face to face interaction. Consider the following excerpt exchange from one man’s interview:

I don’t suppose you’ve tried it yourself, I mean, if you are researching something, there’s a lot to be said for experiencing it yourself

Can you imagine! The Ethics Committee would do their fruit!
(Scarlett)

Oh yes, well I suppose that’s the problem with all these committees. But you know, if you ever do fancy trying it, I would happily give you a very large discount. I mean, I know you are based in the North, but -

Well thank you, that's a very kind offer and I will bear that in mind...
Just picking up on one of your comments before actually, you said that
(...) (Scarlett)

Although momentarily thrown off course, I chose to deal with the situation with humour before deflecting the invitation with diversion to an earlier discussion. Outside of the research context I would likely behave in this manner also, so this was in harmony with how I choose to interact more broadly.

Female participants also offered unexpected questions and invitations. When concluding the interview in one woman's home she spontaneously offered:

Do you want to see my work room? I can take you upstairs, and you can see some of my stuff?

Your work room? Yeah sure, great, why not. That would be great actually. I've not been shown around a work room so far, so this is a first! (Scarlett)

Although 'work rooms' were beyond the remit of the research, I felt this participant wanted to elaborate on some of the points she had discussed, physically showing me various sex aids and closets of working attire within the general space she occupied as an escort. Accepting felt easy, given the rapport and trust we had established, and this visual insight was an additional privilege to the spoken account given.

One woman caught me off-guard in a phone interview. In the spirit of reciprocity, if participants asked questions, I generally tended to answer, even when they were personal in nature. My rationale for this is two-fold: the process of storytelling is aided by mutual sharing, (when asked, and when appropriate), and secondly, it honours a sense of fairness to the encounter. I acknowledge that others might disagree with my stance here, however I tried to interact as authentically as possible. Dickson-Swift (2006) details some of these potential boundary issues faced within research, offering that role ambiguity can result from the process of establishing rapport with participants.

Consider the following:

You know, I don't see it like that at all. And we are the same age, and like you, I have a child, and I'm on my own. (Scarlett)

But I bet you wouldn't do this would you? You wouldn't be an escort?
(female participant)

(Pause) I don't really have those sorts of distinctions, like, I've been researching this for a while now, and I have friends who are sex workers – it's not a case of me thinking 'oh that's something I could never do'

or that sex workers are particular types of people, cos I just don't have that mindset I guess. (Scarlett)

A politician's answer. The question was unexpected and framed as a negative, and at that point I evidently deemed it more important to establish myself as an ally, as someone not there to pass judgement, instead of more directly answering the question.

The telephone as a tool within qualitative research 'is depicted as the less attractive alternative to face-to-face interviews' (Novick, 2008, p.391). Most often aligned with quantitative data surveys, the telephone interview might be construed as impersonal; I do not feel this is the case, particularly within sex industry research. Instead, over the course of three research projects totalling over 60 telephone interviews, I have found the telephone is often the first choice for participants. There are several reasons for this. Unlike the face-to-face interview, participants do not need to travel to a research site, or perhaps concern themselves with tidying their homes prior to an interview. Geographical considerations feature too, and with participants dispersed between Scotland and London, the telephone is a much more convenient and cost-effective means of communication. Although visual clues cannot be detected over the phone, compensation may arise in the form of increased self-enclosure. I have certainly found this to be the case, with one woman commenting that she might feel self-conscious meeting in person.

I felt it important to establish myself as non-judgemental throughout the entire research process, not just within interactions. I therefore chose not to use the language of 'stigma' in the interview schedule. Although stigma is a frequent companion to sex industry research, it felt uncomfortable and assumptive to ask stigma-specific questions. Instead, I wanted to allow experiences of what might be construed as 'stigma' to surface through discussions around openness, secrecy, friends and family. On occasions where interview transcripts included the word 'stigma', this was instigated by participants. Chapter 6 offers more detail; my aim was not to transpose stigma onto participants' stories. I wished to allow the possibility that stigma might *not* feature within sex workers' lives, or feature to the extent that would justify the repetitive research focus. I believe this approach was instrumental to some of the conclusions I have drawn in Chapter 6.

The emotional labour, and potential stigma-by-association of sex work research has received academic commentary (see Hammond and Kingston, 2014; Sanders, 2005), whilst Bergman-Blix and Wettergren (2014) discuss the emotional labour of gaining and

maintaining access to research fields. Several interviews presented some challenging content. For example, George told me a story that was told to him by a female client. This story was exceptionally disturbing. George recalls that he ‘sat up all night, and cried’ after his booking with the client ended. When he told the story to me, the emotional valence was transferred. I deliberated what to do with this ‘story’. I considered whether that story ought to be included in this thesis, and decided against it, thus stopping a fourth-hand reaction to an unpleasant incident. This illustrates not only the power of story, but also the power of the storyteller. I chose to end the perpetuation of that specific narrative, yet here I am, writing about it in very vague terms. This was one of several stories requiring an emotional investment, however fleeting.

Turning to the pragmatic considerations of ethicality intrinsic to all research, I will briefly outline the ways in which this project adhered to data protection, university and research protocols. Once participants had expressed an interest in the research, an information sheet and consent form (Appendix A) was emailed. Participants were informed that their data would be stored securely in encrypted files for electronic data, and lockable filing cabinets for printed transcriptions. Participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonyms (and could use these to sign consent forms), were informed they could withdraw from the research should they wish, and I ensured that sufficiently broad demographic details were collected to decrease the risk of identification. To this end, some participants are located within geographical counties instead of precise towns or cities, or listed in a ‘group’ age, for instance ‘early thirties’. Acknowledging the sensitive nature of the research, the consent form provides contact details for ‘help’ organisations. Beyond these rudimentary levels of research ethicality²¹, I endeavoured to further protect participants’ identities by checking details of stories in some cases. For example, one female escort tells the story of a robbery (featuring in Chapter 5), and a year after the research interview, we had a phone conversation to ascertain the level of detail she was happy for me to reproduce. On occasion, I felt there could be some ambiguity of meaning (and thus of my interpretation, and ensuing representation) and again, I contacted participants for clarification. I found some escorts

²¹ Complying with Ethics guidance provided by the University of Leeds and the British Sociological Association

had retired, or changed their profiles in the interim years. In these instances, I chose to remove potentially ambiguous data from the analyses.

3.2.2 Recruitment

Participants were recruited through email and online forum posts with one exception; a male escort unknown to me, but the friend of a friend. The first recruitment attempts centred upon male escorts. Adultwork, an online website where men and women can advertise a broad spectrum of direct and indirect sexual services and products, was considered as the next recruitment base. Although Adultwork is now the largest database of sex workers in the UK, after preliminary searches here I chose not to recruit men from this domain. Male profiles were often woefully brief (no accompanying text, or incredibly brief text of one or two lines), or explicit (numerous profiles displaying erect penises and nothing else). It is free to create a profile on this website, although costs are incurred for services such as advertising a phone number, or increasing the visibility of a profile by advertising as 'available today'. Adultwork also shows when the advertiser last logged in, and I observed that many male profiles seemed to be abandoned.

Instead, I searched for male escorts through other avenues and settled upon one website with a sufficient database of advertisers. Escorts are charged a fee to advertise a profile on this website, and the profiles were much more informative than those found on Adultwork. In 2012, the male escorts on this website were systematically emailed. Phase one consisted of 83 approaches to different escorts, and phase two commenced after a period of maternity leave in 2013 and the quota of ten men was fulfilled. Although surprised by the relative ease with which men were successfully recruited, it should be noted that a considerable amount of backtracking occurred too. During one week, six men agreed to participate, returned consent forms and agreed to a time. Four of them did not answer their phone at the agreed time, one man said he had completely forgotten despite the email reminder, and one man changed his mind at the last minute. This theme was repeated when interviewing male escorts for the 'Women Who Buy Sex' project: in one day alone I had six interviews arranged, only two of which materialised.

Due to the change of topic and ensuing introduction of the comparative element, female escort recruitment did not commence until the autumn of 2014. A previously

successful recruitment drive for postgraduate studies using Punternet led me to consider using this internet forum once again. A more detailed account of this is given later in this chapter, in relation to resultant hostility. This avenue achieved the recruitment of three female escorts. Although I had discounted Adultwork as a recruitment site for male escorts, I deemed it suitable for female advertisers. Unlike their counterparts on this website, women tend to have more comprehensive profiles, both in terms of descriptive text as well as variety of images.

The Adultwork direct messaging system enabled a much quicker targeting of female escorts than simply scouring independent websites and directories. An invitation to participate in the research was sent to a total of 76 female service providers, in two separate sittings. I filtered the search criteria very minimally, setting parameters to target women who had 'logged in today'. I then systematically emailed each female. This recruitment method was extremely successful, and from only two afternoons of emailing, I had more participants than required. I stopped recruiting when the quota of ten participants had returned consent forms and agreed interview times.

For women and men, I kept the inclusion parameters deliberately broad. The research is premised upon gender comparison, and I did not want to be overly prescriptive with other criteria. Thus, if advertisements demonstrated someone who appeared to be genuinely working in the sex industry, offering heterosexual escort services, they were deemed suitable for participation. Recruitment emails introduced myself and the research scope, outlining the broad areas of investigation. Individuals were invited to visit a research website created specifically for recruitment (www.sexworkresearch.co.uk - now expired) which gave further information about the research project and gave the expected assurances of anonymity and data protection.

A sample size of twenty participants was initially decided upon, although I remained open-minded about further data collection should the need arise. I found, however, that the data gathered was plentiful and the provisional analyses were fruitful enough to remain with the twenty participants' accounts. My intention was not to seek generalisations; indeed, this is questionable in largely uncharted research territory irrespective of sample size. Perhaps because of the lack of parameters concerning

geographical location, escorting experience or nationality, the collective sample show some diversity. Demographic data can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Name	Age	'Indie'/Agency	Location	Time working	Hourly rate	Nationality/ Ethnicity
Lois	34	Independent	North West	3 years	£100	White British
Jessica	32	Independent	Birmingham	4 years	£100	Black British
Autumn	21	Independent	Newcastle	3 years	£110	White British
Carla	37	Agency	London	3 years	£250	White British
Elaine	51	Independent	Cheshire	10+years	£80	White British
Eva	38	Independent	Lancashire	4 years	£100	White British
Kirsten	Late 30s	Independent	London	5 years	£120	White British
Nadine	52	Independent	Yorkshire	4 years	£120	White British
Violet	36	Independent	North West	8 years	£150	White British
Sara	25	Agency	London	5 years	£300	Euro -Asian
John	40s	Agency	London	10+years	£70	White British
Nico	34	Both	London	3 years	£80	European
Gavin	35	Independent	Scotland	Less than a year	£100	White British
George	52	Agency	Manchester	1.5 years	£60	White British
Dan	33	Independent	Surrey	Less than a year	£60	White British
Rob	31	Both	Liverpool	3 years	£120	White British
Steve	37	Independent	London	2 years	£80	White British
Sean	38	Both	London	2 years	£120	Black British
Jason	50s	Independent	Yorkshire	10+years	NA	White European
Zack	36	Both	London	2 years	£100	White British

NA – not applicable / not given

3.2.3 Encountering hostility

At the end of August 2014, a recruitment post was placed on Punternet, explaining the nature of the research and requesting any female escorts interested in the research to contact me. This request was extremely polite; however, it was not received favourably, and the first responses received were from male posters, stating:

While the bright young members of this society are allowed and encouraged to waste their youth on such rubbish, this country will fall further behind the rest of the world. (Member A)

What a shit boring study – 100,000 words on a pointless thesis. (Member B)

In my absence, a debate ensued between some posters querying these two initial posters' aggressive stance. Poster B then replied with 'it is an ill-conceived study'– despite no further input from me since first posting. After several hours of watching various additions to the thread I felt the need to defend my research, and assert I would not be a victim of what I perceived to be blatant cyber-bullying:

Blimey! (...). I am not here to defend my PhD, nor PhD's more generally. There will be many more 'useful', and many less 'useful' PhD's out there than mine. I will, however, address a couple of things that have arisen so far (...) This thread contains several 'guesses' and 'I think that'... the whole point of research is to support and refute 'guesses' and 'thoughts' with defined-boundaries 'evidence'. (Scarlett)

This response was much more elaborate than the excerpt presented above, and was well received by several board members, who then engaged in a more constructive debate. The two previous hostile posters, however, continued to reply antagonistically:

Do you actually meet face to face with your subjects? Or just an armchair academic. you might want to test what I and others are saying - maybe we are right. (Member B)

Member B stated that any research I had collected from male escorts would be a complete fabrication, and that I was researching an imaginary industry. The above quotation incited a deep-seated annoyance at the display of hostile arrogance, alongside the assumption that this aggressive male poster knew more about my research arena than I. Aware that I was representing an academic institution, and therefore unable to respond in the manner most in keeping with how I wished to at this point, I decided yet another detailed response

would be futile and replied simply with ‘Poster B, thank you once again for bumping up my thread’.

Several more posts followed, and it seemed that many people reading the thread were in favour of me staying to defend myself and my research. One poster, however, warned that Member B was unlikely to relent, stating:

He's blowing smoke, everyone reading this thread knows it, Scarlett has made her point and he has actually been an unwitting foil to help her to do so, the Mods don't seem to mind his tilting at windmills and I suspect that we are in for more of the same for a little while longer. (Member C).

This poster was correct, and the vitriol from Member B continued. However, in between his ‘attacks’, a long-standing board member ‘verified’ my status as a competent researcher. This long-standing member had taken part in a previous project conducted for my Masters dissertation, examining the experiences of male partners of female sex workers. Despite this, the repetitive hostility from the two original posters continued, and my exasperation is evident in a later response:

Steady on [Member B], at this rate I will have no option but to include you in the Acknowledgements section of my thesis, if for nothing else, but demonstrating there are 14 different ways of saying exactly the same thing. (Scarlett)

With almost immediate hindsight I wished to delete the above, however the thread continued at such a pace that to do so would have been detrimental to what I perceived to be ‘standing my ground’, and would have been obvious to all readers. It transpired, however, that my spirited refusal to be ‘silenced’ by poster B garnered further support from board members, which served to quieten my increasing rage at the offending man. Hardly a surprise, Member B then began posting in a manner that contravened forum rules, and a board moderator quickly stepped in and deleted his replies. I did not see what was written, but was swiftly contacted by the board moderator assuring me that I was very welcome in the Punternet community and advising me to ignore Poster B. At this point, several other board members struck up private message conversations with me, two of whom continued to be in sporadic email contact for some time.

The thread continued to be lively, often veering off topic, although I always made my presence known, fearing ‘absence’ would be perceived as ‘defeated’. My ongoing participation was well received by all but the two hostile posters, with one member very

nicely stating ‘you certainly are a breath of fresh air on the Punternet forums’ and a female escort adding ‘It’s not often you can see on this forum when various kind of researches actively participate on the debate.’ Further conversations continued, with Member B interjecting regularly, which I ignored. Meanwhile a new (but thankfully short lived) hostile response was elicited from a female member, and the board moderator notified me that Poster B was now in ‘pre-mod’ (where all his posts are approved by moderators before appearing) because he had been abusive and defamatory towards me (again, his posts were removed before I had chance to see them). By this time, the thread had over 200 responses and had been a ‘hot’ topic for two weeks. I asked the moderator, in light of the exhaustive (and exhausting) thread, whether it could be locked after me thanking board members for their participation. This request was honoured.

As a mode of recruitment, this was not the most successful and resulted in three participants coming forward to be interviewed; relative to the amount of time and emotional energy expended, this was disappointing. Two of the women recruited expressed their own frustrations concerning irksome board members, stating there are some ‘silly men’ and ‘keyboard warriors with big chips on their shoulders’ who take unkindly to women being on the Punternet message boards entirely. This nod towards misogyny was further elaborated on in personal messages from other (male) board members. Despite finding the ongoing antagonism incredibly unpleasant, I believe justifying research in the face of adversity is necessary, particularly if you wish to continue in the field. Two years previously when recruiting from the same online forum, similar hostility was demonstrated (again, by a man) and similarly, I chose to continue with some challenging dialogue rather than flee the scene.

Despite the experiences recounted above, and additionally aggressive hostility received sometimes by email, in the overall trajectory these experiences were in the minority. Significant interest and support was given by the sex work community more generally.

3.2.4 Qualitative Interviewing

To an extent, the final mode of data collection for this thesis was pre-determined by the change in research direction outlined in the preface. Relinquishing the prior mixed-methods approach of interviews combined with an attitudinal survey, only ten transcribed

interviews from male escorts remained from the original process. As such, once comparative research was adopted, the most coherent strategy was to interview ten female escorts using the same interview schedule that male escorts had responded to. Of course, this presented limitations. The interview schedule had been conceived with a different research focus in mind. As interviews with women unfolded, I recall experiencing frequent frustrations, most often along the lines of ‘I wish I could ask this’, or ‘it would be interesting to see how that compares with that’ – retrospective curiosity, perhaps, when contemplating this greener grass. However, I also (eventually) realised an appreciation of the narrative value produced within a singular object of attention. For instance, unless a research aim is to specifically gauge the opinions of what women *think* about male escorts, and vice versa, then what value does this have? What is the point? An example provided by Richter and Isaacs unwittingly illustrates issues with such an approach:

Participants were invited to reflect on how male sex worker experiences may differ from those of female sex workers. While participants were adamant that they could not speak for women, some consensus emerged that male sex workers generally made more money from male sex clients than female sex workers did. When asked why that would be, some participants noted that male sex workers are not as prevalent as female sex workers. (2014, p.125)

One can only surmise the above is conjecture on the part of male sex workers. Moreover, there is an assumption that belonging to the umbrella category of ‘sex worker’ equates to a broader knowledge of sex working practices beyond experienced reality. From a research perspective, these conceptual leaps are questionable. Whilst my own data reveals substantial overlap across gender, this arises at the stage of analysis, not that of initial exploration. Indeed, when male escort interviews occurred, the comparative framework was not yet in place.

A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix B. Briefly, three areas were established as exploratory sites:

1. First entry into escorting, including preconceptions, thoughts and first experiences
2. Ongoing practicalities of sex working
3. Contextualising and situating escorting/sex work in the broader spheres of escorts’ lives, including interpersonal relationships.

Complementing the aspiration to incite as free-flowing a narrative as possible, I purposely created open ended questions. On some occasions, participants had asked to see the interview schedule beforehand, and these requests were honoured and sent in plenty of time prior to interviewing.

Although narratives can be elicited in a number of ways (Dale and Mason, 2010), I had concerns both about time constraints, and the unknown element of whether sex workers would respond to a perhaps more creative approach. To ‘create’ a narrative within the interview, I constructed open ended questions related to the areas of interest above, structuring these in a manner I felt would best encourage elements of storytelling. I began with what Riemann and Schutze (1987, p.353) term a ‘generative narrative question’; the first question all participants were asked was ‘can you tell me the story of how you first considered becoming an escort?’ This question appears to be a chronological marker to the interview, starting the story at first entry point as an escort however, a follow up question sought to enquire about preconceptions of sex work prior to first entry. I chose not to place this latter question first, despite pre-dating the actuality of entering sex work; I felt this question could potentially put participants ‘on the defensive’ if asked as the first question. Instead, asking about the direct experience of becoming an escort and thus responding to these often-lengthy stories helped to establish rapport between us. These disclosures often gave me opportunities to respond in ways congruous with the researcher-as-ally, not the researcher-as-judger.

Similarly, my goal upon interview completion was to finish on a positive note. The final section asking about relationships had the potential to unearth difficulties for participants, and indeed this was the case for some interviewees. Eliciting a difficult story, to then be faced with the practicalities of ending the interview could result in awkwardness. Instead, I chose to ask ‘finally, what do you consider to be the positives of your work?’ before moving onto demographic questions. I considered this to serve as a summary for some of the material participants would probably have already discussed in other parts of the exchange, aiding a sense of completion. Finally, by explicitly asking about the positives of sex work, I implicitly acknowledge that sex work presents myriad positive elements as an avenue of work. I felt that this was important to convey, because the common tropes in circulation veer toward discourses of damage, disease, dirt and

disgust (discussed in Chapters 2 and 6). I wanted to demonstrate allegiance with the idea that sex work need not be synonymous with negativity.

Moving to the specifics of interviews, as discussed earlier in this chapter, participants were given several options for taking part in the research: face to face meeting, telephone discussions, asynchronous emailing, real time messaging and Skype. Of the ten men interviewed, two chose to meet in person, seven asked to be interviewed by telephone, and one man preferred an email exchange. Female participants followed a similar pattern. Three women were interviewed in person, six chose to speak on the phone, and one woman took part via email.

Face to face meetings took place in a range of locations: my home for one participant who was a friend of a friend, participants' homes, and one man chose to be interviewed in a relatively private space at the back of a café. Interviews over the phone seemed to be popular because of the comparatively short time expenditure required, and one man stated 'I'm not sure I would speak as easily if we met up in person, it could be a bit weird talking sex in public'. The man and woman who chose asynchronous email both cited the desire to think about questions before replying, in addition to the greater ease they felt with this method. Interviews varied in duration, the shortest lasting half an hour, and the two longest reaching two and a half hours apiece. Most interviews were between 45 and 70 minutes in length.

3.3 Interpreting Stories

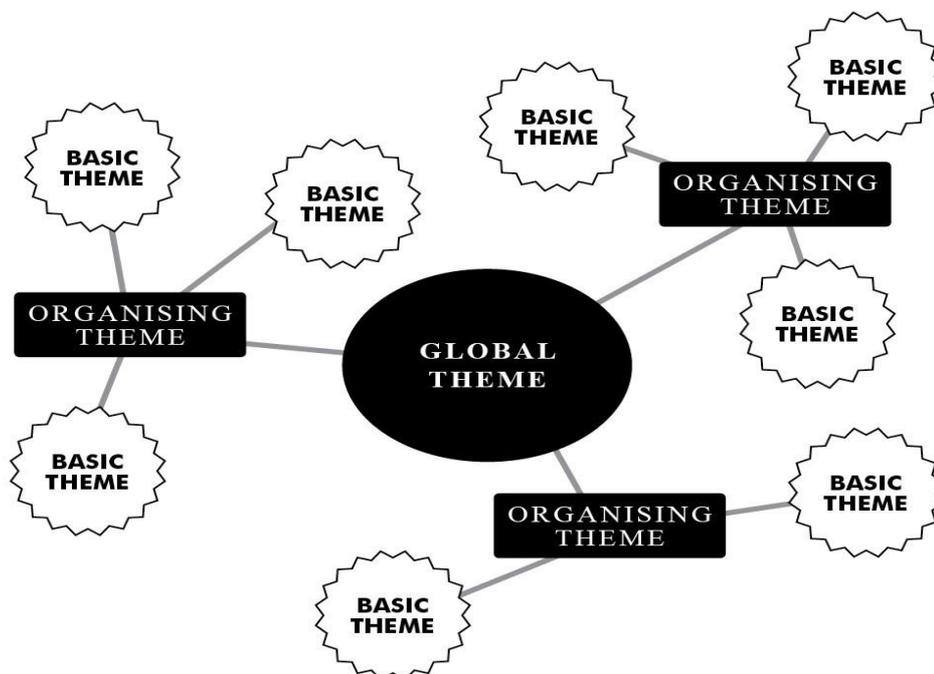
3.3.1 Narrative analysis – thematic networks

The process of arriving at our conclusions in the social sciences, particularly when using qualitative methods, can be decidedly murky. Narrative research is no exception to this. I wanted to go beyond the usual recap of reading, re-reading and coding for emergent themes to offer greater transparency into how I reached my analytical interpretations. Thus, I hoped to aid clarity by making explicit what Lee and Fielding (1996) refer to as the 'how' question of data analysis. The aim here is not to contend an independent veracity to my findings – irrespective of any imposed framework, qualitative research will always lean towards contingency and subjectivity. Instead, my goal is to offer precise insight to the analytical process applied to this research using the tool of 'thematic

networks’ as proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001). The rudimentary findings from the final empirical chapter ‘Relationships’ will be used as a visual demonstration of the process.

Thematic networks, states Attride-Stirling, are summative depictions presented in a web-like illustration which allow ‘a methodical systematization of textual data’ (2001, p.386). Displaying some conceptual similarities to both grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) and hermeneutic analyses, in this sense thematic networks present a ‘tried and tested’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.388) method to complement the range of tools available to qualitative researchers. Briefly, thematic networks comprise a three-tier system: lower order themes, known as *basic* themes; the grouping of basic themes into more abstract *organising* themes; and finally the encompassing, *global* themes which capture the essence of the analysis (for in-depth description of each theme level, see Attride-Stirling, 2001, pp.388-390). The following representation has been adapted from Attride-Stirling’s paper:

Figure 1: Thematic network demonstrating order of themes



Instead of viewing themes as hierarchical, the networks are presented as a web, ‘giving fluidity to the themes and emphasizing the interconnectivity throughout the network’

(Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.389). Perhaps most pertinent of all, the author forewarns that the networks are an analytical tool, not the analysis itself. Upon construction, the visual thematic network serves as an illustration to then receive further interpretation.

The creation and interpretation of a thematic network revolves around three stages of process, summarised as *condensing*, *exploring* and *integrating*. Stage one involves condensing the transcribed material through coding. Using the example from the ‘Relationships’ chapter, I was guided by my final research sub-question asking about the impact of sex work upon interpersonal relationships. All related material was coded and collected. During this process, some unexpected material appeared concerning networks of support. This was not idiosyncratic to the ‘Relationships’ chapter, in fact ‘surprises’ appeared in many guises across all empirical chapters and were subsequently added to the coding network, contributing to the final analysis. The second aspect of stage one involves the construction of a network based on the themes identified via coding. With a broken-down summary created, the next step is to explore the created network, and this is done through description, further exploration and finally, summation. Stage three presents the final stage of analysis – interpretation. The exploration of previous stages becomes interwoven with literature from relevant fields. Patterns (or lack of pattern) are identified, creating an integrated analysis. Finally, the collection and cross comparison of several thematic networks allow conceptual links to be created across *all* empirical findings, not only those that are chapter specific. Evidence of this ‘macro’ approach is most evident in the conclusions presented in the very final chapter, which gathers different thematic elements and presents them in a holistic final interpretive analysis.

3.3.1.1 Thematic network example for Chapter 7

Figure 2 below demonstrates the thematic network on which the final empirical chapter ‘Relationships’ is founded.

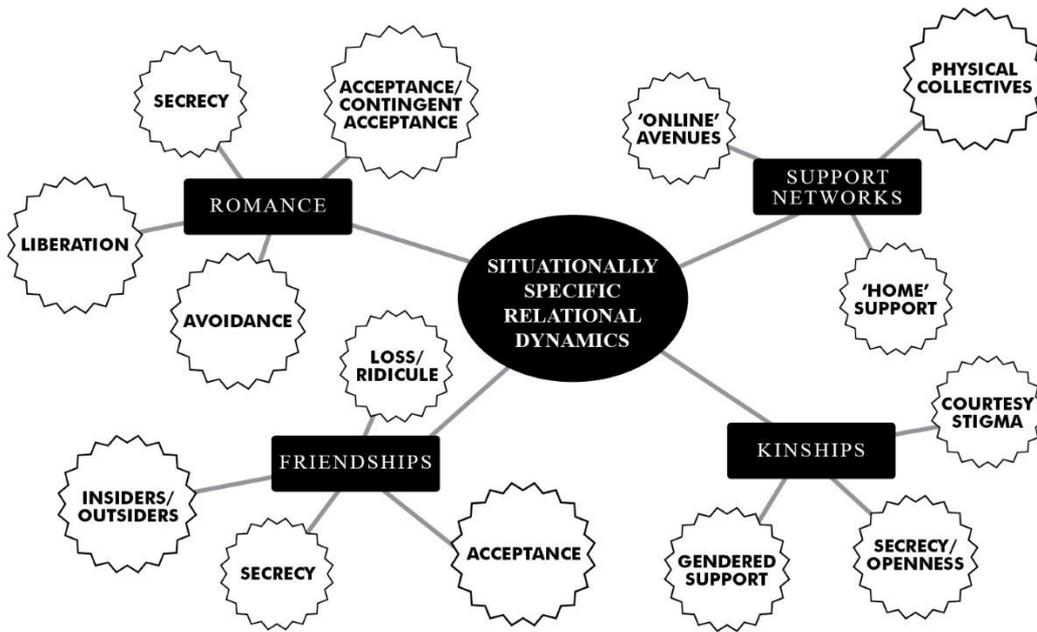


Figure 2: thematic networks – ‘relationships’

Although the diagram above certainly captures the essence of the chapter, it obscures some of the more in-depth analyses. For example, ‘secrecy’ appears three times in the network, and is absent in the ‘support networks’ theme. Hardly surprising, given the nature of the theme – secrecy and support networks are not easy bedfellows. What the network above cannot demonstrate, is that the frequently cited ‘secrecy’ actually *impacts* upon the themes presented in the ‘support networks’. Briefly, the comparatively higher levels of secrecy reported in male escort accounts mean a lesser likelihood of being able to draw upon networks of support. Thus, the thematic networks provide an exploratory base from which explanatory and conceptual links can be made.

3.3.2 Limitations

As with all research, this study has some limitations which I will now illustrate, along with my attempts to minimise their impact. Following on from the thematic networks discussion above, St. Pierre and Jackson (2014, p.715) draw upon Lather's (1991) assertion that data analysis is the 'black hole' of qualitative research. They describe how, as qualitative researchers, it can be incredibly difficult to convey precisely how you have arrived at your final analyses. Outlining the tendency towards brief (or non-existent) discussion of data interpretation, the authors reflect that 'coding' seems to appear frequently in qualitative analyses as the 'get out clause' for a more detailed explanation. By presenting Figure 2 above, generated for the final empirical chapter, I hoped to offer a greater degree of clarity around the analytical interpretations. However, even that cannot tell the bigger 'story' of the process between data coding and my final interpretations as they appear in Chapter 7. I do not claim an independent veracity to the findings presented. This represents my fundamental position that as a qualitative researcher interested in stories, my own biases, logic, and theoretical knowledge are inseparable within the analyses. It is my belief that a different researcher presented with the same data could write a markedly different thesis.

Narrative research specifically presents certain validity issues; Polkinghorne (2007, p.471) describes the 'problem' thus: 'the differences in people's experienced meaning and the stories they tell about this meaning'. For Polkinghorne, this potential discrepancy presents a problem for the social sciences particularly because of the greater need to generate generalisable results, which can then be used to obtain funding / influence policy / create change, for example, in education. Of course, this is only a problem if your goal is to influence policy, or provide 'robust' evidence as a challenge to a status quo or a generally held belief. I return to this issue once more in the concluding chapter, where I position my findings *within a collection* of those from other related works. Therefore, it is the collective research voice which has value in this instance; a collective knowledge claim becomes possible from what might be construed as a too narrow evidence base of twenty interviews.

It is perhaps easier to determine the appropriate number of participants for a study when the research is quantitative in nature – calculations can be made to deduce the best sample size for a given investigation. The 'ideal' number of participants, or interviews,

is less clear within qualitative research. Malterud et al. (2015) suggest that Glaser and Strauss' (1999) concept of saturation, the point at which nothing new 'emerges' from the data does not lend sufficient detail to the process, and they instead suggest 'information power'. The article was read at the point where I had collected all data, and was some way into reducing and categorising transcriptions that totalled a word-count only slightly less than this whole thesis. The authors contend that the narrower the focus of the study, the fewer participants are needed to generate sufficiently-evidenced claims. For example, a study of sex work and stigma ought to require less interviews than a study examining stigma, working practices and relationships. I agree in principle, although in practice I found the *interactions* between relationships, stigma and working practices were more illuminating than a focus upon discrete topics. However, I acknowledge that my research areas were broad, and that it could be argued that a larger sample of participants would have been appropriate.

As the preface detailed, this research began with a different focus and ten interviews had been conducted with the focus upon men as escorts and women as sexual consumers. Therefore, the interview schedule was created with a different topic in mind. However, as I have already suggested, by focusing upon the individual stories of participants (instead of asking them to think comparatively), a more authentic analysis of the role of gender in escorting is possible.

Finally, the choice to engage with narrative and elicit stories from participants engendered a more practical problem; that of word limits. The struggle to engage with and represent stories of participants has been ongoing, in the context of a piece of work that requires sustained engagement with theory to doctoral standard. I have often felt the 'narrative' has suffered at the expense of required academic interpretation; to this end, the suggestions of Malterud et al. (2015) for a greater number of participants would certainly have been problematic. However, in an attempt to minimise this limitation, I present a snapshot summary of each participant below, before the empirical chapters that follow.

3.4 Snapshot stories: Introducing the participants

Autumn is 21 years old and lives in the North East. She began escorting in her late teens when faced with the prospect of losing her job in retail. Autumn is married, and offers ‘incalls’ to her flat, as well as outcalls. Possessing her own website alongside other internet adverts, Autumn works independently. She describes her ‘quirky’ personality as a pull for some clients, and sought to establish herself as a ‘career escort’ fairly soon after first advertising. Other than escorting, Autumn has also offered webcamming and describes herself as fitting into several fetish categories. Freedom is one of the best aspects afforded to her through sex work, particularly freedom of time.

Carla is in her late thirties and had been escorting for three years when we spoke. Residing in London, escorting presents a good source of financial income and time freedom to pursue academic studies. In a committed relationship, Carla plans to move in with her partner and become pregnant at a future date, at which point she will stop escorting. Prior to escorting, Carla ‘shadowed’ a dominatrix but decided she would prefer to offer services more tactile and sensual in nature. She researched and approached some agencies and has continued to be solely employed by agencies, preferring that there ‘is some infrastructure’. Carla offers incalls from hotel rooms generally for two days per week.

Elaine is in her early fifties and escorts from her own address in Cheshire. Having worked as a receptionist for an escort agency in the past, she began escorting herself and now works fully independently. She is single with no children and has been a sex worker for over a decade. Describing herself as a ‘people person through and through’, Elaine highlights the occasional loneliness of waiting at home for her phone to ring. She enjoys the job satisfaction and independence she derives from escorting, as well as the social aspect of interacting with different people. Elaine is completely open about her work to all friends and family.

Eva is in her late thirties and lives in Lancashire with her partner and children. Working for four years, she first started for excitement and more practical reasons; she wanted to return to studying and train as a midwife. Offering incalls from her home, Eva’s partner was originally a client and outside of sex work they enjoy occasional swinging together. In the early days of work, she was the victim of some scams, and cites this as

‘learning the hard way’. Eva describes financial independence as one of the biggest attractions of her job, although when she first started, the novelty, coupled with her high sex drive was also a ‘pull’.

Jessica is a single mum from Birmingham and in her early thirties. When we spoke, she had been working for four years and in that time she had worked for escort agencies, as well as in parlours, before becoming fully independent with her own website. She offers incalls from hotels and generally works weekends. Jessica frankly states she would like to be free from all forms of work, but that escorting means she can generate much larger sums of money for relatively little amounts of time. Jessica is focused upon saving for a house, and enjoys the treats she can now afford for herself and her child. Proud of the good reputation she has built up as an escort, Jessica speaks about sex work as indefinite for her.

Kirsten is an independent escort in her late thirties, living in West London. Kirsten was working occasionally as an escort for two years alongside a full-time job, and was ‘outed’ to work employees, followed by a tabloid newspaper expose which impacted significantly upon her life beyond sex work. Because of this, escorting has been Kirsten’s only form of income for the past three years. Offering incalls from a rented flat, Kirsten advertises some ‘speciality’ services and has worked with other sex workers offering ‘duos’. One of the more ‘connected’ sex workers, Kirsten utilises online spaces dedicated to sex work, and attends coffee mornings with the Sex Workers Open University.

Lois is in her early thirties and based in the North West. She offers incalls from her rented apartment, where she lives with her long-term partner. Lois escorted alongside another job for a while, but now relies on sex work as her sole income. She has been working independently for three years (since she began) and Lois and her partner keep sex work a secret from friends and family. Lois emphasises the element of ‘fun’ she applies to her work, even in scenarios not typically associated with smiles and laughter, for example domination. Escorting has given freedom of time as well as improved finances, and Lois has an extensive database of positive reviews which aids her business.

Nadine is a Yorkshire escort in her early fifties, having escorted for the last five years. Originally, she began working on sex chat lines after her business encountered difficulties in the recession, and now works solely as an escort. Nadine sees men in her

home and has experimented with her prices, contact options and booking durations to arrive at a place where she works in a manner most suitable for her. Describing herself as a ‘home bird’, she is single and does not think sex work and relationships are compatible. Nadine has grown children who are aware of her work, as are her friends. She enjoys the companionable aspects of escorting, alongside the tactile girlfriend experience she likes to offer.

Sara lives in London and is 25 years of age. Currently single, she states she would ‘be open to marrying a client’. Sara escorted briefly at 18 but then had a break whilst she went to university and has since returned. She works for an agency and keeps sex work hidden from friends and family, but does mention some acquaintances within sex work. Sara holds another job alongside escorting, the latter she considers a ‘hobby with perks’. She plans to continue escorting until she meets someone, at which point she would consider stopping. Sara offers some insights into the motivations of men who come to see her, and how she responds to these needs.

Violet is 36 years old, lives in the North West and works independently, offering incalls from a rented property. She has been escorting for 8 years and, as a contrast to mainstream ideas about sex work and addiction, Violet instead found that sex work was a catalyst in helping her overcome alcohol addiction. Violet is currently pursuing postgraduate studies in mental health and has a long-term partner. The only participant to mention physical violence and incidences with the police, Violet also cites other realms of challenge through sex work, because she refuses to live in secrecy. An advocate of sex workers’ rights, Violet’s accounts offer insights into the tensions of disclosing sex work in the public realm and the problems created by a desire to live ‘openly’ contrasted with concerns about how this information could be detrimental to her future career and life beyond sex work.

John is a London based escort in his forties and has been escorting for over a decade. John describes his income from escorting as modest, but it allows him to ‘get by’ and affords him the freedom from more mainstream forms of work and routine. Branching out into sexual surrogacy and relationship coaching, John has dedicated significant amounts of time to promoting his escort services, has his own website and has also appeared in a television documentary. At the time of speaking, John was involved in a

relationship with a woman who accepted his work, and compared to the majority of male escorts, he lives in relative openness concerning sex work.

Nico also resides in London and is in his mid-thirties. He has been escorting women for three years after being introduced to the concept by a male friend. Nico escorts through two realms, an independent escort profile and through connections presented by the friend who first introduced him to escorting. Nico is in a long-term relationship with a woman who does not know about his 'side-line' escort work. Alongside escorting, he has a full-time job in security and sees escorting as a part-time endeavour which affords him luxuries such as holidays.

Gavin is in his mid-thirties and from Scotland. He has been escorting for less than a year and has an independent profile as well as a membership with an escort agency. At the time of interviewing, he was single and said he would happily do more escort bookings if they were available to him. Gavin cites his Scottish accent as a 'pull' for some female clients and, like most of the men, escorts occasionally whilst employed in other work. Gavin emphasises the 'work' element of escorting, and uses the language of work and business that is standard across many female escort accounts.

George is in his early fifties and from Manchester. George is no longer escorting, but worked for an escort agency for a period of 18 months in his early forties. For George, escorting arose through a chance occurrence, after which he contemplated the idea more seriously. The money gained from escort work is seen as secondary to the experience, and George told numerous detailed stories throughout his interview. Single and in full time employment, George stopped escorting shortly after entering what turned into a long-term relationship.

Dan lives in Surrey and is in his early thirties. When we spoke, he was relatively new to escorting, having advertised his profile on the internet for only a few months. Dan is recently separated and was also made redundant from his job. After unsuccessful attempts to secure another job, he began escorting. He has since found other work too however. He works through an agency and via his own independent webpage, and states escorting is a short-term measure which he would end if he entered a new relationship.

Rob has been escorting for three years, is 31 years old and lives in Liverpool. He describes himself as working independently alongside being 'on the books' of several

escort agencies. Rob was newly single when he first began, and thinks he would stop if he met a woman he would like a relationship with. Although working full-time in another job, he says he would miss the escorting money as he is 'used to it' now. Rob engages in a lot of fantasy roleplay with his clients and generally escorts at the weekends. He has a teenage daughter from a previous relationship. Of all the male escorts, Rob is most vocal about the emotional labour side of the job.

Steve is 37 and living in London. He formerly worked in the Navy and states he has had several requests for his uniform from female clients. Currently single, although also dating whilst escorting, Steve speaks of escort work very matter-of-factly, but emphasises how he enjoys engaging in typically chivalrous behaviour towards women, which he sees as going out of fashion. Escorting for two years, Steve works independently.

Sean has been escorting for two years and is in his late thirties. Living in London, he works both independently and for an agency, and first started escorting after a friend helped him set up a profile on the internet. Single and with children, Sean describes himself as incompatible with monogamous relationships, and views escorting as an extension of an already sexually open new way of living. Sean also works full time as an electrician, and views the money he gets from escort bookings as helping to pay for niceties like holidays and things for his children.

Zack is in his mid-thirties and no longer works as an escort. He worked as a stripper in a club in his twenties, and transitioned into escorting through clients he obtained from the club. Based in London, he escorted women for two years, working both independently and for an agency. Of all the participants, Zack was the most conflicted about his work and this led to him eventually leaving the sex industry to pursue a career in photography. Zack was single whilst he escorted, but has since entered a new relationship, and fears his partner might discover his past.

Jason has been escorting women for over ten years on a part-time basis, and first accrued clients from a contact magazine. Like George, Jason never advertised his own profile on the internet. Visiting female escorts himself, Jason was introduced to the idea of becoming an escort through the suggestion of one lady he visits regularly. For Jason, his motivations to escort were for exploratory reasons, and cites the money received as

enabling him to then pay for female escort services himself. Jason is in his fifties, based in Yorkshire and has a partner. Although he never advertised his escort services online, he utilises online spaces dedicated to the discussion of female escorts more generally.

4. Working Practices: ‘Becoming an Escort’

4.1 Introduction

Do men and women share similar paths into sex work? Does gender impact upon the ways in which men and women work as escorts? How do women and men navigate the practicalities of ‘becoming’ an escort, and what impact, if any, does gender have upon the ability to earn a living from escorting? These questions serve as the exploratory springboard for both this research and for this chapter. Micro-detail of individual circumstances will be contextualised in the wider realm of working life whereby finance, sexuality and curiosity intersect and overlap in the pursuit of ‘becoming an escort’.

The previous methodology chapter concluded with pen portraits, mini snapshot summaries of escorts’ stories. This first empirical chapter continues the theme of ‘story’, honouring the narrative methodology employed, and begins with the trajectories and journeys that lead men and women into sex work. I consider these individual ‘stories’ pivotal in cementing and contextualising individual’s circumstances - without these journeys, the empirical richness and diversity of experience remains unexamined, for how can one try to understand the present, without some acknowledgement given to the past? In *Dust Tracks on a Road* Zora Neale Hurston writes ‘there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you’. Although less dramatically expressed, interviewees exhibited pleasure at being given freedom and time to speak about their first *thoughts* of sex work through to first paid *experiences*, and it is the former to which I now turn.

4.2 Trajectories upon entry into the sex industry

Before embarking on the collective trajectories tracing participants’ motivations toward sex work, the legacy of research that attends to sex work entry rationales ought to be acknowledged. For women, the sex industry has *always* offered an avenue of alternative, or supplementary work. Finnegan (1979) discusses the links between prostitution and poverty whilst Bullough and Bullough (1987) provide a social history of prostitution, just as Roberts (1992) accounts for Western ‘whores in history’. The latter decades of the twentieth century bear testimony to the idea of prostitution entwined with the female role

and place within society, their opportunities (or lack of) and relative poverty. More contemporarily, Maggie O'Neill succinctly states 'prostitution, for some women, offers a good enough standard of income for shorter working hours and some degree of autonomy and independence for those working for themselves' (1997, p.3). Meanwhile for male sex workers (and prior to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s), their involvement in selling sex largely suffered from academic invisibility. Davies and Feldman (1997) note how the reductionist account given by Coombs in 1974 tended to dominate the public imaginary of 'rent boys' as socio-economically deprived young men lacking education and family background stability. The trajectories below offer some alternatives (as well as commonalities) to the above, with some notable digressions apparent.

Every participant had some experience in employment other than sex work, prior to their involvement. Several had spent one or two decades in mainstream employment previously, and some (mostly men), juggle escorting alongside other work. Prior employment held by the women included retail, PA and reception work, employees of large businesses, a hotel domestic worker and a small beauty business owner. For the men, their non-escort work comprised contracting in various fields as well as managerial education, finance, a sports coach, an electrician, a security guard and ex-Navy man. Largely, women's previous roles adhere to the feminised domain whereas men report their non-escort work as occupations one would associate with traditional masculinity. Loosely, the trajectories of each person from mainstream employment to sex work can be characterised in three ways: as a result of financial problems and job loss; as a gradual progression from 'peripheral' sex industry activities such as sex chat lines; finally, as part of a greater quest of sexual exploration. Several people interviewed span more than one category. For example, the specific circumstances that led them into sex work speak to financial hardship, but once immersed in escorting, their work evolves into a bigger project of self-expression and autonomy. Each of these 'strands' will be elaborated on below.

4.2.1 Debt and redundancy

The insufficient pay received from jobs prior to escorting galvanised several participants' entry into sex work. The relative financial 'struggle' varies between accounts, but one commonality surfaces across gender – escorting as a financial 'top up' of a more

mainstream labour wage. ‘A Fair Deal for Women’, an umbrella collective of organisations intent on highlighting the gender disparity of disproportionately affected women due to public spending cuts since 2010, report women contributed 79% to the deficit reduction whilst men contributed only 21% (A Fair Deal for Women, 2015). Public spending cuts impact more negatively upon women because of overarching tendencies to be primary caregivers for both the young and older adults, alongside employment in low paid and precarious work. Jessica, a single mother, entered sex work first through one nude modelling photo shoot before progressing into direct sexual services:

I had a taste for the money, I wanted some more, because I was still in debt and stuff. That was all I was thinking about (...) I went to the shop, bought an Evening Mail and in the back you’ve got like the escort agencies and things, which I must have noticed before, subconsciously, because I went to go and get that paper, and I phoned up one of the little ads at the back. (Jessica)

Jessica recounts how she was ‘skipping round the living room’ after receiving £160 from her first escort booking, enabling her to immediately pay the overdue electricity bill clipped to the fridge. Financial hardship echoes in Kirsten’s trajectory, following a marital break-up and moving into a flat on her own: ‘I came to a point where I was really financially stuck (coughs), and it was literally three days after I’d been paid, and I’d completely run out of money’.

Similarly, the threat of running out of money, or having no money, catalysed Autumn’s entry into escort work:

I was 19 at the time. It was early 2010. I had a job, a normal job, working in retail and got into some issues with co-workers and I was facing a disciplinary and it was looking pretty likely that I was going to get fired, and before I’d had that job I’d been unemployed for seven months so I was pretty terrified of the situation I was going to end up in, and I basically decided to do sex work short term while I looked for another job (Autumn).

This urgency to earn money quickly is repeated by Sara, who also started escorting in her late teens. She tells of how her previously ‘comfortable’ parents suffered financial problems:

We had debtors calling us and bills piling up (...) I paid all my parents’ overdue bills...Then I lost interest because I no longer needed the money. I quit after two months (Sara).

Sara returned to escorting after university, where her motivations had shifted from a short-term fix of financial trouble to a longer-term plan enabling her to enjoy a 'posh lifestyle'. In an edited collection of papers addressing sex work and money, Laura Agustin surmises 'we live in a world where individuals are not only expected to make money but where success in life is judged on how much money they make' (2006, p.8). A certain level of dissatisfaction with current earning potential is described by two women and one man:

I'd just come through a bankruptcy as well, and I was fed up of never having very much money at all. I had a job, but I was only ever just paying my rent and my bills, and didn't really have anything spare at all. So I thought I might have a go. (Violet)

It was to top up the usual monthly... the day job paid the bills, and this was to have a bit of fun with. (Lois)

My security work pays the bills, but that's it. It won't pay for holidays. Now I can take my girlfriend on holidays (...) I depend on this money for a few nice things. (Nico)

Sex worker and activist, Margaret Corvid (2016, online) asserts 'sex workers have always known that sex work is an austerity issue' stressing how zero-hours contracts, family care needs and benefits cuts render members of the population 'unable to make ends meet'. Whilst the degrees of financial need vary between participant accounts, 'not enough' money, in tandem with the financial crisis of 2008 is a repeated rationale and motivator for entering sex work. Nadine laments:

I had my own business which I had for 7 years and when the credit crunch hit about 5 years ago the business that I was working in, it was sort of a luxury industry and people didn't have the money. So I needed to find a way of earning an additional income. (Nadine)

Redundancy for two men served as the springboard to consider escort work. Karamessini and Rubery (2014) detail that men initially suffered greater lay-offs in the recession, creating a greater deterioration in employment for men than women. These 'first-round' effects can be explained by the gender segregation in employment that 'initially shielded women' (Berik, 2016, p.197). The second-round effects, as noted previously, then disproportionately affect women through public sector cuts. Although some female interviewees report dire financial circumstances, two men encountered the sudden loss of work and a need to find a speedy replacement:

I lost my job (...) and it really just came out of necessity. (Steve)

I got made redundant back in March, from my job and I split up with my wife then in April and I had applied for loads of other jobs, I didn't get them and then I started this [escorting] and then I got another job.
(Dan)

Both Dan and Steve speak of fleeting thoughts concerning escort work prior to redundancy. Steve suggests 'the seed was planted', however the combined 'push' of being jobless combined with the 'pull' (Vanwesenbeeck, 2013) of escorting and the instant money it generates, was required to seriously consider the viability of sex work as an option. For several interviewees, however, their entry into sex work is best described through the lens of gradual immersion coupled with an opportunistic dimension. Chapter 2 outlined discourses of 'the prostitute' in pathological or individual terms, highlighting deviance of the person. The trajectories offered thus far speak to the now more widely accepted notions of sex work as a sociological phenomenon, situated within structural and economic constraint.

4.2.2 Opportunity and phased entry

John previously worked in teaching and IT consultancy but was trying to 'escape the 9 to 5 treadmill'. In his quest to do this, he became a tennis coach, where he encountered a woman who offered to pay him to accompany her out:

A female client came to me, a tennis client, and asked me if I'd take her to a black tie do. In the evening, and I said, well yeah, I'm very happy to do it. And she asked me how much I wanted, and I thought, well you don't have to pay me to do it, I'll do it for nothing, but she insisted and she's quite wealthy anyway, so I said well, you know, pay me whatever the going rate is, or whatever. (John)

Jason, a patron of female escorts, tells of his first encounter with possibility:

I used to go and see ladies at massage parlours occasionally and there was one particular girl that I saw from time to time who basically said she had a friend who hadn't had any sex for I dunno how many years it was, and she said I was thinking for arranging for a male escort to go and visit her. (Jason)

Meanwhile George recalls 'well I wasn't looking to become an escort, she found me', after being recruited by a female escort agency owner from his online dating profile. For

Jason, John and George, the opportunity to escort was not sought, but presented to them by women.

The role of friends already involved in escorting contributed to the decisions of Nico and Gavin:

It'd never crossed my mind before (...) It was one of my good friends down in my local. He told me some stories, some good some bad right enough, he said the money's good so yeah he sent me some details from some websites he'd used, some agencies and stuff, and just took it from there. (Gavin)

He called me and said 'look if you are interested, there is fun involved, everything is paid for, you can get good tips (...) escorting a group of ladies in Eastern Europe'. So he said as you come from Montenegro you probably know the area better (...) the money was right for me. (Nico)

Nico works in security, holding a 'close protection' licence. His friend offered him what appears to be security work on the surface, escorting small groups of wealthy ladies, although sexual services were nearly always expected. This 'insider knowledge' appears in Elaine's escort trajectory, albeit in a more direct fashion after many years of working as a receptionist for an escort agency, run by the sister of a friend. Despite being asked if she would 'go out' by clients, Elaine 'was not in any way sexual, or into sex at that point', enabling her to refuse easily. After 15 years of 'almost single-handedly' running the agency, and occupying the position of what Goffman would term 'wise' (1963), she started escorting herself.

This 'phasing' into direct sex work can be seen in the narratives of Zack, Nadine and Kirsten. All three interviewees suggest an immediate need for money accelerated their first encounters with sexual service provision although similarly, all three refrained from selling direct sexual contact initially. Zack worked as a male stripper, and Nadine and Kirsten worked on sex chat lines, and it was through these periphery activities that progression onto escort work became a tangible reality.

4.2.3 The sexual journey

Although money can be a deciding (and defining) factor in most people's choice of work, for several interviewees, the sexual journey features simultaneously as important. Jason,

Sean and George express enthusiasm towards escorting, deeming it to dually serve the purpose of sexual exploration and income attainment. George would ‘do it for nothing’ stating he ‘just loves women’ and is on a mission ‘to make women happy’. For George, escorting was only ever ‘a bit of pocket money’ because he was ‘earning a fortune’ at the time in his mainstream job. Similarly, Sean was recently single but disillusioned with the conventional dating:

I tried the dating scene and found it too tedious [...] the complications of ‘when am I going to see you again’. (Sean)

Sean elaborates how he enjoyed being single, concluding he ‘was never meant to have a full-time relationship’, but that meeting multiple women for casual encounters was tedious. Encouraged by friends, Sean’s ex-partner helped him set up as a male escort. Although initially escorting to assist with family finances, Sara expresses that she ‘was excited by the prospect of having sex with strangers’. In ‘The Sex Worker and her Pleasure’, Anna Kontula (2008) documents similar accounts, concluding that sex work can be both a site for sexual pleasure as well as the more frequently reported sexual distancing. Parallels of sexual exploration can be found in the words of Eva, Lois and Carla:

It goes back quite a long way, probably to my late teens, when I developed a mad fascination with all things sex related (...) and decided that, despite being fairly intelligent, that would be something I’d really enjoy doing. I have no idea why, but I was convinced it looked like good fun. (Carla)

I’ve always had a very high sex drive. My husband was a lot older than me (...) and I was very frustrated. (Eva)

My partner and I have always been quite adventurous, so this was to be like, you know, a bit of fun, a bit of extra money. (Lois)

Of the 20 escorts interviewed, only one person detailed their entry into sex work as a very carefully calculated, researched decision. Over the course of one year, Carla:

started doing some due diligence. Did lots of research. Found out what the top agencies were (...) and then monitored these agencies (...) looking at the turnover of girls, how the website was structured (...) I drew myself up a list, a top list of three. (Carla)

Carla’s methodical approach, although galvanised by her long-standing contemplation of sex work, ultimately took precedence over a primary goal of sexual exploration. Here, we

see the ‘idea’ of escorting as tantalising, combined with a thorough undertaking of how best to realise this idea in a safe, profitable and sensible manner. Carla read books, emailed and ‘shadowed’ a dominatrix, and joined a site geared towards non-paid casual sex to trial whether she could have sex with someone she did not ‘fancy’. Additionally, she also sought the services of a life coach and discussed her plan thoroughly, exploring her thoughts and expectations prior to becoming an escort. This degree of preparation, however, was anomalous within the wider trajectories offered here, but offers an unusual perspective of the journey from guiding thoughts through to actualisation as a sex worker.

With the relative escort ‘entry points’ discussed, the focus progresses now to the precarious nature of sex work, and how this precarity is experienced and managed by the men and women spoken to.

4.2.4 The precarity of escort work

I return now to one of the dominant themes offered thus far – ‘not enough money’ from mainstream work juxtaposed with the more lucrative returns offered via sex work. Here, the capacity to sustain a regular, adequate escorting income will be discussed in the context of gender.²² As discussed within the previous section, many participants entered sex work through financial hardship of varying severity. Although initially it would appear some of the men seem to be in considerable financial predicaments related to sudden loss of paid work, these men progressed to secure other work eventually and therefore their reliance upon escorting as a solitary financial avenue tended to be either fleetingly brief or largely non-existent. One of the key differences then (when compared to women) instantly surfaces; sex work provides the dominant and often *only form* of income to the women interviewed. Standing’s work (2011) retains some relevance here.²³ Standing elaborates upon the ‘grinners’ and the ‘groaners’ of the precariat (ibid., p.59) – ‘grinners’ might be workers who pursue paid, side-line work as a supplementary measure whereas the ‘groaners’ tend to be workers who engage in forms of work entirely out of necessity, and when alternatives are absent. Transposing these concepts to the

²² A comprehensive discussion of sex work and precarity is beyond the scope (and evidence-base) of this chapter, but will be developed in the thesis conclusion; ‘precarity’ is evident beyond finances and can be seen in relationships and experiences of stigma.

²³ Although Standing’s concept of the ‘precariat’ is not without its problems, and indicates a great many people could fit easily within his definitional boundaries of precarious workers

present study, in this context male escorts might be seen as ‘grinners’ as they largely occupy occasional, part time positions within the sex industry and the money achieved through escort work is supplementary to a more mainstream income. Conversely, female escorts fall most easily into the category of ‘groaners’ because of the tendency to be solely reliant on sex work income, which renders a greater sense of work vulnerability due to the elements of necessity.

Vanwesenbeeck (2013, p.12) argues that the demand for women in commercial sex ‘far outweighs’ that of men – therefore male escorts appear to be at an immediate disadvantage in the precarious domain of sexual labour. Particularly so when viewed in conjunction with the comparative financial disadvantage faced by female consumers, as victims of the well-documented gender pay gap. Weinberg et al. (1999) note that female sex workers tend to be in greater financial need than male workers, and that men have ‘other sources of income on the side (Vanwesenbeeck, 2013, p.12), however, how can this income relationship be deduced correctly? For example, the majority of the men in my sample hold ‘mainstream’ jobs, but several claim this is *because* of the dearth of female consumers and would happily engage in more frequent escort work if there was a greater demand for their services:

To be honest with you, I would see more if I could but it’s not like loads and loads of women, you could never rely on it. (Dan)

There’s a sort of illusion that it’s you know like it’s the roads are paved with gold, it’s not really, there’s very few successful guys out there (...) there’s just not the money in it like there is for women. (Steve)

Men can make good money if they escort other men but there’s just not enough women to be able to work at it properly, like, by properly, I mean it would be so hard to just be an escort and nothing else, really hard. (Zack)

For women, discovery that sex work can replace other forms of work entirely often catalyses a shift to full time immersion as a sole occupation. I refrain from suggesting here that alternative forms of labour are absent in women’s trajectories, as this genuinely is not the case. However, I would suggest that female escorts are more likely to become dependent upon sex work as a sole income stream (compared to men) because of a readily established market.²⁴ Women can quickly generate greater sums of money when

²⁴ I offer analysis of male and female online markets in the following section

compared to non-sex work occupations that might impose greater demands upon women's time. Two women chart the shift from long term, mainstream work to dependence upon sex work:

It was a scary time, I will admit, going from – because I'd been in my day job for the best part of 8 years (...) it was a scary shift but it has worked out well, I must say. (Lois)

At that point I was part time, so there was less pressure. There's a big difference between needing to earn a couple of hundred pounds a month (...) I mean, I could go a while without having to need to see anyone (...) I kind of have to look at it now as a business. I obviously need to earn a lot more money a month, for rent and bills and so forth. (Kirsten)

As the beginning of this chapter detailed, nine of the ten women entered the sex industry after involvement in conventional employment. Additionally, nine women eventually relied solely on sex work for their income. Sanders and Hardy (2013) suggest sex work is the 'ultimate' precarious labour, and this precarity is supported throughout most female narratives; sometimes slightly and sometimes overtly:

The thing I hate the most is not knowing how much money I'm going to earn, or when I'm going to earn it (..) I kind of do ok, but there's periods where things go quiet, even after all these years (...) and I'll panic and think 'oh my god, no one's ever gonna book me again, and I'm gonna starve, and I'm not gonna be able to pay my rent, and I'll panic about it, but it's usually fine. (Kirsten)

The bloody school holidays, they were the worst ones this year. And Fridays too. Some Fridays I don't get a single call or text. (Elaine)

John, meanwhile, the only 'career' escort of the male sample interviewed is keen to establish that 'it's not a salubrious jet setting lifestyle' and that he 'gets by' after ten years of building up his escort profile, stating straight male escorting is extremely difficult to sustain as a sole occupation. Juxtapose this with the words of Sara, who relates how escorting enables her to enjoy a 'posh lifestyle' and the differences between male and female sex worker earning potential seems prominent. George, like John, is sceptical of escorting as a singular income generator for men:

She had three, four other guys on her books. I never met them, but I can't imagine any of them did it to survive, or to pay the bills [...] you hear these stories, about these blokes [...] and I think its bollocks. Because they're not going to say, if you were reading my story in the paper – 12 months, 2, slept with 17 and earned about £3000-£4000, so what. (George)

These lived realities of precarious income offer a context for some of commentary offered in following sections. Here, attention shifts to the ways in which men and women market and advertise their escort services, dissecting the relative importance placed upon the creation of a working identity and whether this is influenced by gender.

4.3 Creating Escort Identities

4.3.1 The determining role of the internet

Ditmore and Thukral (2005) surmise that most sex workers who wish to remain in the industry would prefer to work independently. This claim will be examined, supported (and occasionally refuted) within the present data, demonstrating how the popularity and proliferation of the internet engenders independent engagement between sex workers and potential clients. Bernstein (2007a, p.93) asserts how sex workers ‘were among the first and most consistent beneficiaries of the technical innovations [...]’, noting that the internet: reduces the need for third party management, decreases interference from the criminal justice system and enables greater profit for workers because they can target specific audiences. Although many recent academic studies touch upon the centrality of the internet for indoor sex workers, scant attention is given to a *gendered* analysis of how male and female sex workers might *use* the internet as a tool to generate both client bookings as well as more passive forms of income (detailed later in this section). Instead, trends toward content analyses of escort websites have been academically popular, see for instance Castle and Lee (2008) and Agresti (2009).

Once established as escorts, all apart from two participants relied heavily upon the internet to act as the intermediary between themselves and clients. However, like the phased entry trajectories described previously, so too did participants tend to arrive at internet advertising after various other ways of selling sex, for example, via newspaper adverts or escort agencies. Many escorts relied upon the internet to facilitate their work, although the extent to which e-technology’s myriad offerings are exploited varies between men and women. The diagram overleaf visually captures some distinct differences:

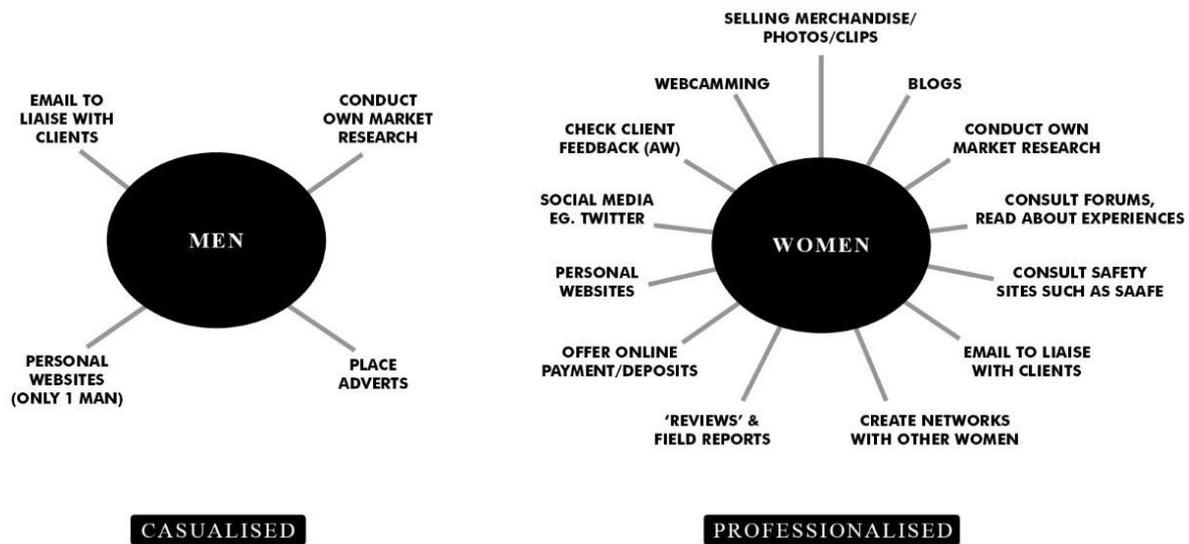


Figure 3: Use of the internet in escorting

As the above indicates, female escorts are much more likely to have a pluralistic, multifaceted relationship with the online world whereas men engage in a comparatively limited way – using the internet to advertise and liaise with clients, but rarely anything beyond. Here I will offer the tentative suggestion that the ways in which men conduct their escort business online mimics the ways in which women would have used the internet, albeit some fifteen years prior. The last decade has witnessed the proliferation of technology and internet spaces such that a sex worker now has multiple avenues available as business ‘aids’. In the early days of this thesis, I recall pondering whether the relatively limited way male escorts use the internet for their business is simply a by-product of them playing ‘catch up’. For example, it has taken some time for female escorts to ‘evolve’ a variety of working practices, thus, for the unestablished ‘straight’ male escort market there might be a potential time lag. If this is indeed the case, then perhaps future decades will witness the same diversification within straight male escorting. A parallel perhaps can be found here with pornography; typically seen as a male pursuit until differently mediated outlets allowed women to embrace online pornography easily and anonymously (for example, Schauer, 2005 and Smith, 2007) in addition to women now also producing, managing and controlling pornography content (see Attwood, 2009) – not just featuring in it.

Many of the female escorts utilised the internet in ways which maximised their earning potential *and* their safety:

I go round safety sites and check numbers. (Violet)

My first ad was online classifieds, free stuff. I didn't know you have to spend money to earn money. (Sara)

I have got good feedback and it has taken me a long time to build it up. (Nadine)

I've realised things like having a website and blogging, and kind of floating around places like the internet forums are useful ways to get business. (Kirsten)

Nadine details how she has her own personal website in addition to her Adultwork page, but prefers the latter because 'I like to know a bit about somebody' (meaning, she can infer some knowledge by looking at a client's own feedback, the commentary he has written about women he has seen previously and perhaps their responses back also). Nadine also refuses to advertise a phone number after feeling anxious about men calling out of the blue and the sense of unknown this brings. Instead, email communication furnishes her with a measured, calculated interaction she can feel in control of, and then when the desired level of comfort is achieved, a phone conversation is arranged. Female escorts use the language of *business* and reinforce the need to keep information, photographs and available services up to date whereas this aspect of discussion is overwhelmingly absent in male accounts. One female escort, Lois, speaks about Twitter and how she has a 'work' profile and this is yet another mode of advertising in a social media-driven society; John, meanwhile, opted for more traditional modes of business management and had personal business cards printed, which he regards as a 'complete waste'. Some of the most marked fissures between how women and men advertise their services lie in the respective efforts each adopt to 'raise their profile' – and largely, it is women, not men, who creatively exploit the multitude of avenues available to advertise online.

Moving to a specific use of the internet, it appears virtual communities are a valuable resource for both male and female sex workers. These virtual domains can be passively consumed or actively engaged in to suit multiple purposes: commercial profile raising; establishing 'norms' of correct behaviour (and understanding these norms); and health and safety contingencies amongst others. Sanders (2009) addresses the forms of

internet regulation both purchasers and sellers of sex engage with online, as well as how these online spaces create new avenues of sexual consumption for people who may have otherwise not become involved. Some studies have expressed concern at perceptions of the internet as the font of all knowledge (for example, Berger et al., 2005; Seale, 2005; Song et al., 2012, in relation to health concerns and ‘googling’). However, for sex workers who have limited options to procure work-related information in other ways, established online communities are cited as useful virtual spaces for knowledge exchange and production. The visibility of sex work on the internet allowed women and men in this study to engage in their own research entirely anonymously:

I had a look around, did some googling (...) found loads of websites and that. Then I found the one you found me on and the men on there seemed more normal, I mean some sites they all look like Greek gods and I thought there’s no way they are real. (Dan)

I kind of went into it with this expectation, that you couldn’t really say no to anything. And then once I’d looked at other girls’ profiles and realised everyone has a long list of dos and don’ts and I could be pickier about what I offered. (Autumn)

Independent escort sites, mass directories and agency sites all enable the novice observer a glimpse into the presentation of sexual services on the internet, however Gavin relates ‘there are lots of scams, lots of sites ready to take your money, but you don’t know this at the start’. The risk of scams will be covered in the following chapter, particularly in relation to male workers, although it should be noted here that aspiring female escorts are afforded a comparatively superior knowledge position due to many online information sources they can consult, which peer more closely at the reality of sex work beyond advertisements:

I stated looking for information online and I found SAAFE. (Autumn)

I’ve never looked back, especially with Adultwork. It’s a good website, the people on there seem to know all the etiquette. (Eva)

I’ve read stuff, like SAAFE (...) I do kind of have a read of that. (Lois)

You can read reviews, and posts about all sorts. (Nadine)

For women considering escort work, there is a wealth of information readily available, accessed quickly and easily through simple online searches. John notes this absence for male escorts, and wishes to address this disparity:

It's something I've thought about actually developing a code of ethics, yeah and getting people to buy into it...I've seen it on a female site, an agency or something, there's a code. (John)

In terms of online spaces, one of the key differences between 'straight' male and female escorts lie in the available work-related spaces they can inhabit. Sanders (2005, p.168) details the embodied networks female sex workers tend to engage in, offering an example of the complicated link between several women whose lives overlap from working in the same sauna at different times. This degree of embodied interaction is much weaker within my own sample of women, although the possibilities of *virtual* networks of female workers are apparent in several accounts. At surface level, it would appear independent workers who advertise online are at risk of being somewhat isolated in their networks. Although kinships and camaraderie appear readily available in the form of online forums such as Punternet and SAAFE, without the physical interactions that would occur in a sauna-type setting, escorts can be entirely solitary in their pursuits. This latter point of the solitary worker will be returned to in a later chapter discussing 'relationships'.

However, as so many women commented in various ways about online forums and discussion boards, I will utilise the idea of *virtual publics*, particularly the idea of Fraser's *counterpublics*, coined as realms in which under-represented people can join and discuss, formulating discourse of 'private' matters in public domains (Warner, 2002, p.67). A public becomes a counterpublic because it:

maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one. (Warner, 2002, p.424)

Punternet and SAAFE both fit into this notion of counterpublics, particularly in relation to the readership majority who 'are socially marked by this kind of discourse' (ibid., p.424) and that 'ordinary' people are neither likely to participate, nor even be present in this counterpublic space. For women, particularly independent workers, the myriad counterpublic spaces available enabled them to situate themselves, their experiences and their expectations within a much broader demonstration of collective knowledge. Returning to the discussion within the literature review of Chapter 2, these accounts feed into what Brents and Sanders (2010) refer to as the 'mainstreaming' of the sex industry, and certainly for women at least, this appears to be the case.

4.3.2 Marketing

Progressing to the specifics of marketing, Burghart's (2015) content analysis of internet escort advertisements asserts that male escorts (for women) adopt traditional ideals of chivalry, offering or mimicking notions of 'romance' to frame and market their escort identities. This theme is repeated within my own sample of participants, whereby men draw upon a range of heteronormative concepts when presenting themselves as available for hire:

I struggle to remember, but I think I put something about being a gentleman (...) there was nothing seedy in there. (Jason)

The agency had me doing all sorts of poses, erm, like flexing my muscles. (Zack)

So she said 'I need you to go to this photographer on Oxford Road, take a dinner jacket, a pair of shorts...are you bothered about being naked?' (...) back then I had a six pack and she said 'I can see that, although it's not that important to be honest, everyone thinks a bloke has to have a big six pack and a twelve-inch cock, but it's nothing of the sort. (George)

Jason and Zack detail expectations of their masculinity which on the surface seem contradictory, a *gentle* man juxtaposed with a powerful, muscled physique, which is 'flexed' and posed. Likewise, women tend to emphasise their femininity and advertise breast size, chest/waist/hips ratios as well as other features such as bottoms and legs. Notably, one of the key differences between how men and women display themselves visually lies in the extent of nudity. Most men who took part in this research display images in which they are fully clothed, with some exceptions of photos capturing men in underwear. This serves as a stark contrast to the available images of male escorts who advertise on Adultwork, for example.

As detailed in the preface, the focus of this thesis changed direction after I struggled to recruit female clients of male sex workers. Shortly after, I worked as Research Associate on the Leverhulme funded 'Women Who Buy Sex' project. This role required interview recruitment of male escorts, and Adultwork was the primary site utilised for this. Interestingly, if one tries to understand the straight male escort sector through

analysing adverts alone, it would appear that phallic domination is key to any profile. Indeed, this ‘trend’ was corroborated at the end of project conference, where both a male escort and female consumer gave presentations. The male escort present described how he markets himself and his services meticulously, dressing carefully and thinking strategically about text to engage a female audience. This man stated that he did not display nudity on his website, and that women are not interested in seeing penises prior to a booking commencing. Moreover, he continued to say women do not even enquire about his genitalia. This sparked a response from the female client present, who said she *does* like to see a ‘cock shot’ within an escort’s portfolio, although not as the primary focus, more as a validation of her own personal preferences alongside the escort’s other perceptible personal and social attributes. The combination of the data gathered for this thesis and the external project discussed above leads me to conclude that the plethora of adverts showing penises in various states of arousal (with no indication of the rest of the person attached to the showcased appendage) are unlikely to bring serious clients to the advertiser.

Smith and Kingston (2015) conducted statistical analyses of over 27000 sex worker adverts from a major directory, noting that 33% of the profiles belonged to men. I would like to add here that *creating and maintaining* an advert does not necessarily equate to *obtaining* clients (this is especially the case with straight male escorts). The overwhelming array of the aforementioned ‘cock shots’ with very brief accompanying text is not likely to be a reliable mode of estimating the prevalence of women as sexual consumers, nor the amount of men who are ‘successful’ male escorts. In some ways, it appears there are considerable overlaps between male escorting and the wider culture of ‘hooking up’, with many male Adultwork profiles attesting they will see women ‘for free’.

The only ‘long term’ male escort interviewed (John, with over ten years’ experience) offers ‘I think my website isn’t too jokey either. It doesn’t mention too much on the sexual... I’ve tried to avoid the words because it just puts people off’. John is the only male escort concerned with the specifics of marketing. As such, he invests time and money to rank highly on search engines whilst tweaking his website text to attract potential female clients with the correct prose, elaborating on how some women ‘email for weeks, back and forth’ prior to finalising a booking. Cartwright’s (2015, p.126) recent work detailing the state of ‘temping’ and the youth labour market asserts:

the ability to ‘sell yourself’, to package your skills, experience and personality into a marketable economic resource, therefore becomes vital in distinguishing oneself from the competition.

Although the quotation above was not written with sex work in mind, her words are equally applicable to how men and women discuss their escort profiles in the context of either a very competitive market (female escorts), or a burgeoning market yet to be fully established (male escorts). This idea of ‘packaging yourself’ will be returned to in the following chapter, particularly in relation to the physicality of sex workers, offering a gendered critique of varied physical standards assumed ‘ideal’ for sex workers. Thus far, this chapter has charted the journeys of participants from motivations through to realisation, and this chronological flow continues into the next section, examining working practices.

4.4 Working Practices

4.4.1 Rates, location and payment

I now turn to some of the more practical and logistical aspects of escorting; first through a discussion of how participants decide how much to charge, followed by where they are willing to work – the places and spaces deemed to be most comfortable and conducive to escorting. Finally, the practicalities of asking for and receiving their fees will be briefly examined, dualistically noting both similarities and differences between female and male escorts.

In the previously mentioned policy-relevant study co-authored by Smith and Kingston (2015), it was noted that female escorts tended to advertise higher hourly rates than male escorts, with 70% of men listing rates of less than £100 compared to 12% of women (2015, p.8). This echoes the data found in my sample of male and female escorts; 9 out of the 10 men offered hourly rates of less than £100 (the lowest being £40) whereas only one woman advertised less than £100 (with the remaining 9 pitching their rates generally between the £100 - £150 mark). Two of the London based women charged much higher rates of £250 and £300 respectively, and were agency workers.

Such a gendered disparity in earning potential is interesting; on the one hand, competition is described as ‘fierce’ for female escorts, however, as this chapter has

already established, many women still manage to ‘make a living’ from escorting alone. For male escorts, it appears the demand is much less, and therefore rates cannot be pitched at similar levels to their counterparts. Amongst the women who discuss the competitive elements of sex work, a narrative of ‘niche’ surfaces. Kirsten relays how she ‘has a separate page for anal play’ because she realised ‘it’s a thing’. Similarly, Carla has ‘a few specialities’ and Lois advertises watersports and BDSM services. Sara, meanwhile, states her agency-commanded fee of £300 is paid on the premise of youth, beauty and a slender flawless body. Gendered norms surrounding beauty will be considered in the following chapter, however it is worth mentioning here that several women felt that age and body type impacted on their capacity to command (or not command) higher rates of pay.

Whilst both men and women arrive at their pricing structure through market research (independent escorts, as opposed to the participants signed up to agencies and consequently rates pre-determined by agencies), how rates are negotiated on an ongoing basis differ. Men, for example, scour online sources, decide where they ‘fit’ in relation to their peers, set a rate and leave this unchanged:

I just had a look around and sort of priced up, looking at what they’re doing, to sort of meet somewhere in the middle [...] you can go too high, and if you go too low you look cheap [...] I just came up with a figure most people would entertain [...] that is still my rate now.
(Gavin)

Women, however, often ‘tweak’ their rates to see if they can maximise their earnings, either through generating more bookings at a lower rate, or fewer bookings but at a higher rate. Whilst men speak of their rates as relatively static, female rates are fluid and subject to change:

I did used to be a bit cheaper. (Autumn)

I noticed at £150 I wasn’t getting as many bookings as I used to, so I dropped it to £120. I’d rather have three clients at £120 than one client at £150. (Nadine)

Within a short time, I became very busy, oversubscribed, and it was getting really stressful (...) so I upped my rates slightly (...) then about 3-4 years ago, I changed them up just slightly again because I just felt I could, and they’ve stayed static at that ever since. I’ve thought about going higher, and being more ‘exclusive’, but to me, that puts a lot of pressure on me. I would feel that I’d have to be extra extra special.
(Violet).

Four women also have reduced rates for regular clients and occasional special offers (generally when business is slow), mimicking more mainstream commercial business practices which strategise consumer loyalty and product / service appeal.

Similarly, these business strategies are evidenced in *where* male and female escorts choose to work. Smith and Kingston (2015, p.5) report overall, that escorts (gender collectively) were more likely to offer outcalls (80%) than incalls (67%), but that the female category 'were more likely to offer incalls than outcalls. The incall / outcall divide is clear cut in the present study, male escorts simply do not offer incalls. It is neither an advertised option, nor a requested option. Instead men visit female clients in hotels, or more rarely, their homes. Hotel bars are commonly given as the very first point of contact with female clients. This sits in opposition to many female accounts, where the initial meeting tends to be in the escort's incall facilities (usually their home, or serviced apartments rented specifically to receive clients), or less frequently, the client's hotel room. For female escorts, the 'where' of sex work appears well established, and links back to the more general mainstreaming of the sex industry discussed in Chapter 2; the places of service provision are clear cut because of what Hausbeck and Brents (2009) refer to as the 'McDonaldization' of the sex industry. Women who received clients at their homes often had a dedicated 'work room' space, with three women trying to create the illusion that they do not live there (with little success):

I used to try and hide all personal things away [...] the story used to be that I used this place for entertaining [...] somebody once said to me, this place gets more and more girly every time I come. He's like, 'you live here don't you?' (Lois)

For two women, however, the desire for complete geographical separation of their working environment is apparent, with Jessica citing it would be 'disgusting' for clients to be using the same space as her young daughter, and Carla preferring to commute into London and offer incalls from hotels there, to reduce the chances of 'bumping into a client in Waitrose'.

Differences, too, exist with regards to when the monetary exchange occurs. Women recount some quite strict procedural steps that occur at the very beginning of each booking, and these tend to fall along the lines of: a friendly welcome greeting with a kiss or hug, an offer of a beverage accompanied by a brief chat, receiving or asking for the fee and then the suggestion of 'freshening up' in the bathroom. Female escorts detail these

sequential elements as foundational to the booking. Some of the women interviewed even offer credit card payment facilities, and use sites such as PayPal to receive deposits, mimicking mainstream business practices more broadly. In contrast, male escorts seldom have any ‘routine’ or process which makes the financial exchange transparent. Six men report taking money at the end of each booking, unless the female client has offered their fee up front. For instance:

She left and just threw the envelope on the table. (Sean)

Usually it’s on display somewhere, maybe by the bed and whatnot but then even then I don’t take it until the end. (Zack)

Women cite trust as one reason why they may occasionally not ask for money at the very start of an appointment, and this relates only to ‘regulars’ – clients they have built a rapport with and feel comfortable that waiting until the end will pose no problem. For ‘regulars’, the usual rules and boundaries are subject to slippage. Otherwise, the overriding reason for being paid up front is, as Eva summarises ‘to stop being ripped off’. With this in mind, consider Steve’s rationale for why he manipulates scenarios so that payment is always at the beginning of a paid date:

never really talk about money, that was a sort of formal quick one, in an email, just to give them an idea – because they are actually more nervous than guys to be honest, because they don’t know what to expect (...) I’ve always stated clear that payment is upfront and the reason I did that was to get it out of the way, get that uncomfortable moment out, there’s nothing worse for them than to sit there thinking ‘right, when do I pay you?’ (Steve)

Scant evidence is given by male escorts that their female clients ‘rip them off’, although as the next chapter will discuss, it is not entirely unheard of. Instead, emphasis is placed upon female clients as trustworthy and highly likely to honour the virtual contract they entered into, thus enabling men to take a much more laissez-faire approach to the financial exchange.

4.4.2 Sexual and platonic services

The role of an escort is potentially ambiguous, particularly when pitted against other industry sectors such as parlours or on-street sex work. The following section will

examine escorting in the context of ‘straight’ male and female workers, offering analyses of services and how these are (and are not) advertised.

The most significant difference relates to the explicit offering of *sexual* services. For female escorts, details of exactly what types of sexual services they are prepared to offer are largely displayed both on personal websites, as well as directory and database advertising portals. Within the sample interviewed, there appeared to be a ‘minimum’ level of sexual service that was always included as available throughout the purchased time. Largely, kissing and other forms of tactile affection, massage, oral sex and full sex are seen as standard services. Sanders (2005) notes that kissing is not a standard service provision for the female sex workers interviewed, and is often ‘saved’ for personal romantic relationships, however this was not the case for the women spoken to throughout the course of this research. One female escort even recounts how she *insists* on kissing with her clients, telling the story of how she asked one man to leave when it became obvious he would not kiss. ‘Standard’ included services aside, some women also chose to offer niche and specialist acts, such as anal play, watersports and BDSM. For some women, these services required a premium (as well as enough notice to prepare) whilst others choose to include them within their usual hourly rate. What transpires in every female account is the near certainty that some form of sexual contact will take place in the escort-client encounter:

I think there are lots of guys who do want the whole cuddly, chatting thing going on for them, but it pretty much always ends in something.
(Kirsten)

I’d say 99% want sex of some kind. (Elaine)

The majority do, but not all (...) they usually just want a blow job.
(Jessica)

For female escorts, then, every encounter is approached with the expectation that sexual contact will occur at some point.

Contrastingly, the male escort sector offers a decidedly murky and vague summary of what may (and may not) be available to women who wish to meet with them.²⁵ Whereas female escorts are *explicit* and transparent in their available (and unavailable) services, male escorts are only occasionally *implicit* in offering sexual contact, with many

²⁵ For a content analysis of escort websites, see Castle and Lee (2008)

of the men choosing not to advertise any form of sex whatsoever. For several men, however, the possibility of sexual pleasure is hinted at:

I said I was a mature professional gentleman (...) willing to entertain ladies and give them a good experience (...) to make them feel special, something like that...it wasn't sleazy. (Jason)

getting across words like 'willing to work one on one', and massage, and in the escort world 'massage' pretty much means, you know...' (Rob)

What emerges - and is in accord with the earlier discussed assertion of straight male escorting as an underdeveloped sector of sex work - is the variability between male escorts; there is no 'industry standard' or benchmark against which men can pitch themselves. This is particularly interesting when compared to the overtly sexual and explicit manner in which male escorts for men advertise their services (see Burghart, 2015)²⁶. Despite this variability, one commonality amongst all men interviewed lies in the *social* aspect of the encounter.

Female escorts frequently allude to the social aspects of their bookings, however this is related in terms of the usual companionship that one might associate with strangers engaging in sex, for example small talk before, between, and after physical contact. Three of the women interviewed offer 'social only' appointments to clients, although this is described as a minor addition to their repertoire:

I offer social only escorting, which is marketed as a different service and I charge less for (...) every two months or so I'll get a booking for that. It's not a hugely popular thing, but it's popular enough that I've continued to offer it for the last three years. (Autumn)

A further two women offer 'dinner dates' rates, where a multi-hour appointment to include lunch or dinner is discounted to their usual rate for that length of time. Diverging considerably, however, some male escorts view their hourly rate as encompassing social escorting only, with sexual services as added 'extras' that the client must pay for additionally:

Normally I charge by the hour and then see what happens after that really, then charge for extra. (Dan)

Had they wanted extras, it would cost them more. (Gavin)

²⁶ The edited collection presented by Minichiello and Scott (2014) is also useful here.

What transpires from male accounts is the misalignment between exactly what is being paid for (and expected), and what is advertised. With only two men implicitly advertising sex, it is perhaps surprising that most men later detail how most of their female clients *do* want to engage in sex:

99% of every client I've had has totally expected sex at the end. They want someone who is going to give them good conversation for the first hour (...) sometimes having a meal but then afterwards it always comes down to the same thing. (Rob)

Sometimes there is just escort with no sex but this very rarely happens, I mean, the last three years it has only happened a couple of times. (Nico)

Of course there's some that just want to be accompanied to weddings and all that, but very rare (...) I thought most of my work would be people coming in [to London] who wanted to be shown around, a bit lost in the area...it doesn't happen...and I do advertise that quite strongly on my website. (John)

Of note here, perhaps, is the relative 'knowledge' of the sex industry each man held prior to becoming an escort. For instance, Zack, a former stripper, held no illusions about women wanting companionship only:

It's never happened to me, never not once. I've always gone to meet every one of them like we are going to become intimate, and it's always happened (...) I've never just been taken for drinks or a day out or whatever. (Zack)

Men who had visited escorts themselves, or had a male friend also escorting, were more likely to mimic the selling patterns of the female sector: offering sexual contact (albeit covertly) as well as an all-inclusive price whereby sexual contact is not seen as an 'extra' to be paid for additionally. Again, this reinforces the previously suggested idea of an unestablished male escort market, with no established 'norms' - to be evidenced further below.

Considerable uncertainty punctuates the given accounts of male escorts and, reading between the lines, this uncertainty appears to be present for female clients too. Firstly, confusion exists at the advertising level:

When I first put that profile on, I wasn't sure whether I could even mention anything to do with sex (...) I didn't know if I could get into trouble for it so I just tried to keep it all professional and really clean. (Rob)

Next, confusion appears concerning exactly who controls whether sex does (or does not occur), the escort or the client:

I said 'I want to sleep with you' and she said 'well I don't want to sleep with you'. And you can imagine as a bloke (...) absolutely kicked me in the guts! (George)

It was a bit hard for me, emotionally and physically, and that's when I told her I could offer massage, but anything over that, I just couldn't do it basically. (Nico)

I remember the first one, I didn't know what to expect because basically (...) she just said let's see how it goes. (Jason)

Several interpretations are possible here. For relatively new male escorts, there could be a misunderstanding of the market and what their female clientele are seeking. Alternatively, there could be some relative naivety among female consumers such that if the male escort does not discuss or initiate sexual proceedings, then these do not occur, irrespective of her desires. Finally, there could be an interplay of factors which make the terrain of women procuring sex from a man somewhat different in nature (and process) compared to male counterparts; this is evinced in both George and Jason's accounts above. George's date clearly had no interest in having sex with him, and ended the booking whilst Jason's first client chose to be ambivalent about how the encounter would proceed, allowing her to decide upon meeting. Bookings with women are discussed as being companionable in nature, with meals or drinks, and conversation cited as integral. The only exceptions to this fall under the category of fantasy play (which usually involves extended email or phone contact prior).

Therefore, whilst the male and female escorts interviewed for this research are united when relaying emphasis upon sexual contact within their bookings, it would seem only the female sector capitalise on this via proliferation of sexual services and advertising. Could this be gender stereotyping played out even in professional sex? John asserts that 'women just don't, you know...fancy a bit of sex with a guy. That's just not women' and later states 'they want companionship as much, if not more than the sexual side. It's very much a combination of the two'. Beyond these discussed contradictions, a lack of standardised, professionalised male escort service is apparent.

4.4.3 Selling a fantasy

In *Can't Buy My Love* Jean Kilbourne (1999) offers a scathing collection of accounts detailing the horrors inflicted by the advertising industry. For Kilbourne, 'advertising corrupts relationships and then offers us products, both as solace and as substitutes for the intimate human connection we all long for and need' (ibid., p.26). Arguably, the indoor sex industry both mimics and contradicts Kilbourne's stance outlined thus far. Commercial sex is potentially just another diversion from a more genuine human connection, although conversely, some discourses allow for sex work to engender, not divert, from such connections. Sex work, advertising and fantasy are seemingly inseparable, although the 'products' on offer present a varied array of looks, services, experiences. In *A Sociology of Sexuality* (1996, p.6) Gail Hawkes explains how sex is 'on the one hand, a source of fear and embarrassment; on the other, a source of infinite happiness and fulfilment'. Knowledge accrued through Hawkes' historical journey of sex permeates my interpretation of the role of fantasy reported by female and male escorts, in conjunction with her later work *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture* (2004) which informs discussion related to 'entertainment sex' – a prominent feature of this section. Attention will be given to the layers of 'fantasy' offered by female and male escorts, demonstrating a spectrum of service provision spanning 'vanilla' to more specialist endeavours including fetishes, role and power play amongst other forms of sexual experimentation.

The most commonly offered service or experience refers to intimacy, or the illusion of intimacy. For women, the parlance most used is the GFE, the 'girlfriend experience'. Marketing of the girlfriend experience in sex work has been analysed through the lens of intersected commercial intimacy (Bernstein, 2007a;2007b), and from the perspective of clients (Huff, 2011 and Milrod and Monto, 2012). A more recent analysis of escorting in film offers:

The movement from The Girlfriend Experience to Magic Mike begins to trace the formation of a multi-class precariat assembled on shared experiences of insecurity (...). These films depict aspiring individuals in the middling – and rising – classes who take themselves to be free agents possessing embodied capital, that, using professionalised and creative entrepreneurial strategies, they can commodify and constellate as a unique personal brand. (Stewart and Pine, 2014, p.201)

I hope to offer a slightly different (and somewhat more mundane) perspective of the GFE here: the notion of the GFE as an ‘industry standard’ within escorting, not as something necessarily elevated in status. 8 of the 10 women interviewed use the term ‘girlfriend experience’, although not in the context of it being a highly-revered speciality employed by more middle class workers, as Bernstein suggests. Consider two female escorts, Nadine and Violet. Both women offer clients the ‘girlfriend experience’, but this is framed as personal preference because it enables them to disengage with other forms of advertising and service provision:

I like things to flow, to feel natural and relaxed (...) a lot of men who come to see me say they like my website because it’s not full of porn and all the ‘cum in my mouth’ stuff. It’s down to earth, and gentle (...) I knew I wanted to stick with the GFE. (Violet)

I just decided to do things my way, the way that I want to do them and if people liked it...I like to chat to people first, I don’t rush them upstairs, I like to have a cup of tea and that’s the way I started doing it and that’s the way I’ll always do it. (Nadine)

For some female escorts, advertising tactility, affection and the more usual sexual pursuits is not necessarily to attract clients, but to reflect the ways in which they are *willing* to work. Interestingly, only one man, Sean, speaks of the male equivalent, the boyfriend experience. For Sean, if his agency informs him a client wants the boyfriend experience, he interprets this as a code for sex. However, although most male escorts do not use this terminology, the associated language and acts comparative to the GFE are evident throughout their accounts, featuring flirtation and compliments, intimacy, kissing, shared touching, affection and sex. George offers that ‘I let them know how much I want to please them’ whilst Dan describes how his chivalrous manner creates a pleasant atmosphere that allows a natural progression from social to physical contact.

Beyond the mimicry of encounters one might expect in non-commercial sex, participants detail an array of different services and power dynamics made available to clients. The most notable theme here is best understood as ‘playing’ with power. For Bourdieu, symbolic power is ‘that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p.164). Similarly, commerce and symbolic power intertwine with gender – both men and women recount requests and experiences

concerning role plays of domination and submission and fantasy. In these instances, the power of consumer capital *purchases* the opportunity to play with power dynamics:

The lecturer in the university was the weirdest one, fucking hell. (...) that's her way of being in charge, her big thing is telling you to fuck off at the end of the night (...) when she'd finished, she'd push back her chair and say 'right you, fuck off' and I went 'whooooaa' and she said 'that's what I'm paying for'. (George)

Many permutations²⁷ of the story above were told to me by participants, female as well as male. Perhaps the most accurate reflection of these stories lies not in blanket assertions about 'subverting' gender norms, nor what this might mean. Instead, it seems more appropriate to demonstrate how 'play' is a significant feature of fantasy enactment, whether this is playing with gender roles, with different physical sensations, or with dominance and submission. Steve laughs as he tells me about the popularity of his Navy uniform, just as Kirsten laughs when she states 'I probably spend far too much time with my fist up men's bottoms'. Laughter again features for Lois, who offers domination to clients, although always with a smile on her face, emphasising elements of fun. These accounts speak to what Hawkes defines as 'entertainment sex', sexual liaisons that are not just about sexual pleasure, but also about 'light hearted fun' (2004, p.12). Nadine, who is in her fifties, tells of how 'you get those in their twenties and they have the MILF fantasy, they probably fancied their mum's best friend or aunty'. Rob details how he 'was quite a good little actor' at school, and therefore embraces clients who 'send whole word documents' scripting their desired scenario. Zack capitalises on his years as a stripper, fulfilling 'stripper fantasies' for some clients. In these instances, the sex worker becomes a vehicle for erotic experimentation more broadly, with both male and female clients *purchasing the experience* of fantasy.

Fetish, like fantasy, features throughout male and female escorting:

A couple of months ago a woman paid me £140 just to massage my feet and lick my feet (...) I mean, to me that is weird, but to these people they have grown up with a fetish and I asked this woman you know why she had such an interest in feet and she said I have no idea. My parents know about it, they said that right from when I was a little toddler right from a little baby she was in the pram and used to pull the socks off her feet and just stare at her feet. (Steve)

²⁷ Although not so overtly aggressive

He wanted his hand crushed by my heels (...) his little finger mainly, and then the very last thing was a bar of chocolate and I had to imprint the bar of chocolate at one end with one heel, and then he would turn it around and had to imprint the other side of it and he would eat that going home. (Elaine)

As with fantasy, male and female workers report a wide repertoire of fetishes they have encountered. Of particular note, however, is the disparity between how men and women cater for and encourage clients seeking these more specialist experiences. Only women capitalise on elements of fantasy within their advertising; service lists, fetish wear, footwear and images of sexual aids all contribute to the visually accessible sexual repertoires a female escort is willing to draw upon. Men, meanwhile, do not declare any specialisms at all. This is particularly interesting, given that female and male workers alike report the prevalence of fantasy requests – only women choose to turn this into an advertising resource. Glancing back to my earlier analysis of the straight male escort sector as largely ‘casualised’ in comparison to the professionalised market of female escorts, it might appear that men have ‘missed a trick’ by not advertising the services they are commonly asked for. However, perhaps a greater likelihood lies in the perceptions of doing so; career escort John is quick to state his opinion that women do not want to see or read sexually explicit material when choosing a male escort. Without the female client voice, anything beyond the musings above are conjecture.

In sum, the accounts given by women demonstrate an *agentic* approach to service provision – with some women simply refusing to consider diversifying their sexual repertoires beyond their own comfort zones. The female escort sector is competitive, and finding a ‘niche’ can be important to ensure regular bookings, however, the overall impression given by women is that they offer services they feel comfortable engaging in. These findings are mostly echoed in male escort accounts, although their encounters with fantasy are more sporadic due to the casual nature of their work. What transpires throughout is the role of the sex worker as a conduit to more expansive sexual experiences: men and women alike can purchase the freedom to experiment sexually, and this experimentation takes many forms, from light hearted play through to socially taboo fantasy, and all in between.

4.4.4 Emotion management – escort and client

When a booking is made between a client and an escort, the agreed sum of money purchases access to the escort's labour *power*, as opposed to their *labour* (or the finished service/completed time). What occurs in the paid-for encounter can be subject to a great many variables (for instance, character, bodily capabilities, time management and preferences to name a few). Thus, providing money in exchange for the not-yet-realised service intentions of the escort is based on an *expectation* of what may occur in the allotted time. Managing emotion (both one's own, and those of the client), although never explicitly offered as part of the service, appears frequently among interviewees as a more draining aspect of escort work. Management of emotion is cited as integral to bookings that tend to be longer time-wise, as well as more frequent in nature. Drawing upon Bell's (1973) analysis, Hochschild relates that, in a post-industrial society, the majority of jobs entail dealing with people instead of things. Communication is now centralised (and prioritised) in many forms of work and the management of feelings a consideration in many service-oriented roles whereby 'we are all partly flight attendants' (Hochschild, 1983, p.11).

Emotion management is examined in varying degrees of depth throughout sex industry research with the oft-used term 'emotional labour', first coined by Arlie Hochschild (1983), a common inclusion. Although this section addresses emotional labour, I also intend to pick up on some of the lesser used aspects and concepts of Hochschild's (1983) *The Managed Heart*, particularly the interactional elements of emotion alongside 'feeling rules' and 'gender, status and feeling'. Here, collaboratively, I hope to offer some tentative assertions about the role of emotion work in the sex industry, stretching *beyond* gender.

Hochschild (1983) distinguishes between emotional labour (observable physical displays in commercial settings) and emotion work and emotion management as taking place in private settings; the currency of the former is financial, whereas for the latter, reciprocity relates to *use* value. Although Hochschild makes distinctions between the 'private' and the 'commercial', I find it more useful to use her work holistically, precisely because sex work straddles commerce and that which is often deemed 'personal', for instance, O'Connell-Davidson speaks of sex as something normatively construed as private (1998). Therefore, what I aim to achieve in this section is a systematic analysis of

how emotion *work*, emotion *management* and emotional *labour* feature collaboratively within participants' accounts of client interactions, complicating the idea of separately existing emotional systems between the private and the public.

According to Hochschild, women are more likely to be involved in emotion work due to the hierarchical, societal disadvantage endured in comparison to men; 'feeling' becomes a tradeable resource in a marketplace structured on inequality (Hochschild, 1983, p.163). Moreover, men and women 'do' emotion differently in accordance with early socialisation 'scripts', and within her analysis, she draws upon the *different* emotion work flight attendants engage in (who are predominantly female) compared to the debt collectors of the same airline (who were exclusively male). Childhood indoctrination of 'niceness' in girls, whilst boys can pursue forms of aggression should they so wish, impacts upon emotional expression through to adulthood. In her chapter on 'Feeling Rules', she observes that 'our culture invites women, more than men, to focus on feeling rather than action' (ibid., p.57). Using this as the first point of departure, consider the following:

I'm the same whether I'm seeing a client, or flirting with someone in the street (...) Like that woman this morning [referring to a story recalled earlier about chatting up a woman on the supermarket checkout] ... if I was meeting you Scarlett, fuck the money, fuck the job, fuck the agency owner, it's just me and you. I feel in love with you.
(George)

Throughout George's interview, the most dominant theme relates to making women feel good, and this permeated *all* encounters, paid or otherwise. Whilst Hochschild does not suggest men *do not* engage in emotional work, she does establish emotion work to be less important for men than women, based upon relative resources / money, power, social status and authority (1983, p.164). Here, we can see how two male escorts actively engage in emotion work during and after a paid encounter:

One woman in particular, she was getting beat up on (...) so there is that side of things, which is pretty sad, especially when you are sitting there with her, having a meal and you are listening to these kinds of stories, I hate all that kind of thing. (Rob)

I sat in that carpark for half an hour in the car (...) and I remember driving home Scarlett, and I just, sat up (...) and I was absolutely shell shocked (...) and I was still sat there at 6 o' clock in the morning.
(George)

I got through a patch of meeting clients, how can I put it, they just seemed really desperate, you know, they seemed desperate just to get anything (...) I actually started suffering from depression a little bit myself. (Rob)

The above excerpts qualify as emotion work, as opposed to emotional labour, because of the genuine, authentic emotional reactions provoked within both men. Neither George nor Rob had any obligation to be emotionally affected by the circumstances of their clients, particularly after the encounter, yet both were impacted immensely. So too is similar emotion work present in female accounts:

He asked me to do an overnight booking in Newcastle (...) and that night in bed if he could have put a pillow in the middle he would have done. He could not get far enough away (...) because of his guilt (...) his guilt did spoil that but I've still got my money I suppose that's what I should think, but I didn't, because I do have a heart. (Nadine)

I always like lots of eye contact and I've always got a smile on my face, I spend a lot of time laughing during appointments, it's fun (...) and I just, crack loads of awful jokes with people and we come out with loads of terrible innuendos. (Lois)

Just as some male escorts engage in emotion work, women also choose to allow access to genuine emotional responses within their bookings (and beyond). It is tempting here to refer to Bernstein's 'bounded authenticity', an authentic, yet bounded, interpersonal connection (2007b, p.473). However, I believe that much of the above demonstrates a level of emotional engagement that bleeds beyond the temporal confines of the meeting, as well as beyond the commerce, and therefore I am reluctant to use it in this instance. A secondary reluctance arises with Bernstein's connection between bounded authenticity and its marketability as a commodity, again, to reduce the above to this would be a disservice to the participants' stories. However, her concept of bounded authenticity is relevant to the role of *emotion management* within some escorts, detailed below.

Both men and women reported occasions where they felt feelings and emotions needed to be *managed*, and this could be their own, as well as those of the client. In some instances, this management was seen as a nuisance, an expected but annoying aspect of escort work. Women and men report similar problems concerning client contact beyond unspoken terms and conditions of the encounter:

how do you manage, I'd say with great difficulty [when clients want more than what is offered], somebody has fallen for you (...) but you just have to say sorry but you're going to have to harden your heart to

some extent...from a practical perspective they can carry on loving me if they want to, I'm always going to be there, but I'm not going to see them any more often because of that. (John)

I'm very careful how I manage those regulars that start to say 'oh I do miss you when I don't see you', and it's been three weeks. And I'm very careful that I talk about other clients with them, because it's meant to be a bit of a taboo (...) but I do do that with my regulars, because I just bring them back down to earth, I just pop that little bubble you know and make them realise this is a transaction. (Carla)

Here, we can see how Carla and John manage clients' growing emotional attachments through tight boundary work, redefining and reemphasising the client-escort relationship as *commercial*, despite this being potentially detrimental to their business. Bernstein's idea of an authentic, but bounded exchange (2007b) is perhaps most pertinent in this instance; neither Carla nor John were prepared to pretend the encounter means more to them emotionally than is true. Both participants also expressed concern for the impact upon the client, should they not dissuade them from over-attachment:

a lot of the time they just want to talk, talk, talk and you know, I've got to be realistic, I haven't got time to keep people on the phone and I'm not sure if it's healthy, to keep on talking. (John)

I don't think it's fair to them. (Carla)

The above demonstrates how emotion is managed; for Hochschild, emotional *labour* is the result of a transmutation of emotion *work* and *management* from the private to the commercial, and certainly, emotional labour in its most literal sense is apparent in many accounts. Bryman (2004, p.40) reviews the working behaviour of Disney staff, observing 'their demeanour (...) is designed among other things to convey the impression that the employees are having fun too and therefore not engaging in real work'. Coining the term 'Disneyization' (which pertains to *consumerism*, unlike the capitalism that McDonaldization is built upon), Bryman lists emotional labour as one of several identifying characteristics that working in Disney fantasy roles not only idealise, but demand. Kirsten encapsulates this parallel in sex work:

I just don't like people for that length of time [overnight], because you're not quite yourself, I mean, I am very much myself, probably a lot more than some girls, but it is quite hard work...it can be exhausting, and not because you've been having lots of sex, but because you've been maintaining a persona, and thinking about what you have to say (...) I did a three hour booking at a hotel in the week and I was seriously losing the will to live. (Kirsten)

Similar emotional labour is visible in the excerpts below:

A lot of them do like talking, but I think, isn't that women in general? (...) they've got their words they need to get out (...) I mean obviously sometimes women don't like talking and you have to talk, and I'm never that comfortable doing that, but I cope. (John)

If that connection just doesn't happen organically it can be a little bit hard for me to force it. I'm not amazing at forcing chemistry with someone if it doesn't flow naturally. (Autumn)

Sometimes it can be like trying to get blood out of a stone. (Lois)

George exhibits some key aspects of emotional labour with one client specifically, stating 'even the ones which were difficult, like Lesley, I felt sorry for them'. Hochschild describes how 'maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning over the long run leads to strain' and that this strain is reduced by 'pulling the two closer together either by changing what we feel or changing what we feign' (1983, p.90) For George, feeling is preferred over feigning, although he offers some discomfort regarding the more emotional aspects of his work:

In the hotel room and everything, and I, to pad out the conversation, other than the meal and the fuck, I'm just trying to counsel. What the fuck do I know about counselling? I'm just saying, 'look, you're absolutely beautiful, why don't you just, you know, get on with your life, there's somebody out there for you' (...) I'm trying to make her feel better, and she's gone fucking worse. (George)

Similarly, Rob offers that he is 'a leather couch on legs', emphasising the therapeutic comfort he feels female clientele achieve through the paid encounter, *because* he allows this emotional engagement.

Beyond emotional work, labour and management, I want to introduce the idea of *emotional cost*. Strikingly, for male participants there is much more talk of what I have interpreted as an emotional cost. Consider the laments below:

I don't want to go and ruin myself with this job (...) it was seriously genuinely getting me down and as I say I did feel quite sad in myself as well, you know, not really being able to laugh at jokes where I would normally laugh, and thinking of things on your mind all the time. (Rob)

No one gets out of this with a straight head. (George)

I was a bit battered by the end of it, like, feeling quite strange about it all. I knew I had to go then. (Zack)

The above excerpts are particularly interesting when compared to the abolitionist ideas discussed in Chapter 2. Not a single woman spoke about their work in the ways above, yet victimising discourses pigeonhole women as necessarily disadvantaged in the world of commercial sex.

I return now to some of the thoughts I introduced earlier in this chapter, the idea of the straight male escorting sector as largely ‘casualised’. Perhaps this casualisation *creates and sustains* some of the negative feeling described by the men above. For example, long term escort John, who approaches his work in the same manner female escorts tend to, does not speak of the deleterious impact upon his wellbeing. In a market where the ‘rules’ are not uniformly established, or even known, the boundaries between commerce and non-working life are more easily blurred, and this is most readily apparent in male escort accounts. In many ways, the established market of female escorting serves as both arbiter and protector; the ‘rules’ and expectations of conduct for both parties in the transaction documented, debated and discussed in the ways identified earlier in Figure 3. I therefore conclude this discussion by suggesting that it is not necessarily gender, but the nature and organisation of sex work itself that commands emotional labour.

4.5 Conclusion

The analyses presented throughout this chapter answer many questions concerning the comparative working practices of female and male escorting, albeit somewhat contingently. The respective gender-dependent professional and casual markets of escorting provide the analytical tool through which to examine broader working practices, and features throughout the following empirical chapters in different guises.

Beyond this concept, the analytical focus has captured nuances of gender in relation to the sex work entry trajectories accounted for by men and women. Whilst both report an array of motivators to enter sex work, the defining element invariably is not enough money. For men, this is articulated as a sudden disruptive loss of income, for instance, because of redundancy, whereas for women, a more ongoing dissatisfaction with financial circumstance is evident. Women describe activity in ‘peripheral’ sex industry markets prior to escorting, such as sex chat lines and web-camming whereas these activities are absent in male accounts (indeed, it could be questioned whether they

are even possibilities for the straight male). Sexual exploration features throughout the recounted experiences of men and women alike.

Meanwhile, the vagaries of marketing including setting rates and working practices, demonstrate further elements of disparity between men and women. Women exploit the opportunities afforded by the internet much more than men throughout the course of their work. Likewise, women can charge more than straight male escorts for their time, and display a greater diversity of available services. However, I have also highlighted the inherent danger of assuming that advertising reflects reality. Although women certainly *seem* to offer a much greater sexual repertoire than men, the given accounts demonstrate men engage in fantasy, fetish and exploration in much the same way a female escort might. Men simply do not advertise these services overtly.

For men and women alike, both emotional labour and precarity are inextricably tied into their escort work, and arguably this might be replicated in other forms of self-employment that require close personal contact such as freelance care work. Whilst precarity is intrinsic to sex work, however, women are better positioned to navigate precarious income because of the much greater number of clients they can attract. Thus, paradoxically, although the women in this research become quickly reliant on sex work as their sole income, they can enjoy freedom from mainstream occupations – a circumstance only one male escort achieves. The following chapter continues to dissect the ways in which straight escorting occurs, delving further into the dimensions of gender and power. Here, I complicate dominant discourses surrounding gendered sex work, particularly in relation to control, as well as physical and sexual safety.

5. Gender and Power within Heterosexual Escorting

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the temporal journeys of participants from the initial stages of sex work through to the particularities of navigating available advertising markets, and subsequent working practices. This present chapter focuses upon the idea of power and control within sex work, particularly in relation to gender. The topic of power is rarely far away from theorisations of sex work, as Chapter 2 demonstrated. Here, I offer some analyses illustrative of the respective gendered power roles female and male escorts inhabit. Enactment of beauty norms, perceptions around positive and negative encounters, and physical and sexual safety are considered sequentially. In these instances, power is a continuously shifting concept *and* practice, and the data provided problematises theories of power which by default assume male dominance and female subordination.

Throughout this chapter, demonstrations of control whereby men, ideologically at least, are more powerful, will be developed and sometimes contested. Brace and O'Connell Davidson (2000) critique gendered analyses of the (female) subordinated sex worker / powerful (male) client dyad. A master / subject approach produces simplified, reductive and ultimately fixed knowledge built upon gender essentialist ideas that gloss over the variety and breadth of possibility between women and men. Chapter Two addressed the radical feminist / abolitionist approach which champions ideas of the female sex worker as a non-agentic victim of patriarchal power. The present chapter offers some distinct challenges to this one-dimensional perspective and echoes Foucault (1980, p.98) whereby power as a static entity to be held or possessed is rejected; instead power is *circulatory*.

Whilst the subjugation of women is both heavily researched and common knowledge (which I have no intention of arguing against) this chapter veers more toward an exploration of power positions within the physical, experiential aspects of escorting across gender. How do women and men navigate their working preparations, environments and encounters, and how might gender might be implicated in this? These questions are addressed throughout.

5.2 Physical appearance and ‘the appeal of difference’.

Being female, argue Myers et al. (1999, p.16), is being told how to look. Heterosexual women, they suggest, cannot avoid the pervasive ‘beauty standard’ which plagues all forms of advertising. Additionally, they examine whether lesbian and bisexual women feel pressured to conform to these same beauty ideals as heterosexual women. Beren et al. (2009) state that lesbian culture ‘deemphasises’ the role of physical beauty thus releasing them from the ‘tyranny’ of the heterosexual beauty standard. Although the authors did find the beauty mandate of lesbian and bisexual women differed from that of heterosexual women, participants still detailed concerns about weight and ‘other factors that make up the dominant culture’s ideal’ (ibid., p.25). It appears women are subject to physical appearance mandates irrespective of sexuality.

In the sample of sex workers interviewed, many of the women presumed successful escorts to be typically youthful, slender and facially attractive, confirming the heterosexual beauty mandate detailed above. Escorts were not asked about their physical appearance in the interview, yet this features repeatedly in many female accounts (and to a lesser degree in male interviews) with similar understandings of the physical attributes the ‘ideal’ escort would embody:

I thought they would all be beautiful, like Jennifer Garner. (Sara)

I kind of assumed escorts were beautiful tall thin young glamorous women, and it wasn’t anything I could really do. (Kirsten) I wasn’t one of the young, blonde, bit tit brigade. (Lois)

The above demonstrates a homogenized preconception of what women *think* men would expect from a paid encounter. In some cases, men relay the male equivalent of these aesthetic ideals, summarised best by George’s forthright account that male escorts are expected have ‘a six pack and a twelve-inch cock’, although he assures me this is not the case. Consider one man’s preconceptions of ‘the male escort’ below:

I thought they would be in like their 20s in their 30s and muscular, and sort of, you know, up for anything, I don’t know, anything and I was in my 40s before I got involved in any shape or form and to be honest I didn’t really think it would be something that would fit me. (Jason)

These preconceptions are important analytically. Since the proliferation of commercial sexual services on the internet, there have been increasing numbers of content analyses in relation to sex work adverts, websites²⁸, clients' forum posts and 'field reports'²⁹. Collaboratively, these data create a picture of desirable characteristics, services, demeanours even. However, caution ought to be exercised when drawing conclusions; advertisements and associated online paraphernalia present the *vener* of the sex industry. For example, Saad conducted statistical analyses of 1068 female sex worker profiles across 48 countries, and found that the average advertised waist-to-hip ratio was 0.72, very close to the male 'near-universal evolved sensorial preference of 0.7' (2008, p.46). Conducted from an evolutionary perspective, Saad argues that global generalisations can be made despite using data mined from a very minute proportion of adverts. No consideration is given to other factors. For instance, sex workers likely to fall outside of conventional beauty ideals of shape, weight or size can simply omit this information, in much the same way that online dating profiles allow users to skirt around questions and body proportions where they might not be considered favourably. Therefore, the data represent the statistics of *given* body measurements. What might be more telling is the proportion of advertisements in a pre-determined sample which exclude this information from the profile. Following Saad's logic, one might conclude the sex industry is composed of evolutionary-perfect bodies, undermining both the diversity and reality of sex working physicality across the globe.

Returning to preconceptions or expectations of beauty, female escorts demonstrate an acute awareness of their appearance in relation to sex work. These concerns are realised through time-consuming beauty regimes, food monitoring (for instance, not just in relation to weight, but for breath freshness and consequently a very limited or pre-planned intake of garlic) and preparation practices spanning hair removal, hair styling and body adornments. Men, meanwhile, lack these often-lengthy preparatory work regimes; for men, only a small amount of extra time in the shower, or clothes ironing is required prior to a paid encounter. These disparities are not idiosyncratic to sex work, however, and Yan and Bissell (2014) argue that a media driven 'globalisation of beauty' is in situ, communicating a homogenous beauty norm to female populations worldwide,

²⁸ See Agresti (2009), Castle and Lee (2008) and Burghart (2015)

²⁹ See Holt and Blevins (2007) and Pettinger (2014)

and these beauty norms require time (and monetary) investments. Diverse cultural boundaries are being blurred, erased, or assimilated within a Western standard of extreme thin-ness and a preference for white skin (ibid., p.209). Arguably, men are also increasingly the focus of beauty marketing, although within the sample of men interviewed, the scope for further analysis is limited precisely because of the lack of discussion around preparatory regimes.

Whilst female and male escorts discuss their preconceptions of how an escort *should* look, many interviewees do not describe themselves as physically ‘typical’ in relation to the heterosexual beauty mandate discussed above. Moreover, deviation from these physical ideals does not exclude them from success within the sex industry, offering an immediate empirical challenge to some of the claims made by online sex work media analysts. My findings indirectly query one of the dominant ideas present in female sex tourism literature – chiefly that white, plump, middle-aged and older women travel abroad for sex with younger dark-skinned males because they are rejected and excluded from the Western sexual market.³⁰ The infantilising and pitying³¹ of women who travel to destinations such as the Caribbean, South America and parts of Africa to engage in sexual commerce with local men is somewhat patronising. Consider the words of Elaine, who states ‘I’m no tin ribs. I’m over 15 stone and I don’t lie about my age, I tell them I’m 51’. My sample of participants includes several women who self-identify as older (late thirties to early fifties), two of whom use the category of BBW to categorise their appearance, whilst three women use the words ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ to describe themselves. These women do not speak to discourses of sexual rejection, but are instead paid to have sex with men. The physical diversity of the female escorts interviewed indicates an encompassing market for women of all ethnicities, body types and ages who can be paid for sexual services.

³⁰ For example, Sanchez-Taylor states, “It is important for many female tourists to reaffirm their sense of ‘womanliness’ by being sexually desired by men. In Western culture, part of a woman’s engendered power comes from being a sexually desirable object for others(...) women who feel rejected in the West for being ‘sort of fatter and older’(...) find that in Jamaica all this is reversed as they are chased and romanced.” (2000, p.46).

³¹ Jeffreys (2010) writes a scathing ‘critique’ of female sex tourism literature, including (but not limited to) suggestions that female sex tourism cannot be likened to male sex tourism, and that white Western women serve as sexual playthings for impoverished dark-skinned men

³²BBW - Big Beautiful Woman

Within this present sample, I lean towards an explanation for the *appeal of difference* (and all it encapsulates within its deliberate vastness), and this in turn can cautiously problematise some of the literature discussing the ‘racially stratified’ nature of the sex industry as an uncontested fact. O’Connell Davidson’s recent analysis of bodily labour in the context of sex work, slavery and worker citizenship (2014) summarises a corpus of research that identifies race as a marker by which individuals are placed within a sex work ‘hierarchy’. Dark-skinned sex workers are seen as less able to command the sums of money expected by lighter skinned workers and are more likely to be stereotyped as ‘drug-addicted, mercenary, unclean and uneducated’ (ibid., p.520). This serves to demonstrate the importance of a radically localised address of how we understand the experiences of sex workers being researched.³² For instance, my sample comprises two women identifying as black and Euro-Asian respectively, and one black male escort. Completely absent, and in fact contradicting O’Connell Davidson above, are any discussions around feeling disadvantaged or subordinated on grounds of race or skin colour. Instead, darker skin is a ‘Unique Selling Point’; something which can be marketed and utilised to increase the pulling power of clients towards the escort.

Whilst I do not wish to detract from arguments around race, inequality and sex work, I refrain from repetition of dominant ideas when the data suggest otherwise. Jessica, a black escort, alludes to the heterosexual beauty mandate discussed earlier, speaking of how she’s known ‘so many beautiful women’ (who fit the white, slim, young and attractive description) who at times struggle to see enough clients. She ascribes this to the levels of competition within that physical category. For Jessica, advertising as ‘ebony’ is a marketing strategy to elicit clients who wish to visit someone with a UK minority skin colour.³³ This latter point is important and I used the phrase ‘cautiously problematise’ above because of the context in which this research arises – in the UK indoor sector of sex work. Sean, a male escort identifying as black, elaborates on his differentness:

³²To reiterate, I am not suggesting racial hierarchies do not exist within the sex industry. For an excellent account of racial stratification in exotic dancing, see Siobhan Brooks (2010) ‘Unequal Desires’. Perhaps there is an argument to be made for the combination of race with the elevated status of the ‘escort’ in the UK sex industry, however I do not have sufficient data to lead this discussion. Nor do there appear to be data addressing the experiences of BME indoor sex workers in the UK that are not migration-specific.

³³ Data from the 2011 UK census presents the percentage of ‘black or black British’ members of the population at 3%.

Women book me for lots of reasons, but I think the main appeal is that I'm a bit different, I've got different hair, I dress a bit different. I'm not your average looking person, although in London, there's not really an average, but you know what I mean. (Sean)

Researchers examining the phenomena of female sex tourism may well position Sean and Jessica as the exotic 'other', reframing their appeal as the romanticising or pursuit of 'hypersexual' black bodies (Kempadoo, 1999, p.2004). However, within the UK context of the sex industry more broadly, coupled with accounts given by other escorts, I instead suggest that Sean and Jessica's 'appeal' could also be the 'appeal of difference', not necessarily as the pursuit of a racialised stereotype. Sean's words introduce a wider agreement amongst interviewees concerning the need to be different in order to stand out in the sea of escort profiles – for instance one man relays how women have booked him because of his strong Scottish accent, which they find appealing. Likewise, Violet openly advertises an unusual natural hair colour as a 'selling point' to further attract clients, and details how some men book her on this alone. Meanwhile Eva capitalises on her height (nearly six feet tall) in her profile, and iterates how this connects her to certain clients. 'Alternative' appearances are marketed by Autumn, whose shaved head, tattoos and piercings yield clients who specifically seek such differences from mainstream appearances. It would appear, within this admittedly small sample, that difference is viewed positively, *as marketable*.

However, herein lies the danger of associating (or conflating) the pursuit of difference with the fetishisation of certain characteristics. The words of Lois are most apt here: 'some clients just want something they've never had, so it might be the huge boobs, or the sex act they've never tried, or whatever'. In these instances, escorts contradict notions of the sex industry as 'McDonaldized'; instead, differences are valuable commodities. To complement an assertion from the previous chapter, both male and female sex workers act as conduits for a more expansive sexual experience, and it appears variety is an important aspect of this.

5.3 Differences in work boundaries and perceptions

5.3.1 Controlling encounters

This section addresses the role of control within the escort-client dyad – who has it, how it is maintained and whether this is gender-dependent. Atchison et al. (2015, p.1) asked sex workers and clients identical questions about ‘who sets the terms of service’ and who holds the power in the interaction, concluding that two thirds of sex workers ‘agreed or strongly agreed’ they controlled the encounter with 60% of clients corroborating this. This present analysis aims to go one step further, introducing gender differences to ascertain whether it is the sex worker per se who tends to remain in control, or if this is in fact variable and gender-influenced.

It appears that some key differences exist between *how* women and men control their encounters. Female escorts, unlike male counterparts, tend to list the variety of services available, in advance of the booking, usually on their advertising page. Nine of the ten women interviewed had some form of ‘services’ list clients could consult prior to getting in touch. Autumn describes this as crucial to her work, and when a new client contacts her, she specifically asks ‘have you read my website?’ to ensure all service boundaries have been acknowledged. These lists not only filter out unsuitable clients, but state, in black and white, what is and is not available within the client-escort meeting. Service lists, as the previous chapter attested, are entirely absent in male advertising, replaced instead by occasional covert or code language, although in the main leaning toward vagueness. Disparities exist also with regards to reviews³³. Only female escorts discuss being ‘reviewed’, and these reviews aid the level of control women command over the encounter:

To be honest, I’ve got so many reviews now that it [bad hygiene] doesn’t really happen much at all. (Lois)

The words of Lois validate one of the key claims of the previous chapter – the idea of the professionalised female sector as bound by norms which regulate consumer behaviour. For Lois, having an identifiable respectful client base online contributes to the level of

³³ ‘Reviews’ are client testimonials of the paid-for encounter and include details such as booking duration, cost, rating out of ten as well as whether they will likely return. See Huff (2011) for a netnography, Pettinger (2014) and Sharp and Earle (2003) for specific ‘field report’ discussions.

comfort and control she can enjoy within her work. Implicitly, too, women control what they will and will not provide, and this is spoken about in the context of photographs, most notably ‘uniforms’. Nadine and Violet choose not to have photos in the vein of PVC or roleplay accoutrements, preferring instead to advertise a more ‘natural’ girlfriend experience, or GFE, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In addition to controlling the terms of the encounter before it has commenced, some women assert control over who they will and will not see, again, something which is not present in male accounts. In concert with Sanders’ (2004, p.565) findings, the women I interviewed sometimes held ideas of the ‘types’ of clients that may prove problematic. For Elaine, she found stating ‘no Asian men’ on her page helped eliminate men with whom she had previously had unpleasant interactions, with one woman choosing to impose a lower age limit:

no under 28s (...) plus it’s my self-esteem as well. I’m not actually that confident in my looks so I tend to think if they’re older than me then I do feel more beautiful. (Eva)

Both Autumn and Carla recount how men asking for services they are not willing to provide triggers concern (and refusal to see the client) whilst eight of the women spoken to adopt a range of preventative measures to avoid a repeat visit from an unpleasant client, best encapsulated by Eva:

I can tell exactly who I want to see and who I don’t want to see. Like the guy who’s coming at four o clock I have stored as Keith Nice. If I’ve given them the surname Nice then I know I want to see them, if I’ve given them, like the guy that smelt really bad, he was Peter Reeks, so I won’t see him again. (Eva)

Before, during, and after the encounter, women employ a range of mechanisms which enhance their sense of control over their work; the role of upfront payment will further strengthen this assertion.

Being paid in a timely fashion is cited as desirable amongst female escorts, as the later section of this chapter ‘positive encounters’ ascertains. For women, being given payment, or asking for payment very soon after the booking start time is integral to maintaining the boundaries of the transaction, as well as establishing the physical shift from conversation to the initiation of intimate contact. Lois describes how there are ‘loads’ of terms for payment, ‘the paperwork, the readies’ and this part of the encounter

occurs in the living area of her flat, after which they can proceed to the bedroom. Carla is bound by the terms of her agency, which dictate she must obtain her fee immediately, and send a text message when she has been paid and all is well.

For both women and men, working for an escort agency presents a mixture of positive and negative impacts upon their working autonomy. The most commonly cited problem revolves around not being able to ‘screen’ clients themselves, and in less scrupulous establishments, this could render the escort vulnerable. Jessica speaks with disgust about her first agency who would send her out ‘to anyone’, and sometimes she would be met with surprise because the agency lied about her appearance to secure the booking (particularly problematic because Jessica is black, and clients could be expecting a blonde, white woman). Likewise, Zack displays discomfort around the marketing strategy of his escort agency who ‘tout’ him as a stripper, and showcase photos of him in poses he feels are incongruent with his personality. However, these issues seem to be situationally specific, and both Carla and Sean detail good relationships with their agencies whereby their wishes and autonomy are respected. Carla relays the power she possesses to say ‘do not send me to see that client again, I do not want to see him again’ whilst Sean’s agency ‘are cool, nah, I say when I can work and when I don’t want to, and it’s up to me what happens’. It is clear from the brief discussion that agencies can enable *and* constrain the relative power positions of their workers, male or female, and this is dependent upon their professionalism.

The presented evidence suggests women engage in highly structured interactions which engender greater levels of control within their encounters. Pre-prepared service lists, availability of reviews, the ‘scripted’ or routine-based liaison and the shared ‘code of conduct’ which exists between female workers and male clients mean women, on the surface at least, occupy positions of power in the paid-for encounters. Men, conversely, provide less tangible evidence of controlling the encounter. Perhaps this demonstrates a further outcome of the casualised male escort market discussed in the previous chapter; or perhaps it indicates men already occupy a position of power afforded by gender – the patriarchal dividend.

5.3.2 Boundaries and fluidity of paid-for 'time'

Brewis and Linstead (1998) draw upon concepts of time and space presented in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and transpose these concepts of smooth space and striated space onto time management within the sex industry. Specifically:

In smooth space, time flows, but in striated space it ticks, and the artifice of the successful sex worker is in making this ticking clock time seem to flow. (Brewis and Linstead, 1998, p.227)

These concepts are useful throughout this section. 'Smooth space' and 'striated space' draw upon feminine and masculine notions of time. Smooth space, where time *flows*, is most often associated with the feminine domain whereas striated space, where time *ticks*, is more readily associated with masculine time. The flowing time represented with smooth space can be likened to the spheres of private, 'intimate' time whereas the ticking time in striated space is evident in contexts of work and commerce, where time is measured and clocked.

Female sex workers, if they are to be successful, need to create the illusion of 'smooth' time (for example, private intimate time) when the reality is that time is striated (it is measured; clients pay for specific allotments of time). Female sex workers need to ensure the *flow* of time within the encounter, not the ticking. Throughout their paper, the authors draw upon masculine and feminine notions of time and conclude that female sex workers and male clients actually subvert these time delegations. Women workers occupy 'male' striated time in sex work, because the encounter is time-dependent whereas their male clientele desire the feminised 'smooth' space associated with 'private' and intimate time. In other words, female sex workers need to manage paid-for time in such a manner that male clients enjoy the freedom from 'ticking' time, relief from the constant awareness that one is 'on the clock'.

The concept of time – what it represents and how it is managed, features across all accounts in the present research, female and male; hardly surprising given that escorts operate from the understanding they are being paid for their time. The novice sex worker and time serves as the springboard for this discussion, beginning with Carla's elaborate time expenditure researching escort agencies:

I started doing some due diligence. Did lots of research. Found out what the top agencies were by going on to group forums and also just

basically googling and then just monitored those agencies, probably for about a year to be honest. (Carla)

Carla's thorough research paid off, and she entered the escort market with significant knowledge and realistic expectations. If we compare this to the early experiences of Eva, the disparity is obvious. Eva suffered multiple occasions of *time-wasting*, (a topic expanded on further into this chapter) and she ascribes this to being 'green' and not entirely cognizant of the merits and pitfalls of the market she has placed herself in. Carla sits as the antithesis to this, despite them sharing the sex worker 'novice' status. Carla's experiences are very different to Eva's, precisely because of the amount of time she spent collecting knowledge prior to escorting. Beyond the initial experiences after becoming an escort, a clear discourse around the meaning of 'work time' surfaces, detailed below.

For women, time is a valuable commodity which they seem to be more preoccupied with than male escorts. Women are conscious of the cost of their time and are similarly aware of the male client's need to receive 'value for money' in their purchased time.

Women speak of time-squeezing and abusers of time below:

coming in to the session with a very, very clear game plan of how they want to go and there will be a lot of high pressure and almost like they're on a timer. Like, I'll do this position for one minute 30 seconds then change. (Autumn)

in that 15 minutes do the whole Kama Sutra and they can be quite rough. (Eva)

I'll start mentioning, once they're over by a couple of minutes I'll start saying, we are pretty much at the end of our time, is there anything I can do to get this to where you want it to go? And like then, five minutes after that, if they're showing no signs of finishing up and leaving, then I will start dropping some heavier hints, and if a session overruns by ten minutes, at that point I will say, look I'm sorry, I have to end it because, you know I'll say I've got someone else coming, even if I'm not. (Autumn)

He used to take the piss with timekeeping basically (...). Every appointment we had he would spin it out longer and longer and longer. Say if it was a three-hour appointment, it would be at the very least half an hour over, possibly more. (Lois)

I don't run over time. Loads of my other friends with private bookings, tend to, oh I was paid for an hour, but I was there for about an hour and a half. I'm like, no, no. If they pay for an hour they're going after an hour. (Carla)

The agency at the time there [had] a fining procedure in that if you arrive late or if you left late you would be fined five pounds depending on the time, how long you were. (Elaine)

These accounts are not paralleled in male escort testimonies, and it may seem logical to assert that gender plays a fundamental role in how time is manipulated (by escort and client); however, at this stage I am reluctant to make that assumption. Instead, returning to the overarching theme of the previous chapter, I suggest that time appears to be more crucial for female workers *because* they tend to rely on escort work as their sole income. Therefore, time is necessarily a consideration.³⁴ That this is not reflected in male accounts adds further support to the casualised / professionalised disparities between ‘straight’ male and female escorts.

The issue of time *dragging* is reported by both men and women, and again, this is not reducible to gender, but to human dynamics more generally. Incompatible personalities are discussed in further detail as this chapter progresses; for the purpose of this theme, it needs to be noted that human connection (or lack of) contribute the most to time described as ‘painful’ or ‘awkward’ by participants. Both men and women recall how clients can dictate, and striate, their booking time beforehand, and this is seen most obviously in the realm of fantasy play. Rob describes how he has received ‘whole word documents’ describing desired roleplay encounters, and George echoes this. Interestingly, both men (if we return to the premise of Brewis and Linstead, 1998) are told how the time will progress, yet need to engage with the more feminised ‘smooth’ time illusion of time flowing. In these instances, it might be pertinent to suggest that sex work more broadly requires the façade of smooth, flowing time and this is irrespective of escort gender.

The boundary between ‘work’ time and the rest of escorts’ lives is subject to slippage, and again, it is difficult to conclude precisely that this is more prevalent among men or women. Consider the following:

When you are here virtually 24/7 in four walls and you are waiting for the calls, what have you got, the TV, music, fair enough I've got my cats so I can talk endlessly to my cats and they are not going to turn

³⁴ There is also an argument to be made about female time considerations more broadly. For example, Gambles et al. have written a volume concerning the ‘work-life balance’. Despite growing participation in paid work, women report less ‘reciprocal change among men, particularly in terms of their participation in care and unpaid domestic activities’ (2006, p.4) and expectations that women service the demands of the domestic sphere and men the demands of paid work (2006, p.72).

around and give me a lot of grief but it can on quiet days be lonely.
(Elaine)

But to me, if I've put time out of my life to work I want to earn at least £600. £500, £600. I want to earn that, and the only way I think of earning that is, my rate and my service (...) I usually work weekends.
(Jessica)

Both Jessica and Elaine describe how escorting impacts upon time not usually associate with work (for instance, waiting for work to 'come in', or weekend working – although this is becoming more common). Jessica sets a financial 'worth' on her time, and Elaine later divulges that she frequently misses out on seeing friends in the 'off chance' an escort booking arises: 'it can affect social life because if I get appointments and I have made arrangements then I will just say sorry I've got appointments'. For men, too, 'work time' can eclipse 'downtime', although this is less significant because of the relatively small amounts of time male escorts tend to work. Jason speaks of one occasion where he 'was in the doghouse' with his partner because he had (unknowingly to her) already committed to an escort booking when they were meant to be going somewhere as a couple. Further evidence of this is found in the emotional labour of George, Zack and Rob, as discussed in the previous chapter, whereby experiences within escorting 'bleed' into the mental and physical fabric of daily existence.

Finally, one area where men and women *do* demonstrate different responses to concepts of time is witnessed in the realm of *unsatisfactory time*. Several men interviewed recall instances where they have offered female clients some of their money back. This usually occurs in the context of what appears to be a disappointing encounter. For example, Sean is conscious of a lack of rapport with one woman, and offers her his fee back, and this is mimicked by Gavin, who felt 'awkward' that his client had not 'had her money's worth'. Offering refunds for perceived unsatisfactory time is entirely absent in female accounts. Instead, the only occasions female workers offered any form of refund was to *end* the paid-for time, or if the client wanted to end the time prematurely – a clear departure from offering refunds for given, or used time. When women speak of offering refunds, it is usually in the context of their own wellbeing alongside concern for their working reputation, best encapsulated by Jessica:

I've had to cut short some two hour bookings because I just think, I can't physically do this, and it grieves me to hand that £100 back, but really, if I'm not going to give him quality for the next 60 minutes it's the best thing to do. So unless it's someone that I click with and I get

on with and we can talk the way me and you are talking now, in between times, longer than an hour just really doesn't work for me. (Jessica)

Arguably, women tend to demonstrate greater control over time as well as concern with time, although collectively all escorts agree on how awkward or difficult interpersonal dynamics can impact upon perceptions of work time. The next section extends discussion to consider the positive aspects of escort-client encounters, and the intention here is to demonstrate the ways in which participants evaluate their working interactions.

5.3.3 What is perceived as a positive booking?

The very open ended question 'what are the merits and pitfalls of escorting for you?' was posed to all escorts as well as 'what do you consider to be a positive booking?' Although some diversity between accounts is apparent, the key (positive) elements are easily grouped into five areas: communication; consideration; client satisfaction; self-affirmation and finally, sexual attraction and pleasure. The encounter 'qualities' will be discussed hierarchically in relation to the frequency they were captured in accounts, beginning with the importance of good communication.

Women and men alike cite comfortable conversation as integral to a pleasant and positive experience all round. This is perhaps unsurprising given the dyadic nature of sex work, whereby strangers interact with few interruptions from outside influence:

We can chat and make eye contact, and that he doesn't make me feel awkward or put me on the spot. (Violet)

It's talk, and it's just not that uncomfortable conversation but a free-flowing conversation, I enjoy. (Sean)

A good conversationalist. I've been through loads of different conversations. (Jason)

Comes over friendly (...) to be able to communicate as well. (Elaine)

You can have a good chat with them. (Kirsten)

Clients who are 'at ease' is also a commonplace desire, as are those who can vocalise their expectations of the interaction. Lois appreciates 'someone who's willing to have a laugh and relax and not take things too seriously' and Autumn likes 'good communication, if they tell me what they like and what they don't, it's a lot easier than me having to figure it out'.

Collectively, developing a good rapport is conducive to a positive experience, enriching the experience for the client and assisting the escort in delivering a smooth, pleasant service. Consideration in various forms is also an important element of the encounter. For female escorts, good timekeeping, paying straight away without being asked and freshly showered bodies are all signs of considerate (and welcomed) clients:

He arrives on time, or is where he says he is, no hassle in the build-up (...) he's got payment there and doesn't try to pull a fast one (...) isn't drunk (...) finishes on time, and you don't actually have to say 'get out'. (Violet)

My favourite client is probably middle aged white guy, or middle aged at least British (...) and clean. Easy to talk to. Pays on arrival, he's on time, and it just goes smooth, and he goes. (Jessica)

Hygiene, absolutely (...) punctual, good time keeping whether it's the beginning or the end, being comfortable, telling what they might or might not like (...) politeness. (Lois)

People who do all the right things – be on time, pay up. (Autumn)

They show up on time, they're clean. (Kirsten)

Of note, male escorts do not discuss any of these elements. Perhaps timekeeping, cleanliness and timely payment are not prioritised for male escorts, or perhaps their clientele do not present these issues to begin with. This aside, it appears for women, these encounter attributes are important for several reasons. First, the ways in which women work (for example, seeing several or more clients per week, whereas men see several clients per month) means tardy timekeeping can impact more heavily upon female escorts' lives. Women dedicate greater time to working and lateness can impact upon other scheduled client appointments. Next, cleanliness, like timekeeping, is more likely to become problematic if in prolonged and frequent contact with bad hygiene. Finally, non-payment is featured heavily as a risk for female escorts, but not for men. However, whilst men do not recount these specific elements of consideration, they do discuss other ways in which their clientele could show them consideration:

I liked it when women were really clear, like, told you what they wanted and then you knew everything would be alright (...) so many of the women either couldn't, or maybe that's the wrong word, but so many women didn't. (Zack)

Knows what she wants and obviously not only paying for the service but to give a tip as well. (Nico)

Whereas female interviewees were more vocal about how their clients could ensure a pleasant interaction, men were more concerned with what I have grouped to be ‘client satisfaction’:

The woman coming, the woman climaxing. (George)

I’m a people pleaser anyway, I always have been (...) If I have just made someone, you know, happy and feel good about themselves, then that is great as well (...) that’s just what I’m thinking about now.

I don’t really think about the merits of the rest of it, you know, it’s now just routine, this is the job. (Rob)

For the customer to walk away feeling like they’ve had a good time, that they’ve spent money in the right way, they got good value for money in terms of conversation. (Steve)

Them having a good time, that’s really important. (Kirsten)

Kirsten remained the only female who directly referred to client enjoyment, however this was implicit throughout many women’s interviews. A certain amount of confidence in their skills resonates amongst women, perhaps most accurately summed up by Jessica, who says ‘not to blow my own trumpet, but my service is excellent’. Women take pride in their work, but are perhaps so entrenched within it, that frequent meetings with many different clients render client satisfaction an almost foregone conclusion. Men, meanwhile, struggle to attain significant numbers of clients, with ‘regulars’ elusive, and therefore seem not to have developed the same sense of confidence in their work displayed by female counterparts.

Whilst women display more confidence in their services, it is also women who receive (and value) the positive affirmations of their clientele:

The immediate satisfaction of someone leaving with a smile on their face, telling you that you’re wonderful, and I don’t think there’s many jobs that give you that at all. (Violet)

I’m very comfortable in my skin, despite being a curvy lady and when people say ‘oh you’ve got beautiful curves’ and I say ‘bit big at the moment, need to get to the gym’ and they’re like ‘no no, keep this body, don’t change anything’. That makes me smile, that makes me sort of glow inside. People complimenting you and telling you you’re lovely. (Carla)

When a guy says ‘oh my god that was amazing!’(Kirsten)

Only one man speaks of similarly self-affirming benefits of escorting:

At the end of the day they pay me to give them attention if you like, and I actually quite like doing that, I like being the old style gent (...) that's dying off and if someone can have a couple of hours where they can get that, that's kind of what I'm about really. (Steve)

Instead men are much more likely than women to cite aesthetically pleasing clients, alongside attraction as making their work more positive:

I like to see a lady who's smart, I mean, good looking in their own way, makes an effort (...) I always like to see a lady in nice lingerie (...) I'm happy if she likes to partake with me much as much as I partake with her. (Jason)

When you meet someone who is actually quite attractive, someone who is quite intelligent, you know someone who would actually picture yourself having a relationship with (...) who hasn't got all these horror stories to tell, it's quite easy flowing and you are having a laugh with each other (...) without getting a bit crude, it feels more like you're making love than having sex (...) they are the nicer situations you want to find yourself in. (Rob)

Well-dressed, clean, well-kept. (Nico)

If something else happened [Sex], I'd even put that down as a bonus as well. (Sean)

Good 'work sex' features in women's accounts, but is mostly absent when answering the question about what constitutes a positive booking; for women, a good sexual experience appears as an unimportant afterthought. For example, Carla is the only woman to state 'when you get a client who's amazing in bed'. Whilst pleasant, of much greater significance are the previously discussed rapport and consideration of the client. A parallel can be drawn here to Jessica, who was 'repulsed' by certain clients in the initial weeks of her escort career, to the extent she would not be able to continue with the services agreed. She speaks about this period of time wryly, offering that she now works 'professionally' and her mind-set has altered accordingly. Jessica's initial preoccupation concerning clients' appearance echoes the emphasis some men place upon this – most men have yet to accumulate significant numbers of clients to overcome what might be considered expected physical reactions to people one does not find attractive. John, the only 'career' escort of the ten men aligns with the female disregard for sexual attraction, stating a preference for one long term 'very unattractive' client over more attractive women on the basis of easy communication and fun when they meet. Lois captures the general attitude of female escorts (and John) when she states 'it doesn't really matter what shape, size, colour or age'.

To summarise, both women and men elevate the role of easy, pleasant communication within their work – this is regarded as essential to successful meetings and important across gender. Considerate clients, to some extent, are important to both men and women, although female workers are more likely to appreciate considerations which enable them to conduct their working days easily, such as good timekeeping and prompt payment. Client satisfaction, meanwhile, lies in the accounts of more male interviewees than female, with significant repetition of the idea of clients ‘getting their money’s worth’. Conversely, it is women who emphasise the very affirming nature of sex work and how compliments and appreciation from clients enhance their work. Finally, the least reported ‘perk’ of escorting is that of sexual attraction and pleasure, and is almost exclusively discussed by men. However, holistically, this is only of minor importance when compared to the social elements discussed above.

The next sections move away from the positives of escort-client encounters and instead examine some of the more problematic aspects of the work, thus offering some balance to how one might evaluate any sort of work in terms of relative merits and pitfalls.

5.4 Navigating problems within escorting

5.4.1 Scams and timewasters

The ‘timewaster’ is a frequently cited annoyance amongst sex workers; time, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a precious commodity to the escort, and timewasters can represent a considerable loss of earnings. In tandem with timewasters are scams; modes of extracting money from escorts with false promises of future returns, and these scams can take several forms. Some clear distinctions emerge between male and female accounts of both scams and timewasters, evidenced throughout this section.

One of the most prominent differences between men and women relates to fraudulent attempts of acquiring money from them; in this instance, it is chiefly men who are the targets of such scams. An oft-cited occurrence is the ‘bogus’ male escort agency who charge a fee to advertise the male escort with the promise of work (which fails to materialise):

I phoned up a couple of places and when I rang up and got the details and there was a fee involved in this, and I did send a fee off, and basically I never heard much after that at all (...) after a year of that, I did try another one and the same thing happened. (Jason)

Had a bit of a bad experience with an agency, well a so-called agency (...) got ripped off, not a massive amount of money in terms of sort of everyday money but it was £150 at the time which I could have used. (Steve)

John, meanwhile, was aware of these scams and therefore avoided the loss of money which six of the ten men interviewed incurred. As the only male escort with his own independent website, John relays how aspiring male escorts email him for advice, often stating they have paid several agencies hundreds of pounds, to which John is astonished. Some men learn from these initial scams, and adopt strategies of determining legitimate potential avenues of work. For example, Rob learned to contact prospective agencies ‘pretending to be a customer or a client, and then if they have set one up for me, then I know they are legitimate’. These issues are mostly absent in female accounts, with only two female escort recounting the story of being the victim of an advertising scam:

I was approached by Qype, they came up with this spiel about we can guarantee this we can guarantee that and it was a phenomenal amount of money to actually advertise on it. If you didn't get so many hits or so many jobs from it, you'd get your money back (...) even when you went on and checked the hits it was zero, I said, ‘it's like three months and nothing’ (...) and when we tried to pull out of it, it was me and another girl, it was like ‘no you can't come out of it’ so I stopped paying, and cancelled my cards’. (Elaine)

Escortresourcer, they get you to sign up, then they call you and say they've got an offer on, it's gonna be £400 for the year instead of £1200, I paid £269 because they were coming high on Google. Then what they do is, they have all this dodgy small print, they ring you up six months in, say there was a clause that you could have got out of auto-renewal at the start, and your ad is going to be auto renew, and it will be £3000. (Violet)

The disparity between successful scamming of many male escorts in comparison to a female minority is perhaps best understood within the broader context of the commercial sex industry; as the previous chapter detailed, female escorts can explore myriad opportunities to advertise sex work online, many of which are free. Adultwork,

for instance, is completely free³⁵ to set up a profile with many directories offering free listings. Agency owners are funded by the commission they charge on each completed booking (anywhere from 15-50%), and with so much free advertising competition, charging a fee for female escorts to 'join' would result in a speedy descent into obscurity. The straight male market, as has been discussed, is not presently dictated by typical supply and demand economics that are more easily discerned in the female sector. The 'market' is yet to be established, 'norms' are variable and this results in a minefield of potential exploitation for men trying to enter this sector of sex work.

Scams aside, timewasters and nuisance callers present difficulties for the men and women interviewed; some noticeable differences appear regarding the nature of timewasting, and to some degree, the extent of timewasting achieved. For men who rely on their own adverts for business, one group of individuals pose the most significant annoyance, with the final excerpt below demonstrating the next step in timewasting:

I've had quite a few men calling and they are all different types and all, wanting to do different things and there was one who wanted to worship my feet (...) I just tell them I am not into that sort of thing (...) I do it politely but if they keep calling back then I do get a bit, yeah, tell them straight basically. (Dan)

Most of it is phone calls or emails from guys wanting to rub my feet and suck my toes (...) and I'm just like, no, even if I'm getting paid for it I'm not into that sort of thing'. (Gavin)

I get this phone call, there is a lady on the phone, she told me she is 35 (...) got the address, went there, it was a guy who opened in the door, I said, 'right I got a call from a lady that I should be here' and he said 'yes come in'. I went in and said 'where's the lady?' He said 'she had to leave but the actual service is for me'. I said 'no it's not going to work like that'. I said, 'I do not do males, sorry'. He go like 'yeah but would you not even try I am going to pay you good money?' I said absolutely not (...) they kind of beg you for it, like, it gets a bit sick. (Nico)

Homosexual male nuisance calls form the majority of timewasting spoken about by male interviewees. This is not echoed in female accounts at all, although one similarity exists in that their timewasters are also men and nor are women immune to the malicious intent of timewasting when first entering sex work:

³⁵Although initially free to set up a profile, services beyond this, such as advertising a phone number, and appearing high up on searches cost money and are billed as separate services on Adultwork.

I got one guy who actually sounded really genuine and he was like ‘oh well, the arrangement that I had was that I would see someone and it would be like a date and I wouldn’t pay her until the next time I met her’. And I fell for it. I absolutely fell for it and met him in a hotel and obviously he didn’t pay me and then he just disappeared off the face of the earth. (Eva)

Of all the women interviewed, Eva offers the steepest learning curve from ‘green’ novice to professional escort, enduring some challenging interactions in her early working days. Likewise, Dan elaborates on an unpleasant encounter shortly after starting escort work, whereby a female client went to the toilets of the restaurant and snuck away, leaving him without his agreed fee, as well as the expense of paying the bill.

Although men and women accept timewasters and pests as part of the job, it is often women who are disproportionately affected because they tend to solely rely on escort income. Because of this, women quickly develop strategies to identify and traverse timewasting. Several women speak of how potential male clients create suspicion through their initial contact, and this alerts them to their potential as timewasters. Indicators such as curt or rude emails, not addressing them by name or expecting long protracted conversation beforehand (often of the titillating kind) all serve as warning signs to women. Nadine notes ‘I don’t mind answering a couple of questions and I will be polite, but I won’t keep on with it’, followed by ‘if they constantly text when they’ve got my number, before they have met me, I will ask them to stop texting me’. For Nadine, asserting her authority and limiting acceptable ways of communicating with her gives her power in the interaction.

Additionally, for some women, the use of feedback and review systems are integral to their work. One woman discusses the ‘search’ facility in her inbox, to retrieve all messages from one email address if suspicious this person has contacted her previously. Another describes how my introductory email was scrutinised in the same automatic way she screens each new client contact:

It’s funny when I saw your first email, I kind of clocked your username and the zero [representing zero feedback] at the same time, so part of my brain went right, zero, going to have to watch this one. And then I saw the name and I was like, right, this is a girl. It did make me laugh. (Lois)

However, even the more experienced escorts cannot completely avoid timewasters, and this is particular to offering incalls; with only a client’s phone number and his promise to

call at the agreed time, the female sex worker relies on intuition to guide acceptance of a booking:

The no-shows are constant, it's time and time and time again, you are sat here ready (...) so they get one extremely harsh text from me and they get blacklisted, that's it (...) the other day I had a whole day of timewasters, about 8 no shows. (Elaine)

The worst ones, are you know, the ones you've had a really good conversation with, and you might even get as far as a booking and they just don't turn up, and just don't contact you (...) whether they get some kind of kick out of it (...) but I have enough nice people to make me keep the faith (...) and the one line emailers, I try to like, kill them with kindness, so I will waffle on and on like a Jehovah's Witness on your doorstep. (Lois)

Sex work and intuition will be revisited in a later part of this chapter, when considering personal safety. Although only women report using intuition *prior* to the encounter, both men and women speak about their use of, and reliance upon, intuition during a booking.

5.4.2 What is perceived as a negative booking?

In a two-part series titled 'the worst thing is the screwing', Brewis and Linstead (2000a and 2000b) address identity management for female sex workers. I offer a counter-idea, as evidenced within my own data, to assert instead that 'the worst thing is the sound of silence', followed in quick succession by meeting with unpleasant characters. Poor hygiene features, as does ignoring the temporal boundaries of the paid interaction, followed by the potential to feel 'degraded' or at risk from violence within the encounter. Of note is the complete absence of negative comment about the sexual exchange itself and therefore I assert, for this sample of participants, the worst part is not 'the screwing'.

Corroborating the previous section relating to perceptions of positive bookings, whereby good communication and rapport was listed as the most desirable characteristic of a positive encounter, so too is 'bad' communication, or social awkwardness the most frequently reported aspect of a negative meeting. Consider the many excerpts below:

When you are not compatible and it's very awkward, you have got nothing to talk about, that's not very nice. (Dan)

You do meet people where you have just got nothing, you just can't have a conversation with everyone sometimes, different conversations are going to be limited with someone at some stage. (Sean)

You don't want to be with people where you feel on edge, or if you're treading on eggshells the whole time (...) especially if you have a client who is very long term and is anxious. (John)

Some of the clients I've met are actually quite difficult to be with. (Nico)

If you have not clicked and it gets really awkward. (Nadine)

For men and women alike, the socially painful situations that arise from incompatible personalities are relayed as the worst interpersonal aspect of encounters. Dan escalates these moments of social awkwardness: 'you feel guilty because you are taking money off them, and there's no sort of, say compatibility or nothing'. Guilt is captured across men's accounts, particularly in relation to the potential disappointment felt by female clientele, and sometimes accompanied by indignation and a loss of pride (as mentioned in the previous chapter whereby George was affronted when a client refused his offer of sex).

In tandem with interactional clumsiness, dealing with unpleasant personalities arises within all accounts, male and female:

I haven't met anyone so condescending in my whole life, and so rude, it was just like 'oh you are the last sort of person I would even think of talking to', and I had a couple of hours with her (...) I'm an electrician for the council, so I have to go to people's houses, so I kind of get abuse from all sorts of people. (Sean)

If they turn up and they're arrogant then that'll usually be like, once and once only. Then I'll be away, or I'll be washing my hair or busy, if people get in touch again. (Lois)

Being insulting, and really rude and demanding stuff that isn't on offer (...) and I really get annoyed, sexist, or racist or homophobic stuff in conversation (...) it's awkward. You know, you don't want to turn it into a political debate, but I'm not going to sit there and passively agree either. (Autumn)

Undoubtedly, unease, awkwardness and character flaws all relate to the social aspects of a client-escort encounter, again, moving away from the common trope that sexual contact might be the most problematic aspect of escort work. Kirsten reports feeling aggrieved when one client turned up with less than the agreed sum of money, which she begrudgingly accepted. George tells the story of enacting a fantasy for a female client

where he was ‘spoken to like dirt’. Unpalatable personalities, not the work itself, are more likely to engender feelings of degradation amongst escorts:

That first one didn’t speak to me, just threw me down on the bed and that was it the whole time and treated me like a piece of meat. (Elaine)

It’s not only really sad to hear other people’s reasons why they are doing it, but it is also quite degrading for yourself sometimes. (Rob) The final two cited elements that contribute to a negative encounter are specific to the female sample and comprise bad hygiene and poor timekeeping:

Not too much aftershave on, sometimes they squirt it down their pants (...) urrrghh, if somebody, if you get a mouthful of body spray that someone’s sprayed on their willy, you’d turn your mouth inside out. (Violet)

The worst thing I have to deal with is bad personal hygiene. (Eva)

What I find really stressful is, when somebody, with the time, and you have to start disengaging yourself, cos you know you’ve gone over and you want them to hurry up and put their clothes on, and that takes twenty minutes, I find that really tiring, you’re trying to be nice, and you’re not wanting to be horrible. (Violet)

Both poor hygiene and disregard for time constraints serve the same function for women: their boundaries of acceptable behaviour are breached. This can mean the female worker struggles to be as enthusiastic as she would like to be with her service (because of physical disgust driven by lack of cleanliness), or may need to assertively ask the client to shower. When time boundaries are crossed, the encounter becomes stressful as the escort walks the tightrope of not wanting to seem mercenary whilst trying to simultaneously retain control of the booking and manage her available time effectively.

Finally, the least common negative aspect of bookings concerns fear. Only Violet vocalised a fear of violence within meetings, stating ‘I just don’t wanna get stabbed’ and that this creates stress for her. It is worth observing here that of all the escorts, only Violet had encountered physical violence – a client threatened her with a knife then robbed her home. This incident reverberated throughout her subsequent encounters, unsurprisingly, leaving a residue of fear and heightened concern for safety. Violet’s fear is anomalous within the aggregate data however, and collectively, these snapshots of escorts’ perceptions of their work demonstrate that social, not physical, factors are most likely to contribute to negative encounters.

5.5 Health and safety strategies

5.5.1 Physical safety

This section seeks to examine the perceptions of, and negotiations around, personal safety within escort work. Drawing upon Kinnell's (2008) *Violence and Sex Work in Britain* volume, in addition to Campbell and O'Neill (2006) and Sanders (2005), the ways in which female sex workers keep themselves safe will be discussed. I add support to these discourses whilst also extending knowledge further to encompass straight male escorting and how this may, or may not, present different risks because of gender.

Sex work and violence are engaged in complex, non-linear relationships. Factors influencing these relationships pertain to types of commercial markets (outdoor versus indoor), legalities (working in multiples instead of lone-working) and gender (violence against women), all of which influence the risk of danger and prevalence of violence (Kinnell, 2008; Sanders, 2004 and 2005). Indoor sex work poses the lesser 'threat' in the traditional sense of violence, however my data demonstrates female indoor workers still adopt a range of strategies to keep themselves safe, in keeping with much of the relevant literature (see for example Sanders and Campbell, 2007, and Sanders et al., 2015).

However, even within the female sample, strategies of safety vary, and a continuum of behaviour from very cautious to moderately cautious through to least cautious is apparent. Carla appreciates the very strict safety protocols her previous escort agency enforced, which comprised a safety text within minutes of the scheduled start time: 'we had to send an S at the start and an F for finish of booking, and we weren't allowed to send our S until we'd been paid and were happy with the client'. Violet speaks of a range of measures to keep herself safe since being the victim of a robbery. Martial Arts based training is cited as useful for two women, and for three women a male bodyguard (usually their partner) is unobtrusively present in another room whilst a booking is underway. The intermediate strategies of reading warning sites such as SAAFE are reported, and Nadine relies upon the Adultwork feedback system to gauge the potential risk (alongside more general information) of first time clients.

The least cautious adoption of safety measures and mechanisms tend to coincide with a perceived lack of risk – for example Kirsten views working in a block of six flats as unlikely to result in 'an attack' because of other people in the vicinity, and Elaine

details some very loose time boundaries whereby suspicion would eventually be aroused should she not be in touch. The female escort least concerned with physical safety, ironically, is also the most active. Jessica, who can see up to thirty clients per week, admits sometimes arranging bookings on text message alone because of time constraints and is not ‘overly stringent’, but contends she is a good judge of character and that ‘even in a text, you can tell what a person’s like, how they talk to you in a text.’ Reliance upon intuition in conjunction with other safety mechanisms are implicit throughout most female escort accounts, something Sanders (2005, p.52) refers to as ‘instinct’. These ‘instincts’ are largely based on biographies of experience, whereby sex workers become aware of specifics from observing demeanour, consistency and demographic information amongst other client features, which can be translated into categories of risk.

When comparing the (majority of) more precautionary measures women adopt to the concerns and accounts given by men, a gulf emerges between gendered expectation (and prevention) of physical violence; for the most part, men simply do not consider themselves to be at risk of danger when escorting women. Female clients are more likely to be ‘vulnerable’ in some respects, not threatening:

They’re often clueless as to what to do, or some of them may have a limited experience (...) because they’re quite vulnerable (...), they’ve got various issues, they could be widowed (...) a lot of them with mental health issues. (John)

Honestly the stories I could tell you, I’d be here all night Scarlett, telling you about these women (...) and her, I just felt so sorry for her. (George)

However, in a similar fashion to female interviewees, some variability exists between men. Nico (working in close protection³⁶) is paid to be mindful of risk and danger in his mainstream work, something he carries over into escort work. Likewise, Rob says ‘I google where I’m going, so I know the area and what’s around’, exhibiting a greater sense of caution compared to other men interviewed. Whilst these two men demonstrate a level of consideration around their safety, this is not from women, but from other men. Nico describes one incident where a man answered the door instead of the woman he had spoken to on the phone, and is quick to assert that he can ‘handle himself’ and would not hesitate to exercise his physical training should the need arise. The combination of pest

³⁶ Close protection is a form of body guarding / personal security

phone calls from men and a more general sense of caution increase the vigilance of a minority of male escorts.

In keeping with an earlier part of this chapter discussing timewasters, whereby men are the perpetrators of timewasting for both female and male escorts, it seems men, too, are again the primary concern for male and female escorts alike. Academically and politically, any violence against male sex workers is discussed in the context of men with male clients (Scott et al., 2005); women as perpetrators of crime against sex workers (male or female) are absent in analyses.³⁷ Indeed, more generally, female violence tends to be discussed in the context of domestic violence and retaliation situations (for example, Saunders, 1984; DeLeon-Granados, 2006), whereby female violence against men is asymmetrical (Dobash, 2004). The lack of threat women pose is common to many male accounts; not one man reports a time where a female client made him feel at risk of danger, nor is this even discussed as a potential possibility. It would seem that on a physical safety level at least, men do indeed retain greater degrees of power and control. Women can carefully construct safe environments and conditions to work in and adopt preventative safety measures, whereas for men this simply is not a concern. And this concern is based upon commonly held ideas (and evidence) *beyond* sex work, whereby men are much more likely to be perpetrators of violence (Stanko, 1994; Stanko and Heidensohn, 1995).

5.5.2 Sexual safety

Reviewing a decade of sex work literature, Vanwesenbeeck (2001, p.243) summarises that condom use was ‘generally found to be high’ in commercial contexts. The use of condoms within sex work has received significant attention, and this section aims to add to this already vast body of literature by comparing condom use (and care of sexual health moreover) between male and female escorts. Through the decade spanning 1990 - 2000, the dominant concern centralised around the spread (and threat) of sexually transmitted disease; unsurprising in the context of the HIV epidemic. So too was attention largely given to street sex working (Barnard, 1993). Since then however (in the Western context at least) there has been much greater refutation of the idea of sex workers as conduits of

³⁷ Except in circumstances where violence erupts between working women

disease. Greater recognition exists for how indoor sex workers engage in consistent condom use for practicalities, health and psychological reasons (Sanders, 2002).

I found male interviewees offered a murky depiction on the use of condoms with clients;³⁸ collectively, male accounts suffered a lack of cohesion or consensus of standard practice. This sits in opposition to the very rigid boundaries women spoke of concerning sexual safety, for instance:

Sexual clinic is every two months and I get fully screened, so even though I don't do anal, I still get fully screened all of the time. They give me a load of grief for the oral without. (Elaine)

I don't have sex with anybody in my life, without a condom (...) I think it's best all round (...) that's the only way I can be sure I'm being responsible for myself and for my clients. (Violet)

Many female escorts speak about sexual health testing in some context. This narrative, conversely, is present in only two male trajectories, with a third man, George, who in his own words had an 'oh shit' health scare which prompted a visit to the doctor.

Only one female interviewee offered 'bareback'³⁹ sex to clients, with the rationale:

A lot of my older clients, they've never worn condoms their whole life. If you try to put a condom on, it just goes. So I do have sex without condoms but I get checked all the time and I have my certificates and it's never been a problem. (Eva)

Eva is very much the exception however, with the remaining nine women offering penetrative sex with condoms, and one woman who insisted on protection for oral sex too.

Male accounts demonstrate a much greater variety of sexual health practices, for instance:

I wasn't using bags or anything. I used to offer it every time. And I used to work on the theory that they were honest. I didn't think for one minute one of them would have the clap or god forbid, anything like that...but it was on the spur of the moment, because for me it was a macho thing [...] you've got a raging hard on, you get your cock out, I say 'yes, no?' you know, half of them, yes, half of them, no. (George)

³⁸ This murkiness is apparent in the work of Bimbi and Parsons (2005) concerning 'barebacking' among male sex workers who advertise on the internet

³⁹ Bareback is slang terminology for unprotected sex

Condoms not much, well, stripping, there was never really any discussion. Sometimes the woman had something, so we might use them the first couple of times but then in the morning, or later on in the whatever, we wouldn't. That was quite common I remember. When I signed up with the agency though, I'd decided to be a professional, so the wellies always came out (...) you'd be amazed though at the number of women who just aren't that fussed or don't want you to use (...) I don't think it was dodgy no, I think they just wanted it to feel a bit more like someone they had met who they hadn't paid, a bit more how it might be in the normal world. (Zack)

Clearly then, Zack's perceptions (and condom usage) mutate because the context in which the sexual encounter arises has changed – having sex for money when women approach him after a strip show was perceived differently to paid encounters organised by an escort agency. My commentary has focused upon straight male sex work as largely casual – it is interesting here that Zack implicitly charts his own shift from perceptibly casual scenarios to being 'a professional'. George, meanwhile, emphasises throughout his interview that he never really considered escorting as 'work'; thematically, direct links were found between men who treated escorting as 'work' and their corresponding condom usage. Consider the mirroring of some female accounts in the words of Rob and Jason:

Well regardless of some people's requests, I always protect myself so the sexual side of things, as long as I know I am keeping it clean and I am checked quite regularly, and I do that for my own peace of mind. (Rob)

Prepared, in more ways than one I was prepared (...), condoms. (Jason)

Somewhat alarmingly, several men divulge how their female clientele either passively receive, or try to orchestrate unprotected sex. Steve recounts one client who requested bareback because she 'wanted a child', to which he explained his rule of no deviation from protected intercourse. From these excerpts, it would appear some female clients are not overly concerned about protecting their sexual health, which Zack surmises as possibly making the sexual encounter seem more like a non-paid liaison. Female motivations for wanting unprotected sex are beyond the scope (and evidence base) of this research, however the discrepancies between sexual health practices between men and women are examined below.

As has already been discussed elsewhere in this thesis³⁹, female escorts work individually within a well-established collective sector of the indoor sex industry where rules and norms inform and guide the escort-client encounter. These ‘norms’ around protecting one’s sexual health are primarily practical – women cannot run the risk of contracting sexual diseases unnecessarily, which in turn impact upon ability to work and earn money. This is particularly salient when considering most women in this research engaged in sex work as a sole occupation. However, reasons can also be emotional, where the condom serves a dual purpose as emotional barrier (Sanders, 2002) thus creating a divide between ‘work’ sex and non-commercial encounters. Female escorts see many more clients than male escorts, therefore the risks associated with unprotected sex are correspondingly greater. For instance, if we compare George’s 23 clients over an 18-month period to Violet’s weekly average of ‘between 5 and 8’, it is evident that a female escort can see the same number of clients in one month that a male escort might engage with across a whole year. Condom use among indoor sex workers is viewed as an industry standard, both for female advertisers and men who see men. Established sites such as Punternet refuse to tolerate any discussion related to ‘bareback’. The straight male escort, however, has no place in these online spaces (quite literally, in some cases, for example Punternet also prohibited any discussion concerning women who purchase sex⁴⁰). Without these entrenched norms, straight male sex work continues to be in a state of flux, occasionally mimicking the female sector but more often reminiscent of a casual sexual encounter culture beyond the commercial sector⁴¹.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine the extent to which gender is implicated in sex industry power relations. As Lukes (2004, p.61) notes:

When we speak and write about power (...) we usually know, or think we know, perfectly well what we mean (...) we discuss its location and extent, who has more and who less, how to gain, resist, seize,

³⁹ See chapters 2 and 4

⁴⁰ Although this was 3 years ago and in a recent visit I observed a more inclusive environment

⁴¹ Examples of ‘hookup’ culture include websites such as AdultFriendFinder and Illicit Encounters

harness, secure, tame, share, spread, distribute, equalize or maximize it.

This chapter risks inclusion into the ‘who has more and who less’ category given by Lukes above, although throughout the offered analyses, I have stretched beyond gender reductionist explanations of power. Discussions of beauty and preparatory practices, health and safety strategies, time management, as well as perceptions of positive and negative bookings unearth the scope for a variety of power positions. Chapter 2 included some commentary whereby sex workers were depicted as passive (female) entities in the commercial exchange. However, the data in this present chapter contests this, offering further support to the many sex work studies which allow for, and recognise, agentic workers. Agency, like power, is a mutable concept dependent upon circumstance. For instance, male escorts are more likely to be victims of scams and unscrupulous or fake escort agencies. Conversely, women are more likely to encounter ‘real time’ timewasting in the form of ‘no-shows’.⁴² Scams and timewasters are not exclusive to sex work, however, and feature across many types of public-facing service work.⁴³

Women, it would seem, appear to be more in control of their working encounters when compared to men, and this is realised through establishing the boundaries of offered services, receiving payment upfront and strategic time management. Here, I offer the suggestion that women occupy relative positions of power by entering an already established commercial sex market (as the previous chapter detailed). Standards of acceptable conduct (of both worker and client) are communicated through personal web pages, as well as online spaces. Although first time clients may not be immediately privy to these ‘norms’ of expected behaviour, beyond the first entry point these behavioural standards are difficult to ignore. I suggest, therefore, that the structure of the online female escort market gives female service providers a favourable *collective power*, in comparison to men.

From a pragmatic standpoint, female escorts see many more clients than men. Thus there are many more opportunities for encounters to ‘go wrong’, although simultaneously, there are many more chances to ‘learn from mistakes’, which can translate into

⁴²No-shows are instances where a client has made and confirmed a booking, received information on where to go then neither turned up at the allotted time, nor called to cancel the appointment.

⁴³ Other examples include timewasting within the NHS as wasted medical appointments. Also, nuisance calls that many ‘help’ services receive, such as the Samaritans (See Brown and Maxwell, 2002)

management strategies. Tried and tested strategies ensure greater control over the working encounter, and in this instance, women benefit from the already established market. Although male escorts can observe how the escort sector seems to operate, and indeed, some male escorts adopt working principles in this way, there is a lack of discourse related to male escorts who offer their services to women.

Writing about gendered power relations, Connell details how the power of men is not a consistent staple across all facets of social life, offering instead that ‘in some circumstances, women have authority; in some others, the power of men is diffuse, confused, or contested’ (1987, p.109). Certainly, this present chapter reflects the essence of Connell’s words. Throughout, only two areas denote female disadvantage in comparison to men: the domains of beauty practices alongside safety from violence. Arguably these disadvantages persist across society, and are not specific to sex work: women are socialised into beauty practices in everyday life just as women are conditioned to be mindful of ‘dangerous men’. In this respect, the sex industry repeats and reinforces a societal perspective of expected behaviour for women. However, the collective power detailed previously means that although women are more at risk of violence through their work, they are also kept safe by the variety of protective mechanisms they can utilise, all of which can be readily gleaned from online sex work spaces. Thus, power is indeed circulatory (Foucault, 1980, p.98). Connell details that:

It is not a question of women being conceded an apparent power which can then be revoked, but of the hard relational outcomes of domestic conflicts and negotiations over years or even decades. (1987, p.111).

Although Connell relates specifically to power within the home, her words can be usefully applied to the female escort industry. The proliferation of new technologies, coupled with the passing of time and the establishment of acceptable behaviour result in somewhat entrenched expectations of how to be an escort, or a client. Collectively, these serve to enable genuine positions of power for female workers within the indoor sex industry. However, this conclusion is specific to *working practices*, and the following chapter considers the role of ‘stigma’ in heterosexual escorting. This progression offers insight reaching beyond the specifics of work, addressing gender disparities (and similarities) concerning the impact (or not) of stigma beyond the working environment.

6. Stigma

6.1 Introduction: the ‘whore stigma’ of the sex industry

This chapter is primarily concerned with stigma. It will examine the concept, function, application and implication of stigma in relation to sex work. First, the chapter will discuss the ‘whore stigma’ (Pheterson, 1993), before advancing toward a three-tiered analysis of stigma comprising its concept, impact upon reality and finally, its questionability.

Tier one will discuss stigma at the level of *concept* – exploring how male and female escorts perceive their work and the sex industry more widely. Stigma variations associated with male and female bodies will be located and discussed. Building upon these conceptual foundations, the chapter’s second tier details the *lived reality* of sex work stigma and how present situations and future plans are affected in concrete, identifiable ways. Here, the concern is with stigma in practice; the ways in which stigma mutates from the level of concept to tangible discriminations. Finally, the third tier of this chapter *queries* stigma, particularly the blanket use of stigma so apparent across much sex industry research. An analogy of stigma as ‘slippery’ is proposed and expanded upon here, where I hope to offer a tentative, alternative way of thinking about stigma in the context of the disparate stories told by female and male escorts during the course of this research.

Goffman, the oft-cited forefather in the scholarly study of stigma, contends that ‘a language of relationships, not attributes’ (1963, p.13) is required to understand how stigma operates within and is maintained through social interaction. Although largely perceived to be rooted in the tradition of symbolic interactionism⁴⁴ and indeed, his trained focus upon the daily minutiae of mundane social interactions sit well with interactionist

⁴⁴ Although contested by Collins (1986) who argues ‘the key concept for Goffman was the way in which individuals enact social ritual in the interests of maintaining the normative order of society’ (1986, p.107), and thus, unlike symbolic interactionists, concerned with how the self is negotiated out of interaction, Goffman leans toward the idea of no self. Self, in fact, is something acted because of social expectation, and not a reflection of an actual individual self.

thinking, Goffman was also concerned with the role of structure. According to Goffman, individuals can possess three categories of a 'mark' or 'blemish': the overtly physical, such as a facial disfigurement; the 'tribal', such as race; the moral, for instance, a thief. These 'marks' or attributes achieve salience only through interactions with social expectations, based against benchmarks of 'normal'. Prostitutes feature frequently in Goffman's exemplars of the 'discreditable', because the social blemish is not immediately obvious.⁴⁵ Goffman's work, and concepts⁴⁶ translate easily across time; this conceptual schema still carries significant purchase today. For example, one female escort, Jessica, tells me the story of why she prefers not to do dinner dates with clients, instead requesting room (i.e. private) meets only. One client 'turned out to be a real-life dwarf, an actual dwarf', and dining with this client obstructed Jessica's wish to 'pass', feeling the client's physically discernible (and discredited) 'mark' of dwarfism uncovered her own invisible blemish of sex worker.

When discussing stigma, unlike Goffman, Link and Phelan (2001, p.364) choose to use 'label' instead of 'mark' because 'human differences are socially selected for salience'. In contrast to how 'mark' or 'attribute' locates the stigma reference as residing within the person, 'label' refocuses attention toward the inherently social aspect of stigma. For Link and Phelan, what becomes stigmatised are the result of social processes, where labels are affixed (2001, p.368). In a later cross-comparative study of 18 separate models of stigma and prejudice (Phelan et al., 2008, p.362) three 'functions' of stigma are proposed as commonalities: exploitation and domination (keeping people down); enforcing social norms (keeping people in); avoiding disease (keeping people away). Although describing the exploitation/domination function as mostly race focused, they also include women within this category. Certainly, enforcing social norms and avoiding disease appear to be frequent rationales for what is often referred to as the 'whore stigma' - the loss of female honour as a result of satisfying 'unworthy' male lust, outside of the socially approved sanctities of love and/or marriage (Pheterson, 1993).

⁴⁵ To 'update' Goffman here, a street sex worker is 'visible' when she/he is working, although sex workers working via the internet maintain a constant, albeit usually low key visibility. For Goffman, the main focus is that unlike other 'blemishes', the 'prostitute' can try to pass as 'normal'.

⁴⁶ Although some of Goffman's language translates less easily over time, with much now deemed offensive and politically incorrect.

Pheterson (1993) cites seven aspects of female sex work which contribute to the greater idea of associated female dishonour, for instance, sexual activity with strangers, and multiple strangers. Being sexually knowledgeable and able to initiate sexual encounters, as well as requesting money for sex, satisfying 'male lust' when the liaison is impersonal, and being out alone at night dressing for male desire all reflect on the character of the woman. Dealing with 'brash, drunk or abusive men' (ibid., p.46) exacerbates this, as by default, the women must also either be 'brash' in order to handle unruly male behaviour, or conversely, may be 'unable to deal with abuse', feeding into notions of victimhood. Here we see a multi-level hierarchy of permissible female behaviour whereby 'whores' occupy the lowest rung and chaste, married females the top. However, beyond this hierarchy, normative gender roles are not only *constrained by*, but *contained within* the much greater prism of patriarchy. For Pheterson, abhorrence of transgressive female sexual behaviour needs to be read in the context of male desire, and although written in the early 1990s, much of Pheterson's analysis retains relevance today. However, if we borrow her seven criteria and apply them to male sex workers, the analysis seems to lose much of its (immediate) relevance. Sexual knowledge, multiple sexual partners, anonymous sex and being out alone at night, albeit not necessarily celebrated (though some may argue the point), do not carry the same moral judgements for men. This chapter seeks to explore these tensions, examining the role and extent (if any) of sex work stigma in the lives of the male and female sex workers interviewed.

Why is deconstructing and addressing the 'whore stigma' necessary? Shifting to more recent work, I link the 'dignity' described by Adler (2008) and Cunningham (2016), merging both with Pheterson's (1993) elaboration on the term 'honour'. Although sexual values are mutable, particularly across generations, this work demonstrates how discourses of honour and dignity can transcend time, particularly in relation to 'acceptable' sexual conduct. Adler (2008) describes a hierarchy of 'ideal' sexual conduct (much like Pheterson) emphasising the 'nature of the relationship in which sex occurs' revealing how sex, particularly 'dignified' sex, occurs only within 'normatively privileged relationship(s)' (2008, p.3). Tracing the historical roots of the dignity concept, Adler (ibid., p.11) charts the shift of meaning from dignity as hierarchical (for instance, imbued with social standing) to dignity as universal, something innate within all humans irrespective of class capital, occupation and so forth. Focusing upon specific case studies in law, Cunningham (2016, p.45) uses the latter understanding of dignity to highlight how

enforcers of international human rights law (judges, for example) adopt contingent and contradictory stances, declaring sex work *beneath* human dignity, and certainly incompatible with it. Here, Cunningham challenges such legal approaches, arguing against the production, maintenance and reproduction of this discourse which serves to exacerbate and reinforce the stigma of commercial sex. If dignity is inherent to all humans, but legal systems portray sex work as beneath dignity, then by default the sex worker is dehumanised (ibid., p.47). Similarly, Pheterson (1993, p.60) posits that a 'whore' 'sells her honor for money'. Arguably, dignity and honour are semantically different but represent the same concept, with the loss of dignity or honour seen as a necessary by-product of commercial sex. The dehumanisation of sex workers, or 'whore stigma', however, produces real risk and danger both socially and professionally (Bernstein, 2007, p.60). One such example is the frequently cited 'discourse of disposability' proposed by Lowman (2000) whereby violence against sex workers is ignored, condoned, or written off as an unfortunate job hazard.

6.2. Sex work stigma at the level of concept

6.2.1 Sexual promiscuity and the sexual double standard

Attempting to discuss gendered sex work stigma, without first attending to the stigma of sexual 'promiscuity' more generally, results in only a partial analysis. Milhausen and Herold (2001) assert that a sexual double standard exists - and is accepted - in contemporary Western society. This double standard, they claim, relates to the different evaluations of sexual behaviour dependent upon gender. Respect and praise are bestowed upon male sexual behaviour, whereas females engaging in identical activities receive derogation. The implication of men as 'studs' and women as 'whores' perhaps sits better as an ideological concept rather than rooted firmly in reality. However, as an overall sentiment (for example, if the media is utilised as the knowledge source) women are more likely to be branded negatively for what may be perceived to be 'promiscuous' sexual behaviour.

When male interviewees discussed perceptions and attitudes toward sex work, it tended to be an interpretation of the sex industry more broadly – not necessarily specific to heterosexual male escorting. I have suggested in the previous two chapters that this is

due to a lack of prevailing or dominant discourse concerning heterosexual male escorts; it simply does not seem to be part of mainstream thought or parlance. There are few discourses for the public to draw on in relation to the man who sells sex to women. Men were never asked to compare their experiences to female escorts (because this piece of work started off with a different conception, detailed in the preface), however some of the male escorts freely make comparisons to female escorts in their interviews. What surfaces in these accounts is the idea that women working in the sex industry are perceived *more negatively* than men doing the same job, iterating the broader idea of the sexual double standard introduced above. Rob describes this contradiction:

Well do you know it's funny, it's funny being a man and it's probably a bit unfair as well when you compare the two jobs with a male escort and a female escort. If I was female and I saw my family, like I've got two older sisters, if one of them told my family they were an escort, they would be frowned upon. I know that's unfair to say but it's just a fact of life, isn't it, at the end of the day what I am doing is male prostitution, but if a woman was to do that she would probably be branded all kinds of you know, slag, you know, dirty, all the rest of it.
(Rob)

The gendered double standard is implicit in Rob's account. He believes his sisters would receive a negative reaction for escorting whereas his status as a man protects him from derogation. Rob disagrees with this hypocrisy, but accepts it as 'normal' – the unfair negative branding of female escorts and female sexual activity as ingrained socially and societally, a 'fact of life'. Webb (2015) provides a historical account of what would today be called 'slut-shaming', from Roman times to present, highlighting the antiquity of shame afforded to women with non-normative sexual behaviour. Webb contends female sexual virtue is policed in a variety of ways dependent upon time-period, although the essence of this policing is consistent: women transgressing the norms of sexual restraint and virtue will be shamed.

Marks and Fraley (2006) offer an alternative assessment. Opposing the sexual double standard as a fixed entity, they suggest it ought to be examined in the context of social interaction. Instead of consistent demonstrations of bias regarding the sexual double standard, they conclude that individuals are less likely to confirm this bias when alone, however participants 'exhibited a double standard when evaluating targets collaboratively' (ibid., p.25). Individual rejection of collectively demonstrated biases is something I will later expand upon when discussing the idea of stigma as 'slippery'.

Several male participants reflect upon the hypocrisy of denigrating sexually available women. Gavin alludes to differences in attitudes towards male and female sex work, suggesting that for women ‘there is more of a stigma attached’ whereas ‘if a guy does it you know it’s like a pat on the back mate, tell us some stories (...) Yeah but then a woman says she’s an escort, it’s like, slut’. Sean echoes Rob’s words, although demonstrates a greater sense of disquiet concerning the status quo:

They [women] get a harder end of the stick for doing the exactly same thing as I do (...) Yeah, it’s not right. That is my only grievance (...) I deserve the same stigma as any other escort, regardless of male or female, to be honest with you (...) I just don’t feel – that’s the only thing I don’t like about all of this, is that, like my friend she has been doing it for years, she still keeps it a secret from lots of people, for the same simple reason that they might look at her differently and everything (...) Yeah, it’s like I know I could be sitting out with my friends having a drink, I get a phone call, it’s about work, what work, my other work, you got a thing, yeah I got one on Saturday – it’s just like passing conversation (...) That’s my only thing I don’t like about this whole thing. (Sean)

Sean describes how he could comfortably receive a phone call from a potential client when out with friends, and he would be able to discuss it using the vehicle of ‘work’. His friends would accept it as part of ‘passing conversation’. His statement ‘I deserve the same stigma as any other escort’ is perhaps more telling of his expectations of broader societal reactions in conjunction with his own interpretation of how his work should be viewed. Stigma is not rejected, but instead ‘deserved’. Sean can openly flaunt his side-line occupation, *because he is a man*, whilst simultaneously expressing beliefs that his work is ‘justly’ frowned upon. This presents a conflict; exercising one’s right to work in a stigmatised realm does not necessarily equate to personal rejection of the social norms that castigate the work itself.

Sara, meanwhile, encapsulates the sexual double standard that reduces sexually ‘promiscuous’ women to sluts:

By having sex for money, I no longer felt the guilt that was usually associated with one night stands. It was a business transaction, and I no longer felt like a slut. I was a hooker, yes (...) but I wasn’t a slut. (Sara)

Sara demonstrates her guilt concerning one night stands, but once she was being paid for sex, she removed the ‘slut’ label *from herself*. This suggests sex for purely pleasurable

purposes is unacceptable, however to sell sex is not. Reframing multiple sexual encounters through the lens of 'business' enables Sara to detach from negative connotations of the promiscuous woman. Sara complicates the idea of associating the words 'slut' and 'hooker', perhaps offering a different slant on Pheterson's (1993) earlier discussed 'whore stigma'. For Sara, receiving payment for sex elevates her self-concept from the shame of 'slut', to the realm of business 'hooker'.

6.2.2 Ingrained stigma perceptions of sex workers and clients

The 'whore', it would seem, invites castigation on the grounds of sexual and gender deviation. I have refrained from assuming the presence of stigma deliberately, and this is elaborated on later in the chapter, however, there is undoubtedly a substantial legacy of women stigmatised by commercial sex occupations. Historically, for instance, Pheterson notes the depiction of female prostitutes as contagions of venereal disease. Scott (2003), meanwhile, details how male sex workers are absent in these associations, despite a very visible male sex work presence in the 19th century (the time at which female prostitutes became aligned with disease). Whereas female prostitution was considered a social problem, and a corruptor of both social and moral health, male prostitution was consigned to explanations of individual perversion. This lack of public concern, argues Scott, could be explained through a volume imbalance of relatively low male sex workers in comparison to female workers. However, this does not consider the various historical 'junctures' where male sex workers amount to significant numbers, nor does it account for the consistent presence of male sex work in most societies (Scott, 2003).

Male prostitution was perceived as an individual moral problem in the 1800s, primarily due to homosexual connotations, resulting in the blurring of boundaries between acts of homosexuality and acts of sexual commerce (Scott, 2003). Male prostitutes were seen as a 'minority of perverts' (ibid., p.181), easily recognised as outsiders to the core moral populace. Female prostitutes, meanwhile, vehicles of disease and moral deficiency, were found to be 'normal' members of society; wives and mothers working in a clandestine fashion. Scott (2003) asserts how female sex workers were perceived as a threat to national stability, whereas their counterparts pose little threat because of the common perception of small scale deviant perversion. Only the relatively recent decades since the 1980s bear testimony to a mutated male sex work discourse

aligned with public health concerns, in the midst of the burgeoning HIV and AIDS crisis. Acknowledging this foundational legacy of attitudes toward sex workers, attention focuses now upon participants' own preconceptions of the sex industry prior to becoming involved themselves. Two men encapsulate the way in which sex work is conflated with drug use and moral decay:

You talk about escorting and what jumps to mind straight away is the, you know, prostitution (...) Drugs, people trafficking, child abuse and god knows what (...) all negative connotations. (John)

I was, my family brought up very religious, so sex, just sex full stop was a taboo. There was a series called 'Bread' when I was growing up, and there was the Lilo Lil character who was called a tart. I think I saw sex as a sin but I think prostitution was more to do with drugs and being desperate. (Zack)

The stigma imposed upon individuals who also pay for sex is present in several participants' accounts. Male clients tend to be discussed through the lens of perversion (similarly to Scott's assessment that male providers tended to be looked upon as individual perversions) evidenced by Kirsten and Sara:

I thought like a lot of people that it is dirty and its horrible people that do it and its horrible people that use escorts and I tut tutted along with the rest of them. (Kirsten)

I thought they must all be perverts. (Sara)

This indicates there is a social imaginary, or stereotype, of 'the client' who purchases sex. Both Sanders (2008) and Hammond (2011) note the relative lack of attention (academic or otherwise) given to men who buy sex. Both detail how discourses of sex work are built upon essentialist ideas of sexuality, and thus it is the transgressive female sex worker who is investigated (academically and politically).

Women who sell sex have traditionally been categorized as deviant whilst the men who avail of such services are merely fulfilling their biological urge. A Royal Commission Report from 1871 states:

We may at once dispose of [any recommendation] founded on the principle of putting both parties to the sin of fornication on the same footing by the obvious but not less conclusive reply that there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes, and men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse. (Sanders, 2008, p.7, citing Goodall, 1995).

Acknowledging a lack of academic and political context to sex purchasers until recent years, however, does not translate into an absence within public 'thought'. Many participants demonstrate an awareness of perversion, or 'seediness' attributed to the 'type' of person who buys sex. One woman illustrates the relationship between lack of knowledge and negative stereotyping:

At first I thought they must all be perverts. I thought people who watched porn were automatically perverts. People looking for call girls must be perverts (...) I didn't want agencies, they all seemed like pimps or traffickers...I didn't know anything about them. That was my prejudice based on lack of knowledge and my imagination running wild. (Sara)

Unlike many negative preconceptions detailed thus far, Autumn states 'I always felt very positively about it', before adding her sister worked as a stripper. Goffman (1963) might term Autumn as 'wise' in this instance, due to some prior insight into sex industry activity. Throughout Autumn's account, the ability to transcend stereotypical assumptions of sex work is apparent. Instead, she was concerned her shyness, not the sex, might make sex work difficult for her. Lack of prior negative assumptions are echoed by Carla, who was inspired by the Joanna Lumley character who reveals she is a 'high class hooker' in the film 'Shirley Valentine'.

Only one man discusses female clients when asked about perceptions. Dan relays concerns about 'the way they [might] sort of conduct themselves' and 'the way they dress (...), I don't like saying it, but common, sort of slutty'. For Dan, there was an expectant fear that women who pay for sex might dress in a manner that would make him feel socially uncomfortable. When asked if this was the case, he replied 'no, never, thankfully'. Multiple gender stereotyping is evident; the expected behaviour and dress of female clients is associated with 'the slut' demonstrating the sexual double standard in action. More commonly, men allude to how they never really considered women as potential purchasers of sex. Steve offers an explanation thus:

because its geared towards – the industry is geared towards them (women providers), males pay for exotic beautiful women but the women are less likely to pay for a man because they figure they can get a man [...] There is still that element, as much as we like to admit, there is still that element of sexism I think in terms of the view towards the whole industry. (Steve)

Men illustrate the societal policing of female sexuality more broadly throughout their interviews, and George offers an interesting contradiction saying 'a woman shouldn't

have to pay for it'. Here, we see a male escort vocalising an entrenched idea of what gender should and should not 'have' to do. George concludes women paying for sex is entirely unnecessary, despite being a provider of such services. Interestingly, he argues 'the next generation will be the internet generation (...) would they pay for it? No.' I contest this idea, and see the internet as an enabler and medium through which increasing numbers of people can sell and purchase sex discreetly and easily – female and male (Kingston et al., forthcoming). Finally, one male escort, Steve recounts an instance where one female client passed his details onto a friend 'which kind of surprised me, because I thought, you know, initially I thought she wouldn't say anything to anyone, you know, because of what is still perceived as a bit of a stigma'. Interestingly, the male escort assumes a 'silencing', conceptual stigma on behalf of the client, which is challenged through her disclosure to a friend.

6.2.3 Examining gendered sex work stigma

Continuing the conceptual stigma accounts, this section debates both the expectations and first reactions of others toward their work. Some marked discrepancies surface between female and male accounts. Most notably, it seems a downgrading of the word 'stigma' to 'taboo' is perhaps more appropriate when discussing straight male escorting, with some participants' accounts indicating even this is too strong a word. First, however, attention turns to the female body in relation to sex work, as this offers a context for male sex work and how it is perceived.

Thus far, being a woman, a sexual woman, and a sex working woman each present their own legacies of circumscribed sanctions demarcating 'appropriate' use and behaviour of the female body. Bell (1994, p.40) describes the active production of the female prostitute as a 'marginalised socio-sexual identity, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century'. The prostitute became the symbol of opposition to bourgeois ideals – the 'good wife' and 'virginal daughter'. Within the category of 'woman', dichotomies proliferated: good girl, bad girl; Madonna, whore; normal, abnormal; wife, prostitute. Bell elaborates on these dichotomies as emphatic of privilege and 'disprivilege', yet one cannot exist with the other. (1994, p.40). This nod towards symbiotic relationships permeates her work; the wife (chastity personified), serves to highlight the loose morals of the prostitute, who engages in sexual activity with multiple

people. Likewise, the reverse is true. Bell continues to suggest female sexuality had its own dichotomous coupling, that of functional reproduction as oppositional to prostitution, its inversion (1994, p.41).

Meanwhile Lewis (2012) draws upon Nussbaum's (1999) work concerning the role of disgust. Women's bodies become sites of disgust because of menstruation and childbirth; physical, animalistic processes not applicable to men. Thus, the male body is 'symbolically cleaner' (Lewis, 2012, p.225). Several women use the language of dirt and disgust, whether this is disgust around first being propositioned for sex, disgust arising from sex with unhygienic clients or disgust at the idea of clients using the same cleaning facilities as a child (Jessica). Discourses of disgust, particularly with how the human body is used or put to work, are discussed by Ashforth and Kreiner (2014) who offer a tentative analysis of 'types' of 'dirty work'. These 'types' of dirty work span physical, social and moral stigma. Examples of physical dirty work could include the mortician or the refuse collector, whereas social 'dirty' work could include medical professionals undertaking abortion procedures, or social workers. Whilst sex work is perceived as morally 'dirty work', it also includes aspects of the physical and social, resulting in three types of 'taint'. Unlike the refuse collector or the social worker, the authors claim, who are seen as more necessary in the 'necessary evil' idiom, moral dirty workers are instead seen as more 'evil' than necessary (ibid., p.84). Perceptions of sex work as more evil than necessary abound in many respondents' stories, resonating throughout this chapter thus far. Upon telling her sister about her escort work, Carla expected 'to be disowned', however she was pleasantly surprised when this failed to transpire. Instead, her sister allows Carla's young niece to stay for long weekends, elaborating how this would not be acceptable if her sister struggled to accept her work. Carla's expectations (and surprise) covertly speak to the idea of the morally destitute female sex worker – the values of engaging in paid sex rendered incompatible with the values of caring for, or more likely being a good role model for, a young girl.

Women's bodies are invariably the objects of focus within stock images used by media outlets, which illustrate sex work in a one-dimensional fashion; the scantily clad female outdoor worker leaning into a car on a darkened street. Skeggs asserts 'when something or someone is designated as excessive, immoral, disgusting and so on, it

provides collective reassurance that we are not alone in our judgement of the disgusting object' (2005, p.970). Unlike women, the male sex worker does not conjure up ideas of, or feature in, these repetitive images we are culturally exposed to. Perhaps this becomes the 'starting point' of sex work stigma; that cultural ideas appropriated over time significantly impact upon how we perceive certain phenomena. For instance, if the male body is symbolically cleaner, whilst free from the moralistic discourses of appropriate use, then it explains how perceptions around male bodies and female bodies engaged in identical sexual labour can be so disparate.

For male escorts who choose to disclose escort work, the most frequently reported response from confidants revolve around jocularity. Often light-hearted although sometimes quite vicious mockery permeates several male accounts. Indeed, sex work 'stigma' within men's interviews is perhaps more appropriately encapsulated by the word 'taboo', and demonstrates how elements of experienced stigma differ between gender. Dan tells of how he 'got a ribbing' from his male friends, who jibed 'no one will pay you!' but who were then 'surprised, by the amount that do'. A similar experience is offered by Rob, whose male friends wanted to 'hear all about' his stories, and he situates this with reference to his friends' stable lives comprising wives and children. Rob's work becomes a source of entertainment amongst his friends. George, however, reports a much more negative response amongst friends:

The biggest upset was my pals. And I finished up a bit of a loner really (...) a lot of them thought I was lying, and I just found myself distancing myself from them in the end. (George)

Given the testimonies of Dan and Rob above, perhaps the biggest surprise is that men were much more likely to be secretive about their work than women - which I return to later in this chapter, and in more detail in Chapter 7.

However, the reactions of George's friends demonstrate that to assume male escorts can discuss their work freely, and without fear from repercussion, would be erroneous. Koken et al. (2010) attempt a comparative male/female sex worker analysis on stigma, with one conclusion suggesting many male sex workers are truthful with their partners about their work. Female sex workers, meanwhile, demonstrate less openness with partners and are more likely to work in secrecy. The next chapter offers a direct challenge to this, refuting that women tend to work in secrecy. However, for the purposes of conclusions concerning stigma, the male and female accounts used throughout the work

of Koken et al. (2010) actually came from two different studies, with different research questions, and a considerable gap of seven years between the two sets of data collection.

Jane Nolan concludes thus:

As such, the analysis failed to fully untangle the intersections between gender, sexuality and the stigma of sex work. Furthermore, Koken et al. made no attempt to consider the similarities and differences in the particular forms of stigma experienced by the men and women in their study. (2015, p.7).

Nolan remedies these errors in her own work, offering a systematic, comprehensive examination of the 'whore' stigma addressing intersections of gender, race and sexuality. She concludes that heterosexual men suffer from the least stigma of all researched parties, and to a large extent, my findings corroborate this. However, the following section discussing shame adds some nuance to what might otherwise appear to be a definitive conclusion.

The previous chapter detailed how women are much more concerned with physical safety than men. Stigma can be a useful analytical tool to examine this with a different focal point. Whereas the previous chapter presented men as better able to defend themselves against problematic female clients (although this was reported as never an issue), we could also consider gendered stereotypes of the client who pays for sex. On occasions where women disclose sex work to family and/or friends, the most frequently reported reaction is worry concerning their safety:

He has no issues with it, apart from, there's the worry about whether I'm alright, if I'm safe, but we work around that. (Lois)

He wants to know that I'm alright and he's worried if I overrun. (Eva)

I think he does fret about me a little bit, which is understandable. (Kirsten)

Female escorts are viewed as potentially vulnerable in the commercial sex exchange, perhaps indicative of implicit ideas held about the male sex purchaser, whereas this concern for male escorts is absent. No men report friends or family members worried about their safety when alone with a paying female. The acts are the same, in terms of being paid for or paying for sex. Yet the responses of friends and family vary according to the gender of who is doing what in the commercial sex transaction.

6.3. Stigma realities: Gender disparities regarding the impact of sex work

6.3.1 Stigma consciousness, guilt and shame

Pinel (1999, p.114) attests how previous researchers of stereotypes assume 'uniform reactions to their stereotyped status'. Instead she proposes that people differ in 'the extent to which they expect to be stereotyped by others' giving rise to what she defines as 'stigma consciousness'. People 'high' in stigma consciousness, or acutely aware of the stigmatised nature of their group, are likely to 'forego opportunities to invalidate stereotypes about their group' which *may* lead to further stereotyping (ibid., p.118). The focus of Pinel's paper is the notion of stigma consciousness in relation to being female, however it is fitting here to borrow her term and apply it to some of the accounts given by female and male escorts:

If you can think of the last person out of all your friends, who would do this, I'm that person. Honestly, you would not think I did this. (Jessica)

My mum was so ashamed when I was stripping. No way I was gonna tell her about escorting, it would have killed her. (Zack)

Zack and Jessica are both very cautious about disclosing their work. It is clear from both excerpts above that sex work stigma is a serious concern; Jessica discusses perceptions whilst Zack reports stigma consciousness based upon the shame his mother experienced. Autumn relays a more mundane scenario where she might 'forego' the chance to talk about sex work:

As for strangers, it depends on if I'm in the mood to play twenty questions about it. I sometimes lie to taxi drivers about what I do because I take quite a lot of taxis to my outcalls (...) they'll make small talk, and it's always 'what do you do for a living, or where have you been tonight?' And if I just don't feel like answering the same sort of million questions over and over and over, I just lie. (Autumn)

In some ways, Autumn challenges conclusions drawn between the stigma awareness of one's group and the likelihood of passing up opportunities to increase awareness. Autumn adopts a blanket policy of openness about her escort work, and when she chooses not to disclose, it is for the more practical purpose of not wishing to engage in an impromptu discussion with a stranger. However, Jason's approach to stigma management validates Pinel's assertions, and he aligns his secrecy about his work with how he feels female sex workers might be similarly secretive: 'I don't know how many ladies who work tell their families or whatever'.

As detailed in Chapter 3, I purposefully avoided the word ‘stigma’ in my interview schedule, instead allowing for a more nuanced language to surface within interactions. I found that the language of shame emerged, and was more likely to be spoken about by men. Scheff (2014, p.724) argues how ‘the great majority of studies of stigma do not define it in terms of shame, most don’t even use the word shame and don’t cite any of the shame literature’. Scheff’s assertion is particularly pertinent when considering sex industry research, where stigma as a social phenomenon is more frequently discussed than the perceptibly intrapersonal emotions such as shame⁴⁷. Kaufman (1989) suggests that discussion of shame is taboo:

American society is a shame-based culture, but (...) shame remains hidden. Since there is shame about shame, it remains under taboo (...) the taboo on shame is so strict (...) that we have to behave as if shame does not exist. (Scheff, 2014, p.725).

The most commonly observed ‘stigma’ reaction within men is the capacity to feel shame as well as guilt, and this is realised in several ways. Six men detail how they feel awkward taking money from women, and Dan best summarises with his words ‘it’s weird actually, you know, as a man, you’re expected to pay for everything, but these women, they buy the drinks’. As the previous chapter detailed, three men offered clients their money back if they felt the booking was disappointing, further exacerbating elements of ‘guilt’ within the transaction for men. In relation to shame, responses are a little more complex, from flagrant flaunting of their escort status amongst friends (for example Sean, as previously detailed) to the shame George is subjected to by a doctor. This health professional passed judgment on what was deemed to be sex with ‘too many’ women:

The doctor said to me ‘are you having a lot of sex?’ I started laughing and telling him about it (...) He said, ‘can you do without it? Have you ever thought you might have a problem?’ (...) I said, ‘sex with what, 70 women, it’s not that much’ – ‘it is that much, that’s a lot’ (George)

For George, moralising discourses that might incite shame are imposed upon him, whereas for Zack, the shame is internalised, best captured by his words that his stint as an escort feels ‘like a noose’. The latter acknowledges the fear of repercussions, despite no longer escorting, and despite keeping his work a well-kept secret. Becker (1963, p.31)

⁴⁷ Some notable exceptions exist, for example Sanders (2008, pp.152-157) discusses shame and shaming in the context of men who buy sex and women who sell sex (2005, pp.119-120).

explains that public labelling is not considered necessary to experience ‘stigma’, because a process of self-stigmatisation can occur when people are involved in perceived deviant acts and behaviours. Comparing the words of Zack to those of Autumn is revealing. Autumn ascertains how her approach has ‘always been if people don’t like everything about me then it’s better that we find that out, rather than pretending to be someone else’. This stance is replicated by several women, with some excerpts featuring in the following section concerning stigma consequences. I offer a tentative penultimate conclusion that individuals who do not express, or agree with negative tropes of the sex industry are better equipped to manage or resist potential elements of stigma presented at both interpersonal and structural levels. Finally, I contend that blanket use of ‘stigma’ as an encompassing term can both mask complexity as well as present data inaccuracies across sex work research, an idea I return to more fully in section 6.4.

6.3.2 Gendered consequences of sex work and the threat to future plans

Here, I will draw upon Hannem and Bruckert’s exploration of stigma as ‘embedded in societal structures and institutions and enacted on populations via regulatory and legal policy’ (2012, p.49). Locating stigma within structures (instead of within and between individuals), marks a relatively recent shift to bring accountability to the role of wider society as a stigma accomplice. For instance, Biradavolu et al. (2012) adopt this approach, aiming to address (and combat) the stigma of HIV and sex work through structural interventions. Stigma is both socially produced and maintained via unequal power relations; this latter point extended below. Placing stigma as a site of study within individuals relays only a partial story; the role of policies, institutions and ideologies yielding the power to stigmatise are crucial to the analysis.

Whilst the above authors discuss structural stigma in relation to female sex workers and HIV (therefore engaging with participants navigating a double stigma), their assertions are equally applicable to some of the experiences recounted from several of my participants. For instance, three female escorts had either directly experienced, or experienced the threat of being ‘outed’ about their work via the media. This power imbalance is articulated in Violet’s account:

A journalist got this smart idea of writing about sex workers in the area and found my website and asked if I’d give an interview, and I didn’t

know how to stop them publishing anything, because I'm already in the public domain (...) In the end, I did a lot of googling, and I got in touch with Press Complaints, and they told me what to do.
(Violet)

The threat of being exposed in a local paper was allayed on this occasion, however another female escort, Kirsten, was less fortunate. An ex-partner sent anonymous emails to several members of her workplace, revealing her escort work. Upon consultation with a lawyer, who confirmed she could be dismissed for bringing the company 'into disrepute', Kirsten resigned. Very shortly after, a nationwide tabloid newspaper pursued her at home:

They stole a picture from my blog (...) and very nicely papped me outside the bins outside my flat...I'd literally gone out to put the bins out, and when I walked back round to my door, he was there, and there must have been a photographer, or hiding in a bush, because when it came out there was a photo of me looking horrific (...) and they used the organisation I worked for as the basis for their article. (Kirsten)

In both instances, representatives of the media usurp the perceived lesser power of the individual female sex worker in order to salaciously promulgate the wider message of shame. It would be inaccurate to refer to 'the media' as one homogenous entity, however, it is worth considering why it seems an almost foregone conclusion that media representations of female sex work will be negative.⁴⁸ The expose tabloid article written about Kirsten need not have been derogatory. Indeed, a completely different angle could have been adopted; that of a professional woman forced to leave her place of work because of (legal) behaviour she engages with in her own time.

Violet, choosing to be open about escort work, was confronted with a succession of barriers when trying to enter Higher Education. Despite including escort work in her personal statement, later in her degree course, she faced obstacles:

It [sex work] comes up on my criminal records check, even though it's not an offence, my occupation. That's the police putting it on, because of the robbery, and because I've had dealings with them, they hold my occupation on file (...) so the course have seen that, but they didn't realise I'm still active. (Violet)

⁴⁸ This issue surfaced in previous discussions with two female escorts (Redman, 2011b). One woman states 'even though things have liberalised over the last ten years or so [...] the media just love reporting it, but they will say it is vice, they will always put a twist at the end where they are showing you she's somehow gone bad for it, or come a cropper'.

Following this was a call for informed people to consult concerning her rights, because of a lack of clarity on whether she could be legitimately discriminated against:

I wanted to know where I stood, could the university discriminate against me? Where did I stand? I rang the ECP⁴⁹ and they weren't sure, and I rang an Outreach, and they weren't quite sure. They were 'ooh they shouldn't be doing this to you' and I was like, well that's no help at the moment. At the time, the support I needed, I needed someone to tell me what my rights were. (Violet)

Violet's struggle continued, and she eventually consulted the professional body associated with her degree course, who ultimately 'were fine with it' but said she 'might get complaints' if it became common knowledge.

Violet's experience with unclear university protocols is repeated in data from the recent 'Student Sex Work Project' (2015) conducted by Swansea University. Sagar et al. (2015, p.405) note that 'universities had no specific formal processes in place that staff can carry out if a student were to disclose working in the sex industry'. Of the Welsh universities included in the study, two institutions responded they would 'take action' against the student if it was deemed the reputation of the university would be put at stake. Further complications arise if the degree course is accredited by a professional body, and the language of discipline is utilised over the language of support. Although Higher Education institutions have a duty of pastoral care and support towards students, this can be 'forgotten' in favour of 'protecting' the reputation of the establishment.

Sex working staff members in Higher Education are also subject to conflicting penalties. For example, compare the experiences of former sex worker Dr Brooke Magnanti (detailed in Chapter 2) and the recent media harassment of Professor Nick Goddard⁵⁰. Dr Magnanti endured many years of media denigration, however she remained in her University post and has engaged in sex work activism. Nick Goddard, meanwhile, received ridicule and mockery from the media, was pursued at his home and workplace and was forced into resignation. Both high profile 'examples' serve to demonstrate that although the 'whore stigma' idea is attached to female bodies, reality of sex work stigma is not necessarily gender specific. Perhaps the lack of public imaginary concerning male involvement in the sex industry (discussed earlier) is relevant here.

⁴⁹ English Collective of Prostitutes

⁵⁰ Nick Goddard was forced to resign from his long academic career as professor at the University of Manchester, when a student 'outed' several pornographic films in which he featured.

Nonetheless, Cusick et al. (2009, p.185) note that ‘the media has no legitimate role in setting benchmarks for acceptable behaviour within the academy’ but that if ‘institutions penalise student (and staff) involvement in commercial sex subsequent to such reports, then the media has a profound effect via elite decision makers within institutions’. Violet’s experiences within Higher Education support this stance, and she was refused one placement because of escort work, with ‘but what if the papers got hold of it?’ cited as one of several reasons. These ideas will be returned to more fully, post-thesis, and feature here as an example of institutionalised stigma and its potential impact.

The ‘impact’ of sex work, through either openness or being outed is largely discussed in contexts of family, or conversely via the implicit threat to future plans. Family reactions and impacts are explored in the following chapter and thus the remainder of this section focuses upon the perceived threat of sex work to the future plans of interviewees. Structurally, leaving sex work is potentially problematic because of the gap this creates within working histories. As Chapter 4 discussed, the majority of female escorts engaged in sex work as a sole occupation, whereas only one male escort reported doing so. In some ways, the casualised market protects ‘straight’ male escorts from such issues, as nine of the ten men were only able to escort as a side-line venture. Thus, the CV gap issue becomes female oriented (within this present research). I include the previous caveat, because male sex workers who see men are able to sustain sex work as a sole occupation and therefore can experience the same structural problems of being unable to declare their work as a legitimate occupation. However, Bar-Johnson and Weiss (2015) contend that CV gaps are not the only barrier to moving away from sex work. For example, male sex workers in Prague can find themselves in situations where significant gaps in health insurance payments have occurred, and therefore entering mainstream work can be problematic because of the debt they then face. This article demonstrates that future plans beyond sex work are not necessarily constrained by stigma alone, but by scenarios that might arise through other forms of non-declaring self-employment.⁵¹

Only two female escorts (Violet and Kirsten) are vocal about the threat of sex work to future plans. Similarly, only one male escort, Zack, is concerned that his escorting past might affect him negatively in his future, though his worry centres around relationships

⁵¹ Although beyond the scope of this thesis, I want to add that many female escorts talked about paying tax, despite no questions around tax

as opposed to work opportunities. Only Kirsten reports a sense of feeling ‘trapped’ in sex work, and this is because of the tabloid expose which catalysed her shift into full time escorting:

The problem is, with the ‘outing’, it’s made me really nervous applying for jobs (...) I’m still on the internet, and that article comes up if you google me, and it got republished everywhere, it went into loads of papers (...) the problem I’ve got is, the last place I worked at, I worked there for ten years. I’m gonna have to use them as a reference, so they’re gonna need to know (...) I’m gonna be brave and start applying and see how it goes. (Kirsten)

In the example above, Kirsten is unable to navigate these issues in ways other escorts might be able to, for example, through economical truths in job applications. Interestingly, Rob notes how it would be impossible for him to escort as a sole occupation, not only because of the lack of female clients, but also because of the perceived ‘black market’ whereby ‘you couldn’t get a mortgage or anything like that’.

The previous section suggested that escorts who can reject the internalisation of sex work stigma are possibly better positioned to serve as spokespeople, choosing to be honest about their work. Since her ‘outing’, sex worker, activist and campaigner Laura Lee is perhaps the embodiment of this, and female escort Violet succinctly details the rationale and struggles with refusing to work in secrecy:

It’s very tiring when I go through all of that (disclosure to university, insurance companies, placement opportunities) emotionally draining, but I have to (...) I do have to be careful. It’s not just me I have to protect, it’s my placement clients, and I have to be careful because of my family. They know what I do, but it could affect them if I get named anywhere or somebody ‘outs’ me. (Violet)

Violet captures the tensions between the desire (and reality) of disclosing sex work as her job against the potential repercussions it might generate. However, there is a higher purpose that requires her ‘having to’ take risks of disclosure. Similar elements appear in the following chapter examining relationships, where I demonstrate how in some instances, interpersonal reactions to sex work disclosure can often be a pleasant surprise. I now turn to a more holistic encapsulation of stigma, as detailed by participants, offering both a summary and alternative way of considering sex work stigma.

6.3.3 The stigma river

If stigma were to acquire tangible characteristics, the most oft-cited description is of ‘stickiness’. Goffman writes of ‘sticky’ discrediting attributes (1963, p.30) and this notion of clinginess, of viscosity, has been utilised many times since⁵² in relation to stigma. Throughout the extensive collections of stigma research, many models and processes are generated as sites of explanation. I too began to derive my own model, or pattern, which most reflected the accounts told by interviewees. However, I found that this approach belied a fundamental aspect of experiential stigma as reported to me by participants – *the role of chance*. Instead of a model, I propose a more fluid encapsulation: the ‘stigma river’. Below is a diagram summary of how stigma is best conceptualised within this present research; as a river with many tributaries.

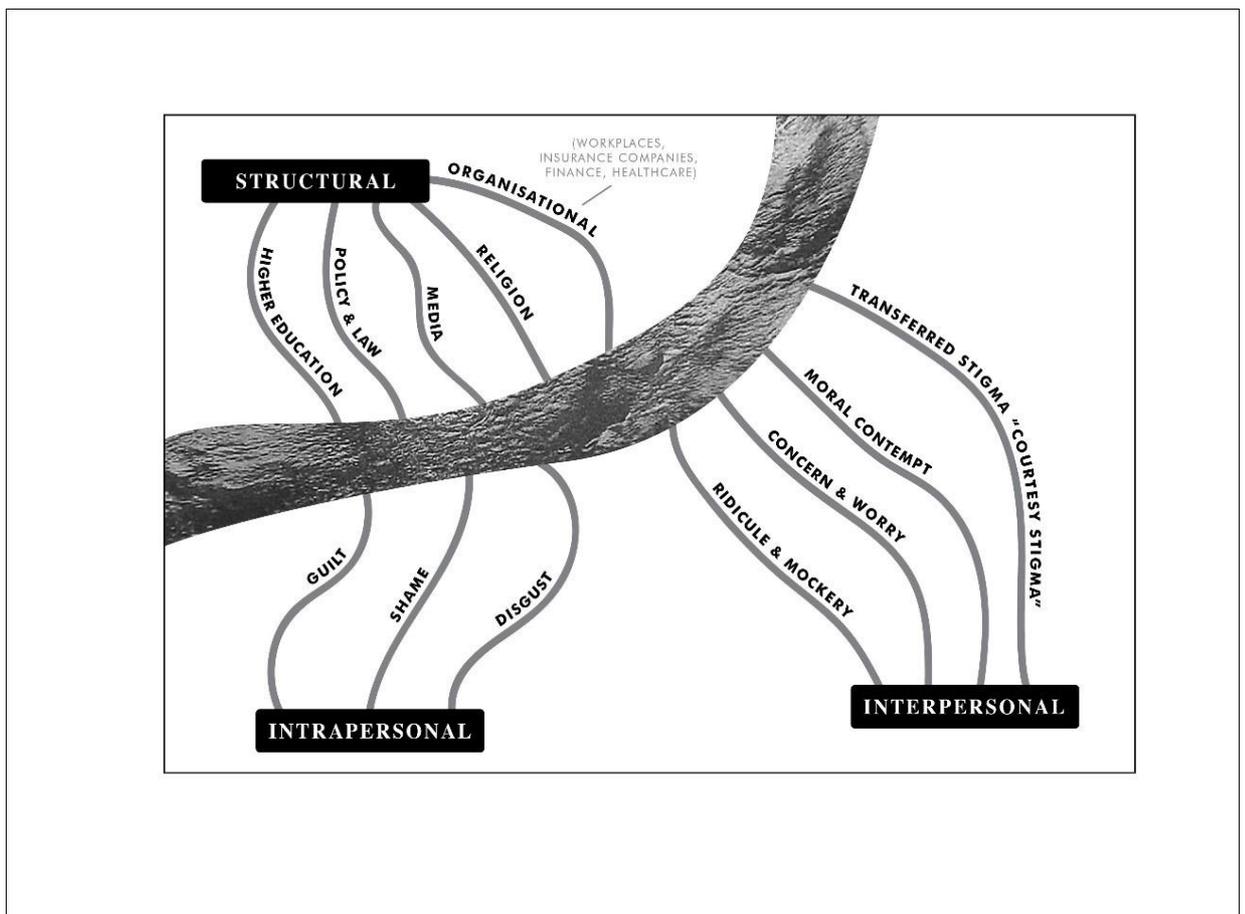


Figure 4: The stigma river

⁵² For recent use, see Barton (2014) in relation to ‘Bible Belt Gays’ and Trouble (2016) who examines stigma associated with the pornography industry.

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, apparently said ‘no man steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river’. This idea of impermanence sits most comfortably with some penultimate thoughts concerning the ‘stigma’ of the sex industry. Loosely, participants discuss stigma within three realms: the structural; the interpersonal; the intrapersonal. Each realm comprises several tributaries which may or may not be experienced or spoken about by interviewees. The impacts of some of the ‘tributaries’ have been elaborated on and discussed throughout this chapter⁵³. Attention will now be given to the overarching dimensions of structural, intrapersonal and interpersonal realm experiences with stigma.

When men discuss their work as escorts, there is a real lack of reporting elements of structural stigma. Escorts (women and men alike) are almost entirely united in drawing upon discourses of women as sexual service providers and men as consumers. Two men report religious parents to rationalise keeping sex work a secret, although beyond this, men seem largely unaffected by the ideas and implications of structural stigma. No concerns are raised about their non-sex work employment being ‘threatened’ by escort work and overall, largely corroborate the ‘whore stigma’ as chiefly concerned with women, not men. These findings further support the comprehensive analysis provided by Jane Nolan (2015), whereby the identities of straight male sex workers suffer the least stigma in comparison to other intersecting identities. Arguably, the tributaries comprising ‘structural’ stigma have the capacity to be the most damaging: salacious and condemning media ‘outing’ of escorts; laws criminalising some aspects of the sex industry but not others; Higher Education staff either lacking in knowledge or demonstrating considerable negative bias towards sex working students and/or staff. Again, women appear to be targets of structural stigma, although this is a highly contingent assertion due to the secrecy male participants maintain around their escort work. A true comparison would require a similar level of sex work disclosure across gender, and this is not apparent from my sample of escorts.

Progressing to ‘interpersonal’ stigma, the analysis demonstrates that men are much more likely to be cajoled, mocked, or ridiculed about their work, from both friends and family. Female participants are more likely to be recipients of a spectrum of perceptibly negative reactions spanning concern and worry through to moralistic judgment. The role

⁵³ Some ‘tributaries’ feature in the following chapter - ‘courtesy stigma’ in particular

of interpersonal relationships, in particular, the idea of transferred or ‘courtesy’ stigma will be discussed in much greater depth in Chapter 7.

The ‘intrapersonal’ section of the stigma river refers to the reported internal or psychological conflicts escort work poses for interviewees, such as guilt or shame. I have suggested previously that individuals who do not express the negative internal dimensions of sex work stigma may be better equipped to manage, or resist, stigmas presented at interpersonal and structural levels. However, I also found that men spoke the language of shame, and sometimes guilt; conversely, only women use the language of disgust, although this is the exception rather than the rule.

To conclude, however, that the number of ‘tributaries’ experienced or present in one person’s account is indicative of a greater impact of sex work stigma would be erroneous. All tributaries are not created equal. Violet, for example, successfully navigated potential problems in several domains including dealing with the police, difficulties with her university and declarations to insurance companies. Such disclosures were hazardous, and incurred penalties such as increased insurance premiums and rejection from a work placement opportunity. As well as ‘it all being so tiring’, Violet recounts situations in which sex work stigma ought to be an unmoveable barrier. However, these barriers are overcome in practice with a combination of openness and persistence. Meanwhile, Zack demonstrates the severity of shame felt by himself and his mother. Despite no negative interactions with structural elements of stigma, Zack is the most vocal of all twenty participants in expressing intense feelings of degradation about his work.

Kirsten, offering no indication of intrapersonal shame, conversely feels guilt about the impact of the newspaper expose upon her family⁵⁴. She feels burdened that applying for non-escorting jobs will be problematic in light of her past, due to being unable to provide a reference from her previous employer. Meanwhile Elaine, Nadine and Carla have experienced very little, or no stigmatic repercussions respectively. These accounts encapsulate what I mean by ‘slippery’ stigma, to be addressed shortly.

Unlike systematic or ‘process’ models, the ‘stigma river’ allows for a more contingent consideration of the ways in which sex work stigma can be experienced. The

⁵⁴ Fully detailed in the next chapter

many avenues of stigma are represented through tributaries, and what I most wish to demonstrate is a lack of hierarchy, or even prediction. The stories participants shared with me resist neat categorisation and speak to the idea that ‘stigma’, if an issue at all, is much more randomly experienced than is perhaps acknowledged, particularly within the academy.

6.4 Stigma Scrutinised – ‘slippery stigma’

In Chapter 2 I reviewed the theoretical debates surrounding sex work, and drew upon Hitlin and Elder’s critique that the core sociological concept of ‘agency’ is ‘slippery’ (2007, p.170). The authors argue against the often-unreflective use of the term and propose a theoretical model comprising four analytical types of agency. Building upon Hitlin and Elder’s more critical stance, I offer similar discontent with how ‘stigma’ permeates much of sex industry research, yet often suffers from similar conceptual slipperiness. Thus, I will offer brief examples from participants which demonstrate the problems of assuming stigma as a glove companion to sex work. As the previous section suggests, blanket use of the term ‘stigma’ can be problematic. At a conceptual level, if the previously discussed work of Ashworth and Kreiner (2014) on moral taint and ‘dirty’ work is accepted as a given, a truth, then the ‘sticky’ stigma of sex work seems commonsensical. However, a significant number of participants report little (or no) experiential stigma in their daily lives. Because of this, I refer to sex work stigma as somewhat ‘slippery’ and what I suggest by this is two-fold: stigma is not only fluid in its affect, presence and reportage it is also ‘slippery’ at a theoretical level. Stigma is not a static entity - it is a river with many tributaries.

Thus far, the focus of this chapter has been created around the given assumption that stigma and sex work are familiar bed fellows. Here, I build upon the work of Manzo, whose central claim is that stigma has become an under-defined and overused concept:

I maintain (...) that “stigma” is an element of sociologists’ belief system: stigma is, for the practical purposes of doing sociology, an objective phenomenon the existence of which is presumed and which is deployed unreflectively for analytic and descriptive purposes. (Manzo, 2004, p.410)

Manzo considers the lived experience of stroke survivors and addresses Jefferson’s (1985) stance that there is a ‘problem of stigma as a social scientific gloss’ (cited in

Manzo, 2004, p.402). What I particularly like about Manzo's work is the ability to question academic tendencies to assert how stigma's 'existence is presumed even when respondents do not report it or its euphemisms' (ibid., p.409). There is a further danger of ascribing 'stigma' as rationale for why people may wish to keep aspects of their lives hidden. For example, Manzo details the supposed stigma that keeps people from disclosing a positive HIV status, when other equally or more immediate explanations are likely, such as fear of losing a job, a relationship, or even of procuring sexual relations.

So too can this caution be applied to my sample of participants, a minority of whom choose to keep their sex work hidden from friends as well as family. Temporarily encroaching on the content of the following chapter, Lois and her partner 'hide' her sex work from their respective families. Lois rationalises this, starting with her mother:

she's at an age and at a stage of health and faith where it wouldn't be good, it wouldn't go down very well. I've got brothers and sisters. They'd probably be, they'd be upset. They'd be worried. (Lois)

Lois clearly outlines her concern lies with the impact of her work directly upon her family, not necessarily as deleterious to her relationships with them. Is this stigma, or not? It feels presumptuous to declare withholding information about her work is entirely, or even mostly, about 'sex work stigma'. Participants' accounts more accurately speak to the idea of stigma concerning sex, more precisely. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I have often veered away from talking about my research with family members. Several researchers (for example, Hammond and Kingston, 2014, and Bowen and Bungay, 2016) have produced articles discussing the 'courtesy' stigma transferred to sex work researchers, and how they too are adversely affected. However, I can state categorically that my reticence to speak about my research is not because of any stigma attached to the sex industry, it is because I am uncomfortable speaking about sex *with family members*. To this end, I have had frank conversations about the nature of my research with strangers, including: the dentist; the doctor; colleagues of friends; random strangers in different countries - a variety of 'unknown to me' people and non-academics. Awkwardness does not perforate these conversations, precisely because of a lack of enduring interpersonal history that categorises and sanctions sexual discussion as taboo. However, a social scientist may quite easily discern, and ascribe, a reticence to discuss work with family members as stigma-causal. I could be a recipient of Goffman's (1963)

courtesy stigma, stigma which is transferred from those directly affected to those associated with the ‘discredited’ individual. Such ascription would be a false conclusion.

With the above caution in mind, I found a higher level of secrecy present in male escorts’ accounts. In isolation, this secrecy could suggest a correlational relationship with stigma; men are not able to be honest about their escort work. Again, such a conclusion would be inaccurate. The men who are the most secretive are also the men who are in relationships. These men live in secrecy to *protect their relationships from perceived infidelities* that invariably attach to sex work, not necessarily because of the ‘stigma’ of sex work. Escorting presents a threat to relationships just as an affair would, and it is for this reason some men hide their involvement in selling sexual services.

How can several women, escorting at the same time, in the same country, in the same sector of the sex industry have such disparate experiences and interactions with the ‘whore’ stigma?⁵⁵ Chance, or happenstance, I suggest, deserve greater recognition here. Varying degrees of stigma are not explained through secrecy or selective disclosure within my sample, indeed some of the least secretive participants are also the least affected by stigma. But the reverse is also true, presenting a conclusion minefield. My findings suggest individuals involved in the sex industry are at the mercy of a random, sporadic and erratically applied discourse whereby one person is not ‘discredited’ in terms of professional standing⁵⁶ whilst another is all but forced into professional resignation⁵⁷. Thus, the available space for individuals to be publicly upfront about sex work becomes a game of Russian roulette. This duality of outcomes is captured in several participants’ accounts, where contradictions are found. Autumn surmises that ‘the stigma is starting to fade a bit’ but is simultaneously wary of ‘people who have the power to make a mess of my life’. The stigma threat hovers, leaving individuals neither sure of quite if it will land, nor what the repercussions might be if it does.

At surface level, several interviewees recall what might be best termed *episodic* stigma. These tend to be isolated, contained incidents with minimum impact described. For example, Elaine’s only encounter with anything closely resembling stigma is through

⁵⁵ The previous chapters attest how intersectionality dimensions of race and class have been explored and do not apply in my sample. Once again, I do not suggest these intersectionality issues do not exist

⁵⁶ Dr Brooke Magnanti, discussed previously

⁵⁷ Professor Nick Goddard, again discussed previously

a text exchange with a stranger who tells her to ‘respect herself’ and ‘get a proper job’. Elaine speaks about this incident very matter-of-factly, keen to express she had spent decades engaged with ‘proper jobs’ but escorting provided greater financial security, personal autonomy and pleasure than previous work. Several men demonstrate similarly seemingly minor encounters with episodic stigma. Collectively, this suggests although there are undoubtedly myriad ways in which sex work stigma can circulate and perpetuate at a macro level, individuals also occupy individual sites of resistance, rejection and in my sample of participants, unaffectedness.

Therefore, although this chapter has stigma as its focus, I wish to exercise some words of caution. It is difficult to talk about a lack of stigma in relation to sex work for two reasons. The first is practical: if someone does not discuss stigma in their account, it becomes difficult to demonstrate this with ‘evidence’. But perhaps of greater consequence, it is also difficult to suggest this in the context of so much sex work research that centralises stigma, it goes against the research grain. To suggest that some sex workers might not experience any stigma at all feels academically unacceptable. This is particularly so in the context of the reported conceptual horrors perpetuated about sex workers, as well as the very real deleterious outcomes of sex work stigma, some of which this chapter highlights. Critics might proclaim that independent and agency escorts are ‘at the top of the tree’ so to speak, and this explains the potential lack of stigma. Certainly, there is an argument to be made about stigma and its relationship to different sex work sectors. However, this is too simplistic, as the following chapter concerning relationships attests. There are many small snippets of evidence throughout sex work research where female sex workers openly divulge their work⁵⁸ and these span a variety of sex work sectors. Such voices are largely pushed aside or situated as anomalous in the quest for greater understanding of the circumstances and experiences of stigma. I suggest a more inquisitive approach to sex work stigma is necessary: if researchers hunt for stigma, it will be found.

The quest to identify, locate and report sex work stigma is predicated on the assumption that this knowledge will go some way towards identifying how to resolve and eradicate it. Furthermore, the drive towards decriminalisation of sex work in the UK⁶⁰

⁵⁸ A particularly memorable declaration can be found in Sanders (2005, p.117) where a female sex worker states ‘I don’t give a fiddler flying fuck, everybody knows what I do’.

⁶⁰ Which I wholeheartedly support, lest this discussion suggest otherwise

utilises stigma as a focal point. Whilst this is worthy, necessary even, I also wonder if the exclusion of those who do not report stigma or its euphemisms, as Manzo (2004) outlines, closes the door to a perhaps different investigation. What remains are continually supported and often circuitous conclusions that sex work stigma needs to be addressed, with a lack of precision on how best to realise this. Weitzer's recent commentary piece (2016, forthcoming) goes some way toward addressing this. Specific suggestions pertaining to neutralising language, decriminalisation, activism, industry mobilisation, mass media change and academic enterprise combine as prerequisites to challenge prevailing sex work stigma. Certainly, this chapter supports Weitzer's vision holistically, whilst tentatively offering a seventh element – to not assume stigma is a uniform, consistent or even present feature of sex workers' lives.

6.5 Conclusion

In *The Prostitution Prism* (1996) Gail Pheterson outlines how the 'whore stigma' is a gendered phenomenon. Male and transgender sex workers cannot be recipients of the whore stigma, because gender oppression is a female problem. Thus, although male sex workers may suffer from stigma and discrimination, the starting point is different. Women are judged against an 'appropriate' sexuality, whereas male workers are judged by their deviation from 'white heterosexual male norms' (ibid., p.66). Jane Nolan (2015) adds further support to Pheterson's stance, concluding that the whore stigma *is* gendered, and the opening sections of this chapter add further agreement. Female and male participants alike demonstrate awareness of the sexual double standard applied to female behaviour, both through interaction and populist media discourse.

Various stigma realities demonstrate the tangible ways in which sex work stigma can impact upon escorts' lives. Pinel's concept of 'stigma consciousness' (1999) offers some utility toward understanding the rationale of people who choose to remain 'in the closet' concerning their work, although does not fully capture participants' stories. Guilt and shame feature in some male escort accounts, although again, no definitive conclusions can be drawn. The most notable distinction between male and female accounts pertains to the impact of sex work upon future plans. Two women detail the tensions and fallout of being publicly known as sex workers (one against her wishes, due to being 'outed') whereas for men, these experiences are absent.

Although a considerable proportion of this chapter discusses stigma, the latter half engages more critically with stigma as a blanket and often poorly-considered or delineated concept. Eschewing static ‘models’ of stigma, I offer the ‘stigma river’ as more consonant with participants’ experiences and discuss how stigma can be experienced structurally, interpersonally and intrapersonally. Finally, I offer some parting thoughts querying the academic expectation of finding stigma, situating this in the context of engendering steps towards decriminalisation.

Whether individuals encounter stigma directly, or fear its threat, or speak of it in its abstract form, one commonality emerges across many accounts. The power positions of media outlets mean discourses of sex work are circulated and perpetuated, almost always in a salacious and discrediting manner. Weitzer (2016, forthcoming) identifies mass media as one site in a list of prerequisites that need to change, if we are to seriously address sex work stereotypes. I end this chapter with the words of long-term escort John, who states ‘you never hear about, you know, the positive stuff. That actually today you might have helped someone move on’. Certainly, a significant shift in how sex work is presented via popular media would be an encouraging start.

7. Relationships

7.1 Introduction: Why examine sex workers' relationships?

John Donne famously noted that 'no man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent' (Meditation 17, cited in Savage, 1975). This chapter seeks to broaden analyses presented thus far, reaching beyond (whilst remaining inclusive of) work and extending to the spheres of romance, family and children - the realm of home-life more broadly. Grasping the essence of Donne's words, observations throughout this chapter reinforce both the narrative methodology employed within this research and my own epistemological viewpoint: to qualitatively interrogate knowledge of sex workers, we must interrogate relationships beyond the working transactions. This chapter supplements some already established discussions around intimacy (for example Giddens, 1992) and is important for advancing a more holistic picture of sex workers' lives *beyond* occupational experiences. Arguably this is unnecessary; if sex work is to be treated as work then sex work research ought to follow. However, I contend sex work occupies a unique position both in the labour market and public perception, as previous chapters discussed. So, whilst viewing 'sex work as work' is an ideological claim I fully support, to analyse it *only* in the context of work belittles the very real, sometimes deleterious ways in which choosing sex work uniquely impacts upon interpersonal relationships. As such, sex work needs to be understood within the broader framework of micro and macro relations and this underpins my intention throughout this thesis as a whole.

In previous work concerning sex workers' intimate relationships (Redman, 2011a), I drew upon literatures concerned with the evolution of sexual and relational values. The idea of 'individualisation' presented by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) seemed relevant, and the focus upon the demise of 'traditional' relationships and values provided a ready-made blueprint through which to interpret participants' relational experiences (at the time). These explanations seem less fitting now, and certainly overly pessimistic. Like the 'stigma' theories of the previous chapter, I find that the experiences of the interviewees resist fitting into available (and established) theoretical frameworks. However, the work of Carol Smart (2007) in *Personal Life* lends a different way of examining contemporary relationships, one which is not automatically imbued with the negative (for example, unlike Beck and Beck-Gernsheim and the many gloomy offerings

of Bauman also). Instead of the ‘individual’, Smart suggests using the ‘personal’. The personal:

Designates an area of life which impacts closely on people and means much to them, but which does not presume that there is an autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unfettered agency (...). To live a personal life is to have agency and to make choices, but the personhood implicit in the concept requires the presence of others to respond to and to contextualise those actions and choices. (Smart, 2007, p.28)

The personal wholly constitutes this chapter, and Smart’s work echoes throughout the analytical approach to escorts’ relationships. The accounts presented herein speak to the social bonds and emotions (spanning love, guilt, disappointment, fear and excitement to name a few) reported throughout participants’ stories.

Whilst this chapter draws on wider relationships literature, it begins with a specific focus upon sex workers’ relationships and how these have been examined academically. I then present the relational stories told to me by participants. Key themes include nonmonogamy and its place within sex workers’ intimate relationships, alongside the roles of truth and trust. Merging work with the ‘private’, I then examine relationship development with clients beyond the commercial exchange. Finally, this section concludes with the thoughts of some participants concerning singlehood as a chosen strategy whilst escorting. Leaving romantic ties, the discussion then extends to the kinships and support networks spoken about by the women and men interviewed comprising parent, sibling and offspring relations as well as those provided by friends and occasionally, colleagues. Holistically, I offer data-driven accounts of the nexus between human relating and escorting, deliberating the impact sex work might have upon a variety of relationships, and whether gender is implicated in this.

7.2 Sex work, relationships and intimacy – reviewing the literature

Academic literature searches of sex workers’ relationships generate staggering returns, although with a very narrow focus and significant emphasis upon what could be interpreted as ‘stigmatising’ research. For example, sex workers’ intimate relationships are mostly examined in the context of sexually transmitted disease⁵⁹, often with a goal to

⁵⁹ Dalla (2001); Day (1988); Day et al. (1993); Elifson et al. (1993)

increase condom use within the intimate partner-sex worker dyad. When sexual health is not a research priority, the prevalence of violence within sex workers' relationships is a popular topic⁶⁰. Health and medical discourses combined with a focus upon violence and exploitation highlight the perceived value of researching sex workers' lives beyond the realm of work: through the lens of risk and protectionism. Swathes of research centralise street sex workers as objects of analysis, whilst a comparative dearth examines the relationships of the indoor sex workers who comprise much of the sex working population.

Sex work research examining the indoor worker often touches upon the wider realms beyond work, although rarely as a substantive focus. Some notable exceptions can be found, however, and these works will inform the discussion throughout this chapter. For example, Sophie Day's (2007) text *On the Game* highlights the importance of spaces, specifically the public and the private, and how dividing these is useful for the female sex worker:

In sex work, perhaps more than other ways of making a living, the imagery of work and business is intertwined with views about proper behaviour on the parts of workers, wives and mothers, and the necessary boundaries between family life and the public world. (Day, 2007, p.10)

Accounts alluding to sex worker relationships often convey difficulties, and like much sex work literature, concentrate upon women as the sexual service provider. For Day, sex work reintroduces the eroding boundary between work and non-work:

Distinctions between public and private are widely recognised as ideological, even fictional, but they also constitute a part of our everyday world. In sex work, the stigma of the occupation promotes a particularly emphatic demarcation of public and private. (2007, p.11)

Day goes on to describe how the covert nature of sex work 'allowed [sex workers] to live in private as well as public' (ibid., p.12), thus the desired outcome of placing perimeters around work and home is to maintain a separation between the two, so that sex work does not impact negatively upon non-working life. Although Day offers a detailed analysis with compelling examples, concepts of public and private are less defined within my own

⁶⁰ Whether from pimps, clients, other working women, also intimate partners - see Barnard (1993)

research, particularly amongst several female escorts I interviewed. For example, Lois is keen to maintain distinctions between sex work and her non-working identity, to the extent that she maintains secrecy about her work with all family members and friends. Yet her partner fully supports her work, and she sees clients in their shared flat, using their bedroom. To state Lois demarcates public and private belies the complexities of how she chooses to work as well as what is deemed 'private'. I return to Carol Smart's (2007) choice of using 'the personal' over 'the private' once again. For Lois, the 'personal' transcends obvious physical boundaries of public and private space. Instead, the intangible qualities of relating constitute the personal, not the physical places in which they occur.

Previous research notes how the stigma of sex work often results in lies, or partial truths, about the individual's profession (Weiner, 1996). When secrecy is not adopted, sex work negatively impacts upon personal relationships as it disrupts the 'special' aspects of intimacy. Women's professions provoke reactions of jealousy, disrespect and resentment, negatively impacting the non-work sexual relationship (Warr and Pyett, 1999). Alternatively, some women in their sample do not perceive being in a romantic relationship as 'deeply incompatible' with sex work, although ideals of 'trust' and 'exclusivity' were deemed beyond what commercial sex could offer (ibid., p.300). This focus upon tensions with romantic partners continues, with Ditmore et al. (2010, p.14) suggesting that 'particular challenges' arise for sex workers 'as they attempt to balance the expectations of their partners with the demand of their profession'. Continuing the theme of secrecy, or problematic disclosure, Sanders (2005) observes that engaging in identity management limits the disapproval and shame that may occur should sex work become known. Some female sex workers anticipate the collision of sex work with non-sex working existence, 'isolating themselves from friendship networks' (ibid., p.116) thus limiting the potential damage of stigma. Violet's choice to 'not make new friends, really' could be categorised in this way, as she feels the need to manage information in ways that pose the least risk to herself, her family and her clients. Even this conclusion is problematic however, given that Violet is also one of the most vocal escorts in disclosing the nature of her work, elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Although dominant strands of health research focus upon condom use and transmission of disease, more nuanced sociological investigations examine the

symbolism of the condom in non-commercial exchanges. Warr and Pyett (1999) report high rates of condom use between sex worker and client contrasted with very low usage between sex workers and romantic partners. Sex workers chose not to use condoms with private partners as this 'enabled them to experience their private relationships as qualitatively different from the sex they engaged in through work' (ibid., p.294): condoms present strong ties to sex work and are thus excluded in non-work sex. Male partners, too, preferred unprotected sex to distinguish between the paid-for and the private, complementing Day's (2007) later distinctions between 'spaces' of work and non-work, public and private.

By definition, sex work blurs the boundaries between the body, labour, emotion and sex. The recent edited collection *Body/Sex/Work* attests how 'forms of work previously performed for love are increasingly performed for a wage' (Wolkowitz et al., 2013, p.6). Furthermore, the 'mainstreaming' of the sex industry discussed in Chapter 2 enables more people to enter peripheral sex work activity in response to economic hardship. Thus, an expanded landscape of what Hochschild (2003) would term commercialised intimate life engenders Zelizer's 'purchase' of intimacy. For Zelizer there are three main scholarly divides concerning economic activity and intimacy:

A first group, the most numerous, have long proposed the twin ideas of "separate spheres and hostile worlds": distinct arenas for economic activity and intimate relations, with inevitable contamination and disorder resulting when the two worlds come into contact with each other. A second smaller group has answered the "nothing-but": far from constituting an encounter between two contradictory principles, the mingling of economic activity and intimacy, properly seen, is nothing but another version of normal market activity [...] A far smaller third cluster - to which I belong - has replied that both of the first positions are wrong, that people who blend intimacy and economic activity are engaged in constructing and negotiating "connected lives" (2005, p.22)

Data presented throughout this chapter reinforce the latter stance of connected lives. 'Blending' of commerce and intimacy is evident in relation to spaces of escort work (which for women can also be their home), with further erasure of boundaries when paying clients cross over to become non-paying romantic partners. Zelizer (2005) notes how romance in the workplace is just another example of how the economic intermingles with the intimate. Furthermore, 'the two often sustain each other' (ibid., p.1).

In the same way that 'stigma' and sex work is overwhelmingly discussed with women in mind, so too is this repeated in non-commercial sexual relationships, and more

recently, in relation to parenting. Since the declaration that ‘prostitution-involved women are rarely recognised as mothers (Dalla, 2004, p.191), there has been *some* increased attention towards sex work and motherhood (but not fatherhood). These investigations go some way toward balancing the stigmatizing discourses of protectionism outlined at the start of this section. The sex-working mother faces tensions when trying to integrate the worker-mother identity; sex work is condemned and not perceived to be legitimate work, therefore her role as a mother is challenged based on discourses of good mother/bad mother (Dodsworth, 2012).

Sex-working motherhood, like the previously discussed ‘whore stigma’, is subject to the same moral sanctioning of acceptable and appropriate behaviour for women. Ironic, perhaps, when much research in this vein examines desperate socio-economic conditions where sex work offers sometimes the only means of caring for children. The discourse of ‘unfit’ mothering is reinforced by abolitionist policies, as exemplified by the case of Petite Jasmine, a sex working mother living in Sweden who was killed by the father of her children. Sweden’s neo-abolitionist stance resulted in child custody being granted to her ex, the man who went on to murder her. Petite Jasmine refused to adhere to the widely-peddled government ideology of sex work as inherently harmful and consequently her children were removed because of her ongoing involvement in commercial sex. The previous chapter discussed the ‘whore stigma’; this example demonstrates structural stigma and resulting discrimination, the ‘whore stigma’ so pronounced it can justify the removal of children from a mother. Constructions of mental instability and immorality are inherent to Swedish sex work policy, creating discourses of victimhood which can justify ideology-driven intervention (Levy, 2014).

Unlike Petite Jasmine, the men and women I interviewed are free to work within a system where the selling and purchase of sex is not criminalised, however it is clear that parenting tensions exist for the women and men I spoke with. Parenthood is considered more fully in section 3.2 of this chapter, where evidence is presented from both sex working mothers *and* fathers, supporting (and occasionally refuting) some of the ideas presented herein. However, consideration will first be given to the non-work romantic relationships of female and male escorts.

7.3 Intimate Relationships

7.3.1 The 'in-between' space of sex work and non-monogamy

Sex work occupies a curious position within non-monogamy, and the meaning (or lack of meaning) given to the 'work' sex that occurs between escorts and their clientele will be examined throughout. There are no blanket conclusions to be drawn, apart from perhaps as Giddens (1992) attests, pluralistic ways of relating are simultaneously available, adopted and rejected; the terrain of sex work and romance bubbling with diversity. In keeping with the narrative methodology of this thesis, the sexual stories told (Plummer, 1995) offer a proliferation of relational values; the multiple meanings of sex vary from erecting symbolic boundaries between 'work sex' and non-commercial sex through to little difference between sexual commerce (the public, commodified exchanges) and sexual intimacy (the private or 'personal', unpaid interactions). Non-work intimate relationships for sex workers are achieving greater focus now, because as Syvertsen et al. (2013) observe, intimate relationships can influence partners' emotional and physical health in important ways (see also Rhodes and Quirk 1998; Sobo, 1995).

For some escorts, sex work is spoken about in the wider sphere of choosing a non-monogamous lifestyle. Sean reports that he is 'just not meant to be in a one on one relationship' and John muses 'I suppose I like the polygamous side to it all'. The theme of chosen non-monogamy is repeated within female accounts also:

I mean we're not monogamous anyway [...] I'm also not keen on monogamy at all, so like even if I wasn't escorting I'd still sometimes be seeing other people and knew from the start that that was a deal breaker for me. Basically that I couldn't do monogamous relationships. So like, to an extent, you know, he wouldn't have got in to the relationship if he couldn't handle it. Early on we had a few arguments about the boundaries of nonmonogamy, but he's always seen my work as separate from that, I think. Where you know, me going out and having casual sex at first was a bit of a jealousy thing for him, but work was just work. You know it wasn't any kind of threat to our relationship because it wasn't on the same kind of level emotionally. (Autumn)

He's very open minded. He lived in Holland a lot of his adult life and they have a lot more of a liberated view. We do swing occasionally as well, so he gets the kind of variety as well, when he wants it, but I know that he loves me, and it just about us having fun together, sexually. Doing something a bit different. Sometimes we'll just get a bloke round. Sometimes it'll be a bloke. Sometimes it'll be a couple (Eva)

The four accounts demonstrate two different forms of non-monogamy, the first three synonymous with what would be best categorised as ‘open’ and Eva’s relationship aligning with what might best be described as ‘monogamish’ (Parsons et al., 2013). Open relationships are those which allow partners to engage in sexual relations separately from the main relationship (LaSala, 2004). Meanwhile ‘monogamish’ refers to relationships that allow partners to engage in sex with others, but only when together as a couple; no extra-relationship sex occurs on an individual basis. For Autumn’s partner, ‘escort sex’ presents less of a challenge to the relationship than the sex she is not paid to engage in, because it is perceived as less of an emotional threat; when escorting, she has been *chosen* whereas outside of work, she chooses who she would like to have sex with.

However, Sanders (2008, p.14) suggests there are ‘false dichotomies between commercial and non-commercial relationships’ and certainly for the participants above, sex work rests within a broader framework of sexual openness. Clearly then, to assume that paid and ‘recreational’ encounters are always discrete from one another is questionable, discussed in Kontula’s (2008) elaboration on pleasure for female sex workers. Critiquing the radical feminist stance that paid sexual transactions result in inevitable harm to all sex workers, Kontula offers the idea that sex work *can* be pleasurable for both parties in the commercial exchange. Acknowledging that ‘individuals have different experiences, feelings and situations’ (ibid, p.607), the author steers away from normative stereotypes, looking instead at the experiences of sex workers and their accounts of work-related pleasure. Although written with female sex workers in mind, this concept of pleasurable experience in sex work is applicable too, to male escorts:

I wasn’t in it for the money, I’d have done it for free. (George)

I see women myself [meaning he visits female escorts], so I thought well why not try it the other way, see if anyone would want to visit me.
(Jason)

Conversely, for Violet, working in the sex industry effectively ‘keeps her in line’; she recounts that she might be tempted to stray sexually from her partner without the frequent sexual outlets that escorting affords her. Sex work allows Violet to lead a comfortable lifestyle whilst tempering potential sexual transgressions that might otherwise occur, although the latter is spoken about retrospectively. In this instance, sex work has

beneficial ‘by-products’ (although these have little or no importance when first considering sex work).

‘Enjoying’ sex work, or more pertinently, the reporting of sex workers enjoying their work featured in the theoretical debates of Chapter 2, typically within the ‘empowerment’ paradigm. Documenting escorting through the realm of pleasure supports ideas of sex work as largely ‘subversive’ or ‘empowering’, and I believe that adopting these stances uniformly runs the risk of obscuring some of the more pragmatic, economic considerations at play. Analytically, I do not view escorts seeking or deriving sexual pleasure from escorting as any more or less subversive than other workers achieving pleasure through their work. In this sense, for the interviewees who chose not to have any boundary blurring toward ‘work sex’ (in other words, that sex with clients veered more toward the perfunctory, or the illusion of enjoyment), I see this paralleled in non-sexual occupations. For example, Sanders et al. (2013) compare the labour of hairdressing and stripping, noting how both involve bodily labour, emotional labour and a certain level of ‘performance’. To re-emphasise my point: whether hairdressers ‘enjoy’ their job is never up for debate, thus there is a logical fallacy in entertaining significant discussion of it within sex work. Of course, the legacy here is that sex is generally associated with pleasure. Jennifer Mason (1996) argues that there are qualitative differences between, for example, acts of care imbued with love, and acts of care when being paid. Both acts can look the same, but the feeling between the two can be different. Although not referring to sex work, Mason’s example can be usefully transposed, however it can just as easily be problematised; the act of payment may engender different ‘feelings’ but not necessarily so.

However, unlike hairdressing (and most professions), the core fabric of sex work presents a challenge to normative intimate relationships. Breaching the generally accepted terms of monogamy is intrinsic to sex work, and for escorts who are in otherwise monogamous relationships, the sexual transgressions can create tension:

We do have a few little wobbles, not very many, but sometimes there’s an elephant in the room and I have to snap him out of it. What’s up honey, and... and it’s, generally speaking the elephant appears when I come home with loads of money, because I know what’s going through his head, because he’s thinking, oh she was busy then. (Carla)

Carla relates occasions where she deposits money in the household safe, and this act can create tension. Syvertsen et al. (2013, p.4) describe how elements of ‘disconnectedness’

can surface between sex workers and partners: ‘similar to cognitive dissonance, these partners disconnected, or psychologically shielded themselves, from sensitive topics that they knew about but did not want to confront’. Carla later elaborates on how her brother, not her partner, would be called upon if difficulties arose in relation to her work, further suggesting that information limitation can serve as protection for the intimate relationship. Padilla’s (2007) findings reinforce the above, concluding that Dominican Republic male sex workers generally avoid discussion of work with female partners (especially where the work involves sex with other men). Avoidance of discussion also serves to avoid the potential stigma, as well as decreasing the threat to a relationship which contravenes accepted social norms around sex and gender.

For women who have accepting partners, or women contemplating entering relationships, narratives suggest potential for it to be problematic at an ideological level:

But yeah they say yes I can handle it but no if you are mine then you are mine, you give this up. (Elaine)

I don’t think it’s that he has a problem with me having sex with other people, although you can see why men wouldn’t like it. (Kirsten)

Violet briefly alludes to the jealousy sex work can provoke within her relationship, however she refuses to avoid discussion of it, commenting ‘he gets jealous, when he knows I’m with somebody else, but we just keep talking about it’. Despite this, women also report their romantic relationships as sanctums and sources of support. Although male partners may not necessarily be enthusiastic about hearing work details, they are nonetheless supportive towards escorting, to be discussed later in this chapter.

The non-monogamy of escorting is considered more problematic for male escorts than female, a theme emphasised in the next section of this chapter. Rob tells the story of a prior attempt to juggle a burgeoning relationship alongside escort work:

I did actually start dating one girl, but she was really sweet, she was really down to earth, she was a really nice girl and you couldn’t fault her in any way whatsoever, but she didn’t feel right at the time, and I think she didn’t feel right because of what I was doing without her knowing, do you know what I mean? I didn’t feel as if I could tell her and carry on, that just wouldn’t have happened, it would have ended anyway, but at the time I didn’t want to stop either, so I had to choose between having that girlfriend or carrying on so I was only with her for about 6 weeks, and in those 6 weeks I didn’t actually have any clients at all, but I missed it, kind of thing, it kind of became part of me then,

so (...) Yeah ended the relationship really, carried on doing what I was doing. (Rob)

For Rob, the tensions between work and intimacy are based upon whether he might be able to accept the situation should it be reversed. It is evident that Rob values monogamy in relationships, and escorting is simply incompatible with this ideal:

I mean at the end of the day I try and put myself in their shoes, you know, if I met a girl and she said look I'm a female escort I don't plan on stopping, I don't think I could be with her, especially if I wasn't in that world myself, yeah there's no way I could live with that I think, you know, putting myself in their shoes, so therefore I wouldn't, you know, and I wouldn't stay in that relationship and I can't help but fear that's exactly what would happen. (Rob)

Meanwhile Zack demonstrates concern that his sex working past may negatively impact upon his new relationship:

I've just started seeing someone new and it's, sometimes I think it's nice to feel that you can be really open with someone. But then I don't want to ruin what we have, and if I tell her that I used to sleep with women for money, I don't know if that would make her suspicious of me. If she would then be wondering every time she can't get hold of me, am I really out having sex with someone. (Zack)

The accounts of Rob and Zack are theoretically interesting, when considering the sexual 'double standard' discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Supposedly, men are better positioned to engage with multiple sexual partners and not suffer condemnation for it. Yet here are two men concerned about the impact of sex work on *future* romantic relationships. Drawing upon the work of Gross (2005), Smart (2007, p.26) explains how people may carry forward traditional values, even if their lifestyles differ markedly from those in which the tradition was created (and revered). Monogamy, then, despite being a problematic concept for sex workers, is an aspiration based on a traditional form of relating, one which some sex workers choose not to eschew. These ideas are developed further in the following discussion of secrecy.

7.3.2 The truth, the half-truth and nothing like the truth

In Goffman's 1959 exposition titled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the metaphors of front stage and back stage are used to capture the impression management modes we all engage in and adopt, dependent upon our audience. 'Front stage' behaviours

are typically transparent to the audience and involve performance, whereas ‘back stage’ behaviours more truly represent ‘natural’ behaviours, when unobserved. Borrowing the dramaturgical metaphor, I present a modern day, gender specific analysis of the ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ behaviours of male and female workers as they choose to live in secrecy or openness with intimate partners. I contend that within the given participant sample, female sex workers live in the light, whilst male workers more frequently occupy the shadows. For Goffman, the front stage symbolises the performance – the ways in which a visible audience would see the self-aware and self-conscious behaviours of those acting. I draw parallels to ‘those in the light’, using accounts from female escorts, although shifting away from the concept of ‘front stage’ as the act. For the purpose of this section, front stage (and light) represents openness whereas back stage (and associated darkness) represent secrecy.

Despite the prolific and well-documented stigma surrounding sex work detailed in the previous chapter, it would appear that female sex workers choose to live in relative openness with intimate partners. In fact, none of the women who reported being in a relationship alluded to the need to lie about their choice of work. Autumn describes how her (now) husband was a friend when she first started escorting ‘so he always knew it was part of the package with me’. For other women, escorting is ‘managed’ in their personal relationships depending on their partner’s feelings toward the work and its perceived imposition upon them as a couple:

The actual escorting side of it, I think he just sees it as, like when I say I’ve got a booking, I could just as well be cutting someone’s hair (...) Because we love each other so much, because we’re so in love. (Eva)

Like the sexual aspect of it isn’t a problem. Unless I end up either like, too tired or too tender to be intimate with [partner], which is hopefully not very often. Yeah, I think we’re both kind of taking it in our stride really. (Lois)

Yeah, so he’s amazing, wonderful. Incredibly supportive (...) We have a few kind of unwritten rules about what is discussed and basically it’s not very much. I don’t generally talk about any clients. When we were first seeing each other and we were friends with benefits I used to talk about clients and I used to tell him, oh I did a great booking with this girl and he liked hearing all the details, especially the girl on girl thing (...). He loved all that, so there is a bit of knowledge. He does know a bit, but then obviously when we got together and we were like, ‘right, how is this going to work?’ He said, for me, he said ‘I can’t know, I don’t want to know. I want to know you’re in London, I want to know you’re safe, but I don’t want to know details’, and I’m like ‘okay honey,

that's fine, I have no problem with that'. So generally speaking that's how it works. (Carla)

For female interviewees in relationships, the language of love and support emerges. Interestingly, for Eva's partner, she 'could just as well be cutting someone's hair' because they are 'so in love' whilst Carla's partner is 'incredibly supportive'. These findings somewhat contradict the assertions of Bradley, who concluded that male partners of female erotic dancers were humiliated and emasculated by the 'violation of this [monogamy] norm' (2007, p.381).

Bradley's work results in a largely negative appraisal of the men who 'accept' their partners dancing for other men, reporting emotions of shame and instances of ridicule. Additionally, some men abused their partner's ability to earn significant sums of money (by not working themselves, or expecting women to work more so they could derive the financial benefit), and some women selected 'lower quality' partners to counterbalance the negative status of erotic dancing. Bradley presents a neat dichotomy of sex industry 'insiders' as better partners, because they understand the nature of the work and are better placed to navigate issues of jealousy, self-doubt and stigma. Whilst not detracting entirely from her findings, I feel that she focused on the negativity associated with approximately half of her sample. For example, she reports that 'half' of the dancers' partners lacked steady employment (what about the other half?), and that 20 of the 37 women provided sole or primary financial support in the relationship (again, what about the near half who did not?). With this in mind, her conclusion that dancers are often in 'poor quality, abusive, exploitative relationships' (ibid., p.383) is perhaps more reflective of her own research bias. Conversely, Jackson et al. (2005) report the sense of inclusion, trust and respect sex workers gain from romantic relationships. Although variations in participant sample are likely to influence different findings, overwhelmingly, I found female escorts spoke about their romantic attachments very positively.

These accounts were not reflected by the male escorts interviewed, whereby secrecy was adopted as the primary information strategy for men involved in relationships.⁶¹ Jason perceives that like him, many female workers also opt for secrecy,

⁶¹ However, it should be acknowledged that with a sample size of ten men, and a scarcity of available literature to draw on, these findings are tentative.

offering ‘I don’t know how many ladies tell their friends, partners, spouses (...) or even sister, or mother’, further reinforced by Zack and Steve:

I’ve had a couple of girlfriends but they, erm they didn’t know to be honest, and to be honest I didn’t even think about telling them, I never once thought oh maybe I should tell them I’m being paid to see other women. (Zack)

It was not awkward you know, because of the way I was used to sort of being on my own but at the same time sometimes there were moments when I had to think of a reason to be away but yeah I’ve never not been able to make one because of it. It had to be a secret, because it’s the whole trust thing. (Steve)

Of the ten men interviewed, only two chose to discuss their escort work with intimate partners, (and thus, come out of ‘the shadows’) although this is not reported as unproblematic:

yeah it’s very difficult to hold down relationships because you know it’s not many women that will want to share you with others, so it’s business, in an intimate way. No, it’s very, very difficult, to do that. Saying that I’m actually, you know I don’t usually tell people this because it’s not good for business, but I’m actually in a relationship with somebody now, who sort of accepts what I do [...] It’s astonishing. I never thought it would happen, to be honest, but it’s, yeah, it just shows you, it is possible. I think genuinely, because sometimes I’ve had relationships where it starts off being okay-ish and then of course as you get more emotionally involved it becomes more difficult for them to accept. (John)

[on his partner knowing about his work] I talked, she knew what I did. [Was it something you both discussed openly?] No. Absolutely not, and I wouldn’t have done that anyway. That would have been crossing the line on our relationship. (George)

Collectively, the findings evidenced above are perhaps surprising, given the context in which they arise: popular discourse emasculates men whose female partners are discovered to be engaging in sex elsewhere. For example, Fonseca (2001) details the Brazilian community perceptions of ‘cuckolds’, men who are married to unfaithful wives. Despite observing women as often subservient to the economic power and potential of the male, Fonseca describes the ways in which Brazilian women successfully use humour and repetitive jokes to threaten a man with cuckoldry. Moreover, she observes how ‘cuckolded’ men are mocked by older women in the street, their cackles serving as very public reminders of the humiliation associated with having an unfaithful wife. A sociological reminder, perhaps, that even supposedly entrenched societal (or global)

norms of male dominance can be undermined by female agency when examined in local contexts. In previous research conducted by interviewing male partners of female sex workers (Redman, 2011b), male accounts demonstrated acute awareness of macro-perceptions of infidelity, particularly in relation to their masculinity. However, the men interviewed presented much more complex and nuanced understandings where they chose to eschew the macro-values to instead pursue a less normative style of relating. Their relationships with women (who sex-work) were more valuable to them than the ideology of traditional monogamy.

In many respects, my findings here offer contradictions to more mainstream discourses surrounding sex work, stigma and the resulting secrecy. A further reminder, perhaps, to move beyond the blanket assumptions and connections made between sex work and secrecy. Only one woman, Sara, lives what might best be described as a ‘double life’. However, returning to the dominant theme of Chapter 4, I suggest the relative ‘openness’ narrative on the part of female workers is entwined within the much bigger story of their lives. For women, escorting is the primary income generator, and women can situate themselves and their experiences within broader discourses of attitudinal shifts concerning sex work. For example, Autumn offers that ‘things are changing’, indicating some malleability of the documented ‘whore stigma’ (Pheterson, 1993) discussed in the previous chapter. It seems (within the present study) that female sex workers are better positioned to pursue what Giddens (1992) terms ‘the pure relationship’ or Weeks’ (2007) interpretation as the ‘choice relationship’. Instead of being necessarily constrained by norms around monogamy, women enjoy relationships with men who choose to circumnavigate these ‘rules’, and who respect their choice of work. These shifts toward a more ‘plastic sexuality’ (Giddens, 1992, p.112), a sexuality freed from the ideology of reproduction, recognise the power and choice taken back by women in the sexual exchange. For female escorts, circumnavigating these rules, however, is potentially less problematic (ideologically at least) if one considers romantic relationships with clients – to which I now turn.

7.3.3 Relationships with clients

Pockets of research suggest that relationships for sex workers can be more easily obtained and maintained with industry insiders (Bradley, 2007), or that there are blurred

boundaries between personal and commercial relationships (Sanders, 2008). This section examines the recounted experiences of merging escort-client relations into the 'personal' domain. As with the previous section, there are multiple trajectories here. Some workers happily blur the boundaries between commerce and personal lives whilst others express disgust at even contemplating crossing that line. This bleeding of work into personal boundaries is evident in the work of Frank (2002) and Egan (2003) in relation to exotic dance and 'regulars'. Conversely, Day (2007) describes the clear distinctions some female sex workers made between sex as work and sex outside of the commercial exchange as they 'explained carefully and patiently' to her how their work 'had nothing to do with sexuality' (2007, p.35). Utilising the experiences from my sample, it appears that female escorts are more likely than males to engage in relationships with clients. Consider the following:

There was one guy I was seeing in the first year, who I met as a client actually, and we saw each other for a little bit, and that didn't work out. It was partly because of the job and partly because he'd not long been divorced, but we're still friends. (Kirsten)

Well my partner was once a client (...), I went and met him and it was pretty much love at first sight. (Eva)

He was a client, so that kinda sorted that one out, he was a regular client of mine. But I wouldn't be able to have a relationship with someone without telling him. (Violet)

I would be open to marrying a good client. (Sara)

Sanders (2008, p.109) reports there is a 'place of intimacy and 'deep knowing' at both an emotional and physical level between some sex workers and clients' – certainly, the four female escorts cited above blurred the boundary between the commercial and the personal spheres.

Elaine, meanwhile, elaborates on the relationship opportunities clients present to her, but she refuses due to anticipated difficulties, reinforcing some of the relational issues discussed in the previous section concerning non-monogamies:

I have many, many offers to be a girlfriend, a mistress, etcetera and it's just no, not interested (...) there's a lot of guys could not handle what I do although they say of course I would be able to handle it (...) I just said nobody tells me what to do. I am continuing doing this for as long as I can do it. I make my decisions, nobody else. (Elaine)

Interestingly, although men are more likely than women to view paid encounters as ‘casual fun’ (see Chapter 4, and this is with some exceptions), this does not mutate into merging escort work with unpaid liaisons. For example, George and Sean reiterate how they were both accustomed to ‘giving it away for free’ prior to escorting, and in this context, sex work is viewed as an extension of an already existing lifestyle. Beyond the commercial exchange, however, men tend to be more reluctant to form relationships with clients:

I had one booked for Friday and I think the following Wednesday she wanted to book me again, I was like ‘no, this is too much.’ (Sean)

I don’t reveal too much of myself to them, they are not too worried about that either, they are just interested in me turning up and sort of being happy with them, and to give them a good time if I can. (Jason).

In the above, we see the cautionary actions of Sean juxtaposed with Jason, who has well established commercial relationships with his female clients, but manages to ensure boundaries do not slip beyond the commercial exchange. Like Jason, John speaks mostly of regular clients, however his experiences veer more towards unreciprocated romantic and emotional attachments:

The thing about, women just want sex. No strings attached, that’s it. I’ve rarely found any woman like that (...) I don’t usually tell people this because it’s not good for business, but I’m actually in a relationship with somebody now. (John)

It would seem the main difference between how Jason and John manage long-term regular clients lies in the maintenance (or not) of a pseudo-relationship encounter, and this disparity is mimicked in female accounts too. Several female escorts discuss how they tell clients they have a partner, whereas some choose to keep these details beyond permitted discussion in client-escort interactions. Working boundaries are highly subjective (and sometimes confusing) across gender in my sample of participants. For example, Rob states that the best escort bookings are ones which closely resemble encounters he might choose to have outside of the commercial exchange, yet he discusses a clear separation between work and non-work. However, none of the men interviewed report romantic relationships with their female clients, nor a desire to pursue further attachments beyond the purchased time. This could be indicative of the ‘casual’ male market, whereby ‘regular’ female clients are not so frequently reported in men’s accounts, thus limiting the potential for romance to develop. Or perhaps the relatively low volume of female clients make it less likely for male escorts to encounter a client they might like

to pursue a relationship with. These are little more than suggestions, however, to explain why male escort encounters might not mutate into friendships or romance beyond the paid-for time.

7.3.4 Preferring singlehood

Previous chapters detailed how the straight male escort market appears largely ‘casualised’, alongside systematic analysis of some of the different consequences and conditions that arise from highly sporadic instances of sex work. As male escorting is less of a defining feature in respondents’ lives, one might suppose it should follow that romantic relationships ought to be less problematic, given this infrequency. However, within this study, more men than women cite the desire to remain single whilst escorting:

I think if I put myself in a position to actually go out and find a girlfriend, a partner, I think I would be doing it purposefully to find someone obviously and have that fairy tale ending with, you know what I mean, you want to fall in love, you want to get married, you want to have kids, I want all that. So I know I can’t have them both but I’d much, I’d definitely choose that marriage with love and kids over escorting, all day every day. So if the right one came along then definitely, I’d give it up, and you know I’d close all my accounts, I mean on the same day you know. (Rob)

I just can’t see me doing it for sort of years and years. At some stage I would like to get into a normal sort of relationship again. (Dan)

For Rob and Dan, sex work and intimate relationships are fundamentally incompatible, whilst Sean considers himself incompatible with committed relationships: ‘relationships is just something I can’t do’.

Returning to the professionalised / casualised dichotomy of female and male escort sectors, I suggest that for women (particularly the women within this research), mainstream relationships must either fit in with sex work – which must be accepted by partners – or be avoided altogether. Secrecy is not reported to be an option. For example, Nadine has chosen singlehood throughout her five years as an escort, and adds that escort work would end if this changed:

If, and this is a very big if, I ever met Prince Charming who swept me off my feet, I would pack in escorting, but if I found someone had cheated on me that would be it. (Nadine)

For Nadine, a more traditional morality built upon fidelity is important within relationships, and as such, juggling escorting and personal romance is beyond the realm of possibility. The above best align with more traditional values surrounding love, sex and partnerships. Despite the sexual nature of their work, the participants above appear resolute in their refusal to engage in romantic relationships whilst sex working, echoing some male escorts' stances detailed earlier when discussing non-monogamy. In the extract above, Nadine also expresses some cynicism around relationships – sentiments which are echoed by Jessica:

Doing what I do, you do learn what men are like. And I don't think I would ever trust a man again (...) I think I would always be suspicious because it is Mister Ordinary who goes to see escorts. I do look around and think, 'I wonder if you go to escorts?' because it is your normal person, the bloke next door, happily married couple, you think they are lovely, you wouldn't think for a minute that he probably goes, and it does make you very cynical. (Jessica)

It would have to be somebody really, really special but I'm not looking, I'm not looking. (Nadine)

Several women talk about lack of trust as potentially problematic in future relationships, contextualising this against the knowledge accrued throughout the course of their escorting careers. Jessica's direct experience with happily married (but unfaithful) 'Mister Ordinary' has altered her perspective towards men (and relationships also), and for Nadine, the emphasis upon a man needing to be 'really, really special' before she would consider a relationship further symbolises a lack of faith in romantic possibilities. Interestingly, no male escorts speak cynically about future relationship prospects.

Thus far, the romantic relationships of escorts have been considered. Attention now shifts to the dimensions of family and support – the non-sexual domains of human relating.

7.4 Kinships and Support Networks

7.4.1 Parents and siblings – courtesy stigma

Chapter 6 centralised 'stigma' as the site of analysis, although the topic of 'courtesy stigma' was reserved for discussion here. First conceptualised by Goffman, 'courtesy stigma' is the secondary stigma applied to and experienced by a person connected to the stigmatised, where 'the problems faced by stigmatised persons spread out in waves of

diminishing intensity among those they come in contact with' (1963, p.30). The notion of 'courtesy stigma' is most often applied to the domains of mental health (for example, Angermeyer et al., 2003; Phelan et al., 1998), or stigmatised physical and 'moral' health (for example, Bogart et al., 2007, examining HIV stigma across families). In essence, associates of people living with stigmatized conditions experience a form of stigma *through association*.

The previous chapter developed thoughts and concepts around direct sex work stigma specifically; this section will now explore the reported impact of sex work upon family members. Bruckert (2002, p.243) describes how sex work stigma is 'sticky', and this sticky stigma affects the lives of those associated with erotic dancers such that 'her family may be, or perceive themselves to be, stigmatised'. Moving beyond the immediate structural ties of kinship, Phillips et al. (2011) analyse the courtesy stigma experiences of frontline staff working with sex workers and how this is perceived by family, friends and the wider community. Sex work was chosen as their site of study because of its 'sharp' moral imbuement. It follows, then, that people more closely associated with sex workers (for example, their families) are more likely to be at the forefront of Goffman's diminishing waves analogy. Phelan et al. (1998) questioned whether greater socioeconomic status would reduce courtesy stigma, but instead found that this increased the reports of avoidance; offering perhaps that education may increase perceptions of stigma (and therefore a greater likelihood of avoiding the sex worker). Alternatively, tolerance of stigma may be 'diminished among more affluent individuals' (Phillips et al., 2012, p.681).

Courtesy stigma is a topic of concern for several interviewees. Borrowing Goffman's imagery of waves of diminishing intensity (1963), coupled with the suggestion of higher socioeconomic status correlating with higher felt courtesy stigma, consider the following recollections of Kirsten, who was 'outed' by a national tabloid and was forced to inform her family of her work:

I knew that I didn't want my parents to be told by anyone else. My father worked as an engineer in a machine shop, and the newspaper would have been lying around...so I kind of felt that they needed to know (...) and my father and I have never discussed it either, ever...pretending it doesn't happen (long pause) Ah, ummmmm. That's really hard. Yes, she [mum] was completely disgusted by it (...) She's really ashamed by it, she really suffers. My father's side of the family did all find out about it, my mother's side of the family, I don't think

anyone knows (...) Probably because they're too posh to read [name of tabloid paper] (laughter). Whereas my dad's side, it's a really large family, and once one person had seen it, everyone knew about it, and my mother just found it the most mortifying, horrific thing ever. And I still feel really bad for that. I don't give a shit about what anyone thinks about me, but, my mother really does. So that's one of the hardest things that's happened since the outing, that's by far the worst outcome, in terms of how that's affected my mum. (Kirsten)

Kirsten also recalls how she has never spoken to her youngest brother about it, but that he told their mother she had 'ruined the family name'. Complete avoidance of discussion features here, whilst 'too posh to read' the tabloid implies overtones of class and socioeconomic privilege. Kirsten's story presents the harshest reality of how courtesy stigma impacts not only family members, but also the relational bond:

the family thing has been awkward, because I didn't go back and see them for a long while afterwards (...) I'm her only daughter and we were close-ish, you know, she misses that relationship that we used to have, but she's just finding it impossible, you know, she would come up to London and we'd spend the day together but now she won't even do that. (Kirsten)

In accordance with the aforementioned avoidance strategies employed, she concludes 'I do think, if I get a proper job, it will never be quite forgotten, but it will be easier for her to say it never happened, or to have to think about it again'. Meanwhile Violet (although open about her work) fears repercussions for her mother, because of her mother's standing in the local community.

Beyond courtesy stigma directly, other escorts (female and male) report the desire to avoid the potential conflict their work could cause within familial relationships:

my mum doesn't know (...) She knows what I'm like but there's only so much I can tell her. No she knows her son's a bit frivolous, that's about it, but the full details, like I'm not disclosing that one. (Sean)

I never told my mum because she would have hit the roof and it goes against everything she believes religion wise. I think if she knew I was once being paid for sex, she would struggle to cope with that, she might even disown me, although I can't be certain. (Zack) My mum's very religious, it wouldn't go down well at all (Dan)

Lois echoes sentiments of problematic religion, reporting her mother's 'faith' as one of several reasons (alongside health and age) why she keeps escorting hidden from family

members. Sara simply states ‘the job is the stigma, the scarlet letter’, as her rationale for not telling her family.

In the previous chapter, I cautioned against the blanket application of stigma theory onto sex work experience. I now reinforce this stance through the accounts of men and women who challenge, refute, and/or navigate courtesy stigma within their familial relationships. Autumn, one of the youngest escorts of this research, describes how all members of her family know about her work and it has never been a problem. Jessica exercises a gendered disclosure, choosing to tell her mum and sister, but not her brother and father, describing the former as ‘a man’s man’ who would be uncomfortable with both the discussion and reality of her involvement in sex work. Carla, conversely, describes her brother as the first person she would turn to for support regarding her work, and likewise the earlier account of Kirsten’s ‘outing’ was met with support by one of her brothers. Rob relays a detailed account of his mum’s reaction:

She’s quite an open-minded woman, me mum, and she says, I think, she’s always joked among her friends and family about you know how much of a good-looking lad she thinks I am, typical mother stuff obviously, you know, and when this came out she was like ‘I’m just not surprised, I’m not surprised at all’. So she’s just totally accepted straightaway. (Rob)

Parental acceptance and support is apparent throughout Elaine’s account. She exercises openness with all family and friends, but describes her parents as ‘old hat’, alluding to sexual prudery, particularly values around ‘living in sin’.

However, despite this her parents fully accept her work and Elaine feels comfortable enough to receive work calls in front of her mum (although she leaves the room if her dad is there). In perhaps the most evocative demonstration of parental acceptance, Elaine describes one of her regular client’s requests and her mother’s role within the booking:

I’ve got this one client who likes me dripping in gold. So when he books me, I say to my mum, ‘mum, I’ve got him again, can I have your gold?’
(Elaine)

Interestingly, Elaine was one of two female escorts in their fifties, both of whom refused to lie about their work. If we consider Elaine, in her fifties, and Autumn, in her twenties; there is a substantial generational gap between their respective parents. Thus, it becomes difficult to explain differences in parental responses on generational, or traditional

grounds. The stigma river presented in the previous chapter is useful here: just as experiences of stigma refused neat categorisation then, so is this repeated now. Carla describes how her brother knows all about her work, but she was initially reluctant to tell her sister, because she thought she would react negatively: ‘she reacted in quite an unusual way actually, she was like, wow, I wish I could do something like that’. Relational circumstances where one might feel able to gauge the reactions of others defy prediction. Moreover, there are no parallels to be drawn between gender here; both women and men experience a *range* of reactions from family members. Instead of examining gender in these instances, a wider analysis of the particular relational bonds may be more revealing.

7.4.2 Children – protection and protectiveness

Although questions concerning children were not asked as part of the interview (apart from demographic collection afterwards), children feature throughout several accounts. In keeping with the variability presented in this chapter thus far, women and men discussed children and their escort work in contrasting ways. Consider the isolated reporting of honesty and acceptance in Nadine’s account:

I’ve got kids that are grown up, they know (...) they were fine, because they knew I did web-camming and phone chat and I think they think I’m old enough to know what I’m doing (...) so no, they don’t have a problem with it at all. (Nadine)

Perhaps the age of offspring is crucial to inducing the possibility of openness from sex working parents. This need not be because of sex work per se, but because of barriers around discussions of a sexual nature more generally; an idea I offered in the Methodology and previous chapter to this. If we struggle to talk about sex, then how can we begin to talk about sex work? Sex worker and activist Elle Stranger writes an open letter to her young daughter, entitled ‘I’m a sex worker, and this is what I’ll tell my child’. Elle normalises her work throughout, demonstrating age-appropriate ways of informing her child about how she earns money. She writes:

I’m sorry that the television will send you conflicting messages about sex and love (...) I’m sorry that some aspects of womanhood are oppressive, and it’s true, that in many places around the world, men and women and children are forced to do things with their bodies, for other people. I hope you understand that mommy gets to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’

when it suits her (...). Yes, your mommy is naked on the Internet. You've seen me walking naked round the house. Human bodies are amazing things. (Elle Stanger, 2016, online).

Throughout the article, Elle places her work in the broader realm of *all* work, and contextualises paid sex, nakedness and choice within the wider domain of human relationships. Weitzer's (2016) commentary piece (discussed in the close of the previous chapter) offered practical suggestions to help decrease the negativity surrounding sex work, including 'neutralising language'. Elle's account above speaks to ideas about normalising, as well as neutralising, however sex and children is a contentious coupling. For instance, St James Infirmary, a peer-based occupational health and safety clinic for sex workers and their families in San Francisco created a poster campaign 'someone you know is a sex worker'. Numerous posters were created, with captions such as 'sex workers are mothers, school teachers, and social activists' and 'sex workers go to work, come home, take care of their children – just like everybody else does'. The proposed billboard advertising campaign was rejected 'because the words 'sex work' and sex worker' were not considered to be 'family friendly' (St James Infirmary, online). This is particularly interesting given the sexualised nature of much advertising⁶², yet some simple images of fully clothed, 'regular' looking people with a caption are deemed unsuitable.

Jessica and Eva have not disclosed how they earn money to their children, nor do any escort fathers speak about their children being aware of their involvement with sex work. Jessica recalls some memories from her schooldays:

I mean, I think back to the times when I was at secondary school and you used to get some of the kids with the latest things on and they had a single mum (...) they'd come back from the holidays with a full-on tan (...) I daresay a lot of the kids at my school probably had a parlour mam. (Jessica)

For single mother Jessica, escorting gives her access to a better style of living than she could otherwise enjoy, which extends to giving her young daughter 'nice holidays'. Similarly, Eva describes how an overnight booking 'can really make a difference to the family', demonstrating the wider familial benefit of escort income. The recent work of

⁶² Vast literatures discuss this, examples include Rosewarne (2005) 'The men's gallery: outdoor advertising and public space', O'Barr's 'Sex and advertising', and Ey and McInnes (2015) 'Sexualised music videos broadcast on Australian free-to-air television in child-friendly time periods'.

Rivers-Moore (2016) untangles the relationship between motherhood, sex work, and consumption, and despite the different socio-economic setting is pertinent to this analysis. For example, in Costa Rica ‘sex work facilitates a level of middle-class consumption usually unavailable to low-income and poor women’ (ibid., p.102), and the same applies to the UK. Prior to escorting, Jessica worked in a hotel and struggled to keep up with bill payments. However, unlike some of the women in Rivers-Moore’s analysis, Jessica is quick to assert she could easily find other forms of work if she wished. All escorts with dependents kept the nature of their work hidden from their children. Whilst this is rationalised as a protective measure in the expected sense - the adult protecting the child - Jessica also offers the reverse:

She’s, even though she’s only ten, she’s protective of me. She’s protective and defensive, and if anyone were to say anything about me then, that’s it then. She would be getting in trouble in school left right and centre. (Jessica)

Jessica’s protective daughter, and her potential reaction, echoes the findings of Sircar and Dutta (2011). They discuss how the children of Kolkata sex workers organise to reclaim both the dignity for their mothers, as well as for their own status as sex workers’ offspring. Protectiveness flows back and forth between parents and children.

Male escorts are equally keen for their children to remain unaware of their work.

Consider the accounts of Rob and Sean, who both have teenagers:

I’ve got a daughter who is thirteen years old, and I would hate for her to find out (...) I’d hate for her to find out (...) I’ve not really thought about what I would say if she did find out, but hopefully I’ll never have to. (Rob)

My kids don’t know they don’t need to know that. My oldest is thirteen and he’s not quite – he is getting to the stage where he understands a few things, but he doesn’t need to know. (Sean)

Although the previous chapter discussed the ‘whore stigma’ in the sense of it being gendered, when attention is given to the parent-child dyad, the historical roots of acceptable sexual behaviour for women and men matter little. The issue is sex and sex work, not the gendered sex worker, an idea I return to in the conclusion. This chapter now concludes with an examination of the support female and male escorts reported, including support networks.

7.4.3 Support Networks

According to Bauman (2003, xxi) modern day social networks provide a matrix ‘for simultaneously connecting and disconnecting’, whereby each state of (dis)connection is equally valid. Although *Liquid Love* offers a somewhat depressing treatise of human relating in what he refers to as our ‘liquid modern world’ (ibid., xiii), his observations retain relevance to some of the experiences recalled by interviewees. Bauman writes specifically about internet dating, offering a parallel to online shopping (ibid., p.65) in which the network (and thus romantic potential) is perceived as detrimental to lasting human bonds. Extending this beyond the realm of romance, I draw upon the connections and disconnections of human networks, examining the support mechanisms available for female and male escorts. Turner (1994, p.521) details how ‘a vast body of literature shows impressive evidence for the direct and stress-buffering effects of social support on psychological health’. Accepting that social support can correlate with wellbeing, I aim to offer some thoughts on how support is discussed amongst sex workers, and whether gender influences the avenues of support both available and/or taken up. Although speaking more generally, Turner suggests that women may be simultaneously ‘better providers of support and the recipients of more supportive transactions’ (1994, p.522). These assertions will be considered in tandem with empirical data given by participants.

‘Support’ is largely spoken about in the context of being physical, emotional and practical. Beginning with the former, physical assistance is uniformly provided by men:

My brother’s brilliant (...) he’s the muscle if I felt I ever needed anyone.
(Carla)

We’ve got a mezzanine there, he [male partner] sits up there. (Lois)

I’ve got some support, like, I have a bodyguard here who will sit in a different room. The clients won’t be aware of him at all. (Autumn)

Meanwhile men do not report the need for protection or back up – for male escorts, as Chapter 5 suggested, personal safety is not a primary concern. Female clients are simply not viewed in the context of threat, and this is symptomatic of gendered relations more generally, not specific to the sex industry.

Moving onto the potential supportive allies found in work colleagues, McPherson et al. (2001, p.415) state that ‘similarity breeds connection’, building upon Lazarsfeld and Merton’s status homophily (1954, cited in McPherson et al., 2001) – the ways in which

society is stratified socio-demographically by factors such as age, race, religion and occupation amongst others. Occupational contacts, for female escorts at least, can be sanctums of support and advice, however the ‘connection’ shared with other escorts does not necessarily engender relationships of significant depth:

The other girls [when she worked in a parlour] the only thing I have in common with them is we were both prostitutes in the same place (...) we’ve got an understanding, but aside from that we’ve got nothing in common. (Jessica)

I don’t have any escort friends, as I said, this one woman, she was so fickle always cancelling. (Nadine)

For some researchers, the specific avoidance of sex industry friendships is interpreted as an exercise in controlling information, and potential stigma. Certainly, Violet adopts such strategies when she states ‘I don’t have a lot of friends (...) I tend to gravitate towards not taking on new friends, if they’re local, because I see it as too dangerous for discretion’. However, I would also suggest that the much more mundane elements of any job need to be acknowledged here – in most lines of work, people maintain a spectrum of interpersonal connections with colleagues ranging from the entirely professional to those which straddle non-work spheres. In this instance, why should escort work be any different? Sex work, *like all work*, can merely provide the situational conditions under which people meet.

As with other forms of occupation, emerging friendships may initially centre around the common work ‘role’ or environment, but can also proliferate from this. The shared status as ‘sex worker’ contributes to fostering supportive allegiances as well as genuine friendships:

There’s a girl I used to work with (...) we try and meet up when we’re both in the same place, because it’s really important that we have some interaction with someone else who does what we do (Carla).

She’s my best friend, and we work together too. We share our clients. (Elaine)

My two best friends I met through doing this (...) the first one was a client, and then another woman who was working. They ended up getting together, although they’ve split up now. I’m best friends with both of them, just separately. (Eva)

In accordance with Turner’s (1994) assertions concerning gendered support, it appears female escorts both receive support from, and provide support to, other women. Male

escorts, meanwhile, are much less likely to report other male escorts as sources of support. In rare instances where male interviewees enjoy a friendship with another male worker, it transpires the friendship existed prior to escort work. Beyond this, only John recalls contact with other male workers, and this is exclusively in the context of being approached for information about how to escort successfully, which he finds an annoyance as ‘they just want information from me’. Several men speak of female sex workers they are acquainted with, but these friendships are described in very casual terms and lack any narrative of support or closeness. Female and male escorting are viewed so differently as to be beyond comparison, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Finally, collective support is discussed solely by women, and this can take several forms. Jessica mentions SAAFE, a website dedicated to support and advice for sex workers. Meanwhile physical collectives are utilised by Violet and Kirsten. Violet contacted the English Collective of Prostitutes for advice when she needed clarity regarding university discrimination, and Kirsten describes how she often attends coffee mornings as part of the Sex Worker Open University. In *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, Rainie and Wellman (2014) discuss the concept of networked individualism. This new operating system, they observe, removes the more traditional and restrictive ties associated with groups, increasing networks both in number and size. Returning to a point made in Chapter 4, I observed that women utilised the internet for business purposes in a much more multi-faceted way than male escorts. I also noted that female escorts engaged with online forums for mutual information exchange, support and camaraderie. Many female respondents were indeed ‘networked individuals’ regarding support, however this was generally not the case for men. Violet best represents the majority of female escort-colleague relations when she notes ‘I know other escorts through the internet and stuff’. Although avenues of collective support remain heavily female oriented, many are not exclusively so. SAAFE, for example, homes several threads of aspiring male escorts looking for female clientele. In the main, female escorts utilise these spaces and collectives. Perhaps there is an argument to be made that the ‘straight male escort’ does not need to engage with these online mechanisms of support, because of his gender-privileged position alongside the relatively small volume of female clients he can procure, however this is somewhat presumptive and will be discussed in the conclusion below.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the topic of sex work and relationships, spanning romantic ties, familial and friendship bonds, and wider networks of support. What is evident throughout is the lack of predictable discourse concerning the impact of sex work upon relationships. For example, female sex workers in relationships with men exercise openness and honesty concerning their work, contradicting literature which more frequently focus upon secrecy and lies. Moreover, the women speak about their romantic relationships very positively; the men in their lives are supportive concerning their work. Again, this contradicts previous commentary focusing upon the detrimental aspects of (female) sex workers' intimate ties. Conversely, the opposite is found in male escort accounts and the overwhelming tendency is to keep escort work hidden from romantic partners. However, this is an isolated observation due to a complete absence of literature to draw upon, alongside the small sample size of this project, and even smaller sample of men involved in relationships. This could be idiosyncratic. It is perhaps more pertinent to move beyond the specific interaction of sex work and relationships and instead look more broadly at the (varied) sexual and relational values apparent across women and men's accounts. For instance, for some sex workers (women and men), sex work is simply incompatible with a relationship, because they value monogamy. For others, non-monogamy is either already a feature of their relationships or escorting is not seen to be a breach of monogamy. Thus, participants' values influence their relational realities.

'Values', and their place in relationships are also found within participants' discussions of family ties. Again, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider the specific relational dynamics within families, and I explore how discussion of sex is (or is not) deemed appropriate for some escorts. Afifi and Geurero (1995, p.277) review research concerning self-disclosure, and comment that 'topic avoidance is a key element defining the scope and boundaries of intimacy in close relationships'. Talking to family members (including children) about sex work means there must already be a certain level of comfort discussing sex, and it is this latter point which is problematic. As Kirsten reports, discussing her work (and her happiness with her work) with her mum is difficult, because it communicates that she actually 'quite likes' having sex with many men.

Beyond romance and family, women and men report differences in the availability – and utilisation – of networks of support. The women interviewed discuss multiple

avenues of support available to them, most often through friendships, escort colleagues and the wider realm of internet spaces designed purposefully to aid dialogue between sex workers. For men, these avenues of support are much more muted; friendships can provide mockery or bravado (as the previous chapter also attests) and they do not engage at all in designated online ‘support’ spaces for sex workers. Arguably, the ‘straight male escort’ is not subject to the ingrained structural stigma and persecution afforded to women and thus do not require an array of support mechanisms, as the more abolitionist stances toward sex work contend (Farley, 2003; Jeffreys, 2008). However, if we are to create an encompassing address of contemporary sex work in the UK, where men as sexual service providers and women as consumers are acknowledged in policy and practice, then I would argue that similar collectives and online spaces ought to engage accordingly.⁶³ These ideas conclude the empirical analyses, which are synthesised in the final chapter, next.

⁶³ Indeed, the ongoing ‘Beyond the Gaze’ research project is investigating in depth the online spaces and working practices of all-gendered sex workers.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has addressed the comparative experiences of ‘straight’ female and male escorts working in the UK sex industry. Here, in the concluding chapter, I draw together the research aims and findings, highlighting the specific contributions to the sex work literature. I also present an overview of some of the more theory based contributions to broader sociological knowledge. Using Elaine’s narrative, my discussions of the theoretical contributions of the thesis conclude with an homage to the storytelling and narrative method employed. Elaine’s experiences tell a partial (thematic) story of the thesis, and importantly in relation to my own argument and contribution, her story evades and challenges the populist and academic ‘pigeon-holing’.

I then return to the (potentially) changing sex work policy landscape highlighted in Chapter 1, outlining some practical suggestions for future research based on ‘speaking’ to policy directly; alongside some less political, but academically interesting avenues for moving forward in sex work research.

8.2 Answering the research questions

In Chapter 1, I asserted the need for a comparative and exploratory approach in researching ‘straight’ female and male escorting. In light of this, the overarching question guiding the research asked; ‘what are the experiences of female and male escorts (who work heteronormatively)?’ Four sub-questions provide some answers to this question – each of which will now be discussed in turn.

1. What motivates women and men to become escorts?

All twenty participants interviewed had (sometimes lengthy) employment histories prior to ‘becoming’ an escort, and entered the sex industry through choice and (unsurprisingly) to earn money. Although discourses of ‘choice’ feed into what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) term ‘individualisation’; I believe the entry points into sex work are best understood in terms of the wider context of the ‘mainstreaming’ of the sex industry, as

discussed in Chapter 2. The theme of ‘precarity’ is most evident as an initial motivational driver, both financial and employment precarity. Financial precarity is noticeable across many accounts, where ‘not enough’ money features as an initial ‘push’ factor into *considering* sex work. Employment precarity (in the form of redundancy or disciplinary action) also catalyses first entry into the escort sector. Precarity appears thematically across many interviews and extends beyond finances directly.

For many participants, the readily available information online meant they could conduct their own searches into escorting, enabling them to browse websites and directories privately prior to creating their own profiles. Only four of the twenty interviewees began escorting without any input from the internet (Jessica responded to a newspaper advert; Jason placed an advert in a magazine; George was recruited by a female agency owner and Elaine worked for many years answering the phone for an escort agency). Therefore, the internet (and associated visibility of sex industry activity) was instrumental in 80% of participants’ first entry into direct sex work.

Although motivations are based on individuals’ financial circumstances, knowledge of sex work and the ability to procure it, I consider that these are culturally positioned within a more ‘mainstream’ sexual society. Writing about adult entertainment, Lynn Comella argues:

If industry observers and professionals have learned anything over the course of the past decade, it is that consumer demand for adult entertainment is diverse enough to support an increasingly segmented marketplace (...) have brought new voices, new products, and importantly, new consumers into the sexual marketplace, expanding adult industry offerings and, in the process, leaving an indelible imprint. Today, the boundaries between “mainstream” and “alternative” segments of the adult industry are increasingly porous. (2009, pp.300-301)

Several participants had been involved in connected sex industry activity before engaging in direct sex work themselves; escorting was the outcome of gradual immersion from stripping (Zack), phone chat lines and webcamming (Kirsten and Nadine), reception work for an escort agency (Elaine), nude photography (Jessica) and dominatrix ‘shadowing’ (Carla). Within the sample of women and men interviewed, women are more likely to report a phased entry into sex work. However, this could also be indicative of the proliferation of sex industry avenues available to women in comparison to those available to the ‘straight’ male interested only in female clientele.

For some participants, motivations were less distinctly about money and more about the pursuit of what I termed ‘the sexual journey’. So, although payment for sex certainly featured as important, this was enmeshed within a wider matrix of *exploration*. Jason stated he wanted to see if women would be willing to pay for his time in the way that he also pays for female escorts’ time. Likewise, Eva cites frustration with a sexless marriage and a desire to retrain as a midwife, deciding that escorting could be a ‘solution’ to both. Carla, although money-focused, had a longstanding ‘mad fascination with all things sex-related’, capturing a broader perspective of the decision to sex-work within the participants’ life histories.

2. What similarities and differences exist between the working practices of women and men?

In Chapter 4, I outlined some key differences between how women and men utilise the internet throughout the course of their work, offering a diagram demonstrating male escorts as occupants of a ‘casual’ market whereas for the female sector, the market appears much more professionalised (and diversified). This theme reverberates through Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Male escorts are seemingly limited in the ways they choose to engage with the internet for their work; for example, Figure 3 illustrates 13 ways female escorts use the internet for work purposes, compared to only 4 ways for men. I posit that the ‘straight’ male escort market is not yet fully established, and is yet to fully integrate within mainstream sex industry commerce. A similar observation is found in pornography created by women:

The world of women-made pornography is fragmented; it lacks a central location for production and is less established than the mainstream porn industry (Bakehorn, 2010, p. 92)

Comparatively, although the male escort market for women is clearly part of the sex industry, it appears to be peripheral to the bulk of activity which largely pertains to the female service provider and the male consumer.

Continuing the previously mentioned theme of precarity, women and men express different levels of concern about generating money from escorting. Paradoxically, 9 of the 10 male escorts are unable to sustain a reasonable standard of living from sex work alone and therefore only escort as a part-time endeavour to a mainstream job. Women,

meanwhile, largely engage with sex work as a sole occupation and report the pressures all self-employed workers face, for example financial insecurity (Logan, 2005). The precarity of escort work (not knowing if, and when, bookings will happen) is consequently experienced differently for women. However, the buoyant market for female escorts means that women have the option of retaining sex work as a sole income generator, a possibility realised by only one man, who admits that he ‘gets by’. Conversely, women report how escort work has made them ‘very comfortable’ (Autumn), and allows them greater choice over how to spend their time (for instance, Carla works two days a week which generates ‘easily enough’ to live on per month). Female escorts command premium hourly rates compared to men, see many more clients than men and for the most part, engage in sex work for longer periods of time in comparison to their counterparts.

Continuing the disparity between casual and professional escort markets, women and men navigate ‘safety’ differently within their work. Female escorts report a variety of practical preventative measures they employ which engender their safety as they work; mechanisms which are already well-supported in sex industry research literature (for example Campbell and O’Neill, 2006; O’Doherty, 2011; Sanders, 2004,2005,2006; Sanders and Campbell, 2007). Meanwhile male escorts demonstrate very little concern for their safety before, during or after a booking and this could be because of the perceived lesser threat a female client poses. Similarly, several men demonstrate a lack of concern regarding sexual safety. Although some male escorts view their paid liaisons as entirely work (where condoms are essential), several men also talk about escorting as an extension of their sex lives more broadly, and condom use is inconsistent. This finding is consonant with the work of Blackwell and Dziegielewski (2013), who called for targeted public health interventions geared toward male sexual service providers advertising on the internet. Unlike the circumstances in which female sex workers may ‘forego’ sexual safety provisions, irregular condom use for male escorts is not attributed to increased fees, or other ‘marketing’ reasons and in some instances male accounts mimic a wider culture of casual sex – the ‘hook up’ culture (McHugh et al., 2012). Only one female escort offers unprotected intercourse to clients; the majority vocalise disgust at what is perceived to be recklessness.

Emotion management, particularly emotional labour is well-documented throughout the indoor sex industry (Sanders, 2004; 2005). Emotion management is most often seen to be ‘women’s work’, where ‘feeling’ becomes a tradeable resource (Hohschild, 1983, p.163). The accounts of female and male escorts interviewed offer some challenges to this position: I suggest that it is not necessarily *gender*, but the *nature* and *organisation* of sex work itself that commands emotional labour. Some male escort accounts speak the loudest to the place of emotion work in their job, with one man for example describing himself as a ‘leather couch on legs’.

3.Does gender influence experiences (or lack) of ‘stigma’?

Chapter 6 provides a three-tiered examination of sex work stigma charting its *concept*, *reality* and *questionability*. Both a historical account of the ‘whore stigma’ (Pheterson, 1993) and a more general address of stigma theory were presented. Pheterson (1996) declared ‘whore stigma’ to be a uniquely female problem because of its legacy of gender oppression, and indeed, several men corroborate the idea of the whore stigma as attached to sex-working women; as well as the existence and attachment of the sexual double standard. In relation to sex working realities, however, a much murkier terrain emerges. Although male escorts are less likely to report such intensely negative experiences in comparison to women, this is complicated by the ways in which some men experience shame and guilt because of their work. Furthermore, although two women detailed very unpleasant experiences with being ‘outed’, or of navigating prejudice when choosing to disclose sex work, most of the women interviewed report negligible amounts of what could be termed ‘stigma’. Although no men have ‘outing’ stories to share, they are likely to be recipients of mockery from friends (indeed one man states he ‘ended up a bit of a loner’ after disclosing his work). In contrast, women are more likely to be met with concern for their safety and welfare.

However, there are difficulties in reaching a straightforward conclusion of gendered sex work stigma. Instead, I proposed a fluid model of stigma, presented visually as the stigma river (Figure 4). Briefly, the stigma river captured the many ways (for women and men alike) in which stigma can be experienced, and was grouped into three areas: structurally, interpersonally and intrapersonally. The stigma river offered a more contingent way of thinking about and theorising stigma. Many aspects of my findings

throughout Chapter 6 are consistent with both Pheterson's (1996) and more recently Nolan's (2015) assertions of a gendered 'whore stigma'. However, I warn against the blanket imposition of stigma 'modelling' onto individual (and gendered) experience, using examples of the media treatment of Brooke Magnanti and Nick Goddard. These served to demonstrate that although the 'whore stigma' idea is attached to female bodies, the reality of sex work stigma is not *necessarily* gender specific.

The accounts of women and men also illustrate that stigma is not *uniformly* experienced within genders, and that the theory and application of stigma can be somewhat disparate. Consider Carla, who was expecting a negative reaction from her sister, but then counters this by saying her niece still stays with her for long weekends. The ideology of the 'whore' - and expected reactions - can diverge in practice: as Lavie-Ajayi observes 'the relationships between attitudes and behaviour is complex' (2016, p.12). Lastly, the stories told by men and women also demonstrate that people have different resources for 'dealing' with stigmatisation, and that it does not affect everyone equally: this can often be overlooked in sex work research.

3.What impact does escorting have beyond the realm of work, extending to interpersonal relationships?

By moving away from analyses preoccupied with discourses and topics of choice, pleasure, damage or empowerment for example, I remain with the complexity and contradictions of individuals' stories, and thus their lives. As lives are relational, it was important for me to allow participants to talk about their families, friends, any children or the possibility of children, support networks and links to the wider community.

For some participants, sex work rests easily in a broader project of living a non-monogamous life. Weeks relates that 'in the contemporary world, everyone has a sexual lifestyle, some more or less a traditional one, some very new' (2007, p.110), and 'we no longer all try to live in the same way, nor do we see everything in the same way' (ibid., p.108). This sexual and relational diversity is evident for both women and men interviewed. For instance, for some participants, Wagner's observation of swinging provides theoretical purchase: 'practising multiple sexual relationships while opposing multiple love relationships is how swingers differ from other forms of polyamory' (2009,

p.293). Interestingly, most academic commentary of sex workers' relationships often frame them as sites of *struggle*. My analyses suggest otherwise, and I observed tales of love and support (concerning male partners of female escorts particularly). Conversely, some women and men chose to remain single whilst escorting, and this choice was framed within the broader context of valuing monogamy. Two women cite mistrust, or cynicism in romantic relationships realised through the experience of escorting.

Some differences arise concerning secrecy within relationships. For example, three men have chosen not to tell their female partners about their escort work. Therefore, men engage in a form of relational precarity most typically discussed in sex work literature as a feature of *female* sex work. Additionally, (and contrary to literature which observes clear distinctions between the work/personal lives of sex workers) I found that for some female escorts, there was a significant overlap between the commercial and the personal; four women cite romantic involvement with clients. Although no male escorts report relationships with clients beyond the paid encounters, this could be more fully attributed to the number of clients men engage with relative to their counterparts; the established female escort sector engenders many more connections between female workers and male clients and logically a greater chance of meeting someone who might be suited romantically. In Chapter 2, I outlined my position of understanding and researching *sex work as work*; here, I reinforce this stance by acknowledging that people meet their partners in many forms of work – crucially, why should sex work be any different?

The data given concerning sex work, families and friendships defy neat categorisations, and instead I used Carol Smart's (2007) theory of relationality to frame the varied accounts given by men and women. Parents and siblings *could* be sources of love, support, acceptance and good humour, *but also* bastions of morality who might disown their sex-working relation should their escort work become known. Throughout the empirical accounts presented within the stigma and relationships chapters, I highlighted a much more complex and diverse understanding of sex workers' interpersonal relationships. It is neither sufficient to reduce these to analyses to the binaries of 'suffering' or 'rejecting' stigma; nor to 'living in secrecy' versus 'living openly'. Stretching, and moving beyond the agency debates discussed in Chapter 2, the accounts speak more to the role of *processes* and human interactions, and it is these relational processes which generate realities. There is thus a need for this aspect to be considered more in studies of both stigma and relationships more generally.

8.3 Contributions to theoretical knowledge

The discussion in Chapter 5 explored the matrix of gender, power and escorting. Although ‘power’ was not a predetermined site of exploration, my analysis indicated nuanced power relations in a variety of ways that proved novel and thus pertinent. The chapter recounted an array of relationships spanning gender and physicality; ‘managing’ the commercial encounter, and physical and sexual safety. The concept of ‘power’ is pervasive throughout sex work theorising, as Chapter 1 introduced, and Chapter 2 discussed – and, Chapter 5 warns against theorising power as property. For the female escorts interviewed, a form of collective power is evident, and I discuss this in the context of the established female escort sector, which is professionalised and operates with expected ‘norms’ of acceptable conduct on behalf of the sex worker and client. I suggest that, although these ‘norms’ may not be immediately apparent, the online infrastructure of escorting assists in creating benchmarks of behaviour. An obvious example would be the ways in which female escorts list the desired behaviours of potential clients (for example, relating to hygiene, punctuality and respect) in contrast to the comparative lack of discussion amongst male escorts. Women not only discuss ‘ideal’ behaviours, but include them in advertising blurb. The male client (but not the female client) is made aware of permitted behaviours, available services and protocols surrounding making, and enacting, the booking. These ‘norms’, combined with careful time management engender positions of power and control for female escorts in the commercial exchange.

The power positions men and women occupy as escorts vary according to the aspect of work being examined. For instance, the established (or yet to be established) escort markets discussed above trickles down into the gendered working experiences. ‘Timewasting’ is experienced differently between women and men; for women, this mostly takes the form of ‘no-shows’ – clients not turning up for bookings whereas for men it manifests in homosexual nuisance calls. Read (2012, p.13) notes ‘that A is more powerful than B does not necessarily mean that A is powerful *because* B is less powerful’ and this serves as a useful summary for many of the micro-conclusions of Chapter 5.

In Chapter 6 I questioned the academic tendency to *expect* stigma to accompany sex work. I argue that by framing discussions around stigma, it likely unearths what could be classified as stigma, for example, keeping sex work a secret from family and friends – it can perpetuate and reinforce an understanding of stigma theory as the primary

explanatory framework for sex work. However, this theoretical ‘glass ceiling’ potentially hinders other suitable interpretations, and I found that living in secrecy was often attached to breaching the monogamous contract of romantic relationships. In other words, the issue was ‘bigger’ than stigma: instead it became about broader relational values. In this way, I construe sex work stigma - as presently theorised - as conceptually ‘slippery’. Brannen and Nilsen assert that ‘the absence of a relevant discourse ought to be taken as seriously as the presence of another discourse’ (2005, p.418), and I echo this stance through considering the instance where stigma is of little, or no importance in some escorts’ experiences.

The stigma river thus enabled a new, broader way of thinking and theorising stigma, by both acknowledging the role of chance and resisting a hierarchical or modelling process of explanation. My recognition that experiences of stigma resist precise prediction and may be more erratically applied and/or experienced illuminates the limitations of previous academic theorising - the stories told by participants rarely followed any pattern or logic. The most secretive escort for example also reported guilt and shame on numerous occasions throughout our conversation, and conversely one of the most ‘open’ women had no experience of stigma, or as Manzo describes, its euphemisms (2004). I hope to tentatively have moved the stigma debate along in relation to sex work, remaining cognizant of the ‘political’ nature of knowledge production and the relationship between theory and culture:

The way they [theories and concepts] influence interpretations of social life more generally and in particular the currency they provide for political elites and the media in communicating to the populace. This is especially the case in concepts so general that they are presumed applicable to any time or any place (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005, p.424).

Binaristic debates can gain an almost ‘common-sense’ authority within the academy, and the politics of these knowledges of filtering through to mainstream contemporary ‘thought’ and parlance must be carefully considered. My stigma river, as well as offering a new theoretical framework for thinking about an aspect of sex workers’ lives, also seeks to complicate and challenge any ‘common-sense’ assumptions within the academy and wider culture on sex workers’ experience of their lives.

In a similar vein, in Chapter 7 I observed the tendency for sex workers’ relationships to be theorised as problematic. Certainly, this can be the case, but once again the interviews (with women in particular) suggest that relational problems are not a

foregone conclusion, and inhere as much complexity as non-sex working women. I offered some tentative thoughts for looking beyond sex work specifically, extending analyses to the role of sex in society. How we communicate (or do not) about sex is theoretically important – as Meerabeau (1999) considers, throughout Western contemporary thought, sex is construed as a *private* affair. Like many private affairs, sex can incite embarrassment, awkwardness, shame and guilt (all of which feature in Chapter 6). For Lavie-Ajayi (2016), embarrassment serves as a barrier for effective sex-related communication. As long as there is an enduring awkwardness concerning sex and its perceived ‘place’ in the ‘private’ realm, progressive discussions of sex work are hindered. For instance:

Intimate life is the endlessly cited *elsewhere* of political public discourse, a promised haven that (...) shames them for any divergence between their lives and the intimate sphere that is alleged to be simple personhood. (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p.553)

Kirsten vocalises the shame her mother felt after the tabloid ‘outing’ and the awkwardness of trying to communicate that she quite likes her work. In Chapters 3 and 6, I indicated the awkwardness I felt (and continue to feel) discussing my research topic with family members. For Sean, his mother knows ‘he is a bit frivolous’ but he feels she does not need to know any more than that. These all reinforce the awkwardness of sex as a topic, and identify the broader landscape of sexual discussion as problematic in some interpersonal relations. Theoretically, I have made some points about how the topic of sex (not necessarily sex work) can often be the fundamental stumbling block in the path of accepting sex work as work. And whilst I am in full support of decriminalisation of the sex industry, I harbour no illusions that such a move would engender an attitudinal sea change toward commercial sex. For example, swingers are not contravening any laws, yet it is unlikely to feature on one’s job application in the ‘hobbies and pastimes’ section, nor is it likely to arise in daily conversation - thus there is a broader issue of ‘appropriate’ sex within society, which is often side-lined (or simply not considered at all) within sex work research.

However, avoiding the ‘false certainties’ of ‘grand theorising’, I conclude this section with some of the details of Elaine’s story; a nod toward the narrative method of this research and a thematic overview of several empirical findings. First, the words of Edward Snow are pertinent:

For all the power of the theory then, I remain most interested in what escapes it (...). Theory seems always to choose its paradigms as instances of what it already knows. Its analyses seldom completely shed the aura of a demonstration, its treatment of details subject to strict control and fitted into a prior frame. (1989, p.31)

Elaine is a single white woman in her fifties, and prides herself on honesty and repeat business. She frankly states 'I'm no tin ribs. I'm over 15 stone and I don't lie about my age, I tell them I'm 51'. She proceeds to detail how she has relied on escorting as a sole income for many years. Chapter 5 discussed gendered beauty expectations and female sex tourism, of which both inadvertently suggest Elaine ought to struggle procuring sex. Elaine works from her home, a rented property. She speaks of one long standing friendship with a client, who she now sees platonically, contradicting strands of research which emphasise the physical and mental boundaries and separation between sex work and personal life. She expects birthday cards from regular clients, and communicates this to them.

Elaine lives openly in relation to her work. Midway through her interview, the cleaner arrives and I asked if she would like to resume the interview at another time, to which she replied 'Oh no, the cleaner knows all about it. Everyone knows what I do'. Later in the conversation, she tells me about how she gets 'grief' from the sexual health clinic when she has her regular check-ups, because she offers 'cim' (come in mouth) and swallowing to clients, which she said the clinic are not happy about. Elaine tells me that she used to be quite 'traditional' and that her interest in sex arrived later in life; lending itself to Carol Smart's (2007) focus upon individual histories as better explanations of relating over the life course. Not only did Elaine's relationship with sex change, but her values changed, and these changes continued as she gathered more experience. Elaine describes her parents (in their seventies) as 'old hat'. Despite this, she told them about her work, and their relationship remained unaffected. Contradicting the discourses of secrecy, she can take phone bookings whilst in their presence, although she leaves the room if her dad is there 'out of respect'. Finally, the level of comfort and normalisation of sex work discussion apparent between Elaine and her mum is best realised through one particular client, who likes Elaine to be 'dripping in gold' at which point Elaine calls her mum, stating 'mum, I've got him again, can I have your gold?'

The voices of sex workers like Elaine above are rarely heard in sex industry research; there is no political value to her story, and seemingly little academic value

beyond trite conclusions of ‘empowerment’. Perhaps a keener academic valuation of sex workers’ lives as ‘normal’, unfettered by the black cloud of stigma, and beyond discourses of secrecy and shame, free from felt or projected stigma, and without violence, might engender a genuine recognition that sex work *is* work.

8.4 Policy implications and suggestions for further research

As detailed in the introductory chapter, the concluding phases of this research occurred alongside two key interventions signalling an ideological/normative shift in how sex work might be viewed in policy. The first, Amnesty International called for:

The decriminalisation of all aspects of adult consensual sex work due to the foreseeable barriers that criminalization creates to the realization of the human rights of sex workers. (2016, p.2)

In conjunction with their acknowledgment that cisgender men (*ibid.*, p.6) account for significant proportions of sex workers in ‘many states’, the recommendation that criminalisation of sex work violates human rights is momentous. This is particularly so in the context of the creeping neo-abolitionism described by Scoular and Carline (2014), also indicated in the England and Wales policy documents *Paying the Price* (2004) the *Co-ordinated Strategy* (2006) and more recently *Shifting the Burden* (2014). Extending beyond England and Wales, MEP Mary Honeyball proposed a motion to criminalise the purchase of sex throughout Europe, which was endorsed by the European parliament. The resolution states that ‘prostitution and forced prostitution are intrinsically linked to gender inequality in society and have an impact on the status of women and men in society’ (European Parliament Resolution, 2014 cited in Scoular and Carline, 2014, p.609). Thus, the recommendations of Amnesty International occurred at a time where significant advances towards further criminalisation were proposed.

More recently still, the Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into prostitution advised ‘as a matter of urgency, that laws around soliciting are repealed, and that sex workers be allowed to work together’ (2016, p.7). Recognition that collaborative working can *increase* the safety of sex workers, combined with advice to repeal soliciting laws, represents a significant shift. Notwithstanding the smear campaign associated with the

committee chair, Keith Vaz - leading some to describe the HASC guidance as little more than a ‘punter’s charter’ - the inquiry reported:⁶⁴

We were dismayed to discover the poor quality of information available about the extent and nature of prostitution in England and Wales. Without a proper evidence base, the Government cannot make informed decisions about the effectiveness of current legislation and policies, and cannot target funding and support interventions effectively. (2016, p.14)

Having read many of the submissions that ‘informed’ the above conclusion, I found this verdict jarring. Perhaps this reflects my own position, as a researcher immersed in the sex industry via research, teaching and volunteering capacities: for me, the evidence is both plentiful *and* robust. However, the guidance makes it clear that ‘evidence’ ought to be wide scale and statistical. The nature of the sex industry (and the more pragmatic issues of research funding) render mass statistical analyses and ‘grand’ conclusions somewhat problematic. However, the report offers clarity on the *type* of evidence that is valued, and as researchers, *through collaboration* it is possible to achieve some semblance of the desired evidence-base called for.

Going forward, there appears to be a need for more quantitative sex work research, if we are to provide the statistical evidence base that policy makers clearly value. Or perhaps regular, comprehensive reviews of research evidence claims (in the manner adopted by Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, and Weitzer, 2009) to make visible general trends, and to enable confident policy-making decisions without the need to wade through many distinct ‘pockets’ of research. As a collective of sex work scholars, we need to continually reach beyond the specifics of our particular research, aligning and integrating our collective resources to address the ‘woeful lack’ of robust conclusions drawn by the recent HASC interim report. I thus urge for more collaborative and accumulative knowledge that can be easily utilised beyond academia. In relation to sex work theorising, Buschi urges:

In the future, sex work should accordingly no longer be defined and perceived as a social problem but rather a social phenomenon. If sex work can be de-problematized and viewed as gainful employment, this

⁶⁴ It was discovered that Keith Vaz had paid for male escorts’ services. Frankie Mullin uses this phrase in a rebuttal against allowing Vaz’s personal experiences with the sex industry to undermine the recommendations of the HASC.

might lead to a more differentiated and value-free approach to topics and issues in the context of sex work (2014, p.737)

Although I agree with Buschi's sentiment, I remain unconvinced that an attitudinal shift allowing sex work to be 'gainful employment' is the panacea it is purported to be.

Whilst I cannot suggest my research findings might influence policy (clearly, a twenty-strong in depth qualitative study has little 'purchase' in policy making contexts), I do suggest that my conclusions can be positioned within a broader framework, which collaboratively, can pack a research punch. For instance, my findings sit complementarily with the 'Women Who Buy Sex' project. Co-Investigator Dr Sarah Kingston submitted a response to the initial HASC inquiry, and was quoted in the context of 'some sex buyers are women'. A further invitation to the Home Office in September 2016 resulted in dissemination of the WWBS research findings more broadly (personal communication, 2016). Adjusting the research focus to include women as active purchasers and consumers throughout the sex industry is overdue. Although my findings do this only implicitly, it signals (and unearths) a greater recognition of the variety of positions men and women occupy in sex work, beyond the normative assumptions of men as consumers and women as providers. In keeping with the 'different' way of looking proposed in the theoretical discussions previously, we can also look differently at the gendered 'actors' within sex work. The inclusion of greater diversity (both gender-related and otherwise) is gaining momentum (see for instance, the edited collection *Queer Sex Work* by Laing et al., 2015), and Pitcher urges for this diversity to be recognised in policy:

If indoor-based sex workers represent the majority of sex workers, then it is important for policy considerations to reflect their circumstances and experiences. This is not to suggest that initiatives should be directed only at the majority – too often the needs of male and transgender sex workers have been disregarded on this basis. It is important, however, to be aware that current policies are often formed on outdated assumptions, or selective data, which relate to a comparatively small proportion of sex workers. (Pitcher, 2015, pp.95-96).

As long as the political emphasis remains with the female sex supplier and the male consumer, it too remains difficult to move beyond conclusions of male privilege and female subordination; women as victims and men as abusers. Thus, my research locates itself in an increasingly growing body of knowledge which is both comparative in nature, and includes gender as a point of comparison. In doing so, the possibility arises for

theorising the experiences of sex industry actors *differently*, and the hegemony of sex work research is challenged.

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Appendix A – Information and Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. This sheet will detail how the information given will be used. This interview will form part of a larger PhD research project which examines the experiences of heterosexual male and female escorts.

If you would like more information, please visit www.sexworkresearch.co.uk. My Supervisors at the University of Leeds are Teela Sanders t.l.m.sanders@leeds.ac.uk and Sally Hines s.hines@leeds.ac.uk

Your identity will not be revealed at any point, you are also free to choose your own pseudonym, which is how you will be referred to in the write up. Please enter your choice of alternative name here: _____

This interview will be recorded and then transcribed. You are free at any stage to withdraw from the study up until the final submission deadline of January 2016, there will be no repercussions by doing so and no reason is needed. If you have chosen to be 'interviewed' by email or real time internet methods, you will have been notified of the insecure nature of internet exchanges. Whilst I can assure the safety of your words when in my possession, I cannot guarantee their safety in transit. Please indicate you understand the above _____ and that you are over the age of 18 _____

If you would like a transcript of the interview to be sent to you, to check you are happy with it and don't want to omit anything, this can be done within two weeks. Please indicate here if you would like this: _____

Please note, if a question is asked which you don't wish to answer, you are perfectly free not to do so. You are under no pressure to complete all of interview and you can leave the interview process at any stage up until the project has been written up, whereby all data will be deleted. You can also ask me any questions at any point during the interview or afterwards. I can be reached via email at sssr@leeds.ac.uk.

Your data will be stored securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1988), your identity will never be linked up to your words. The final project may be used as the basis for conferences or academic journals, please indicate below if you would like to be notified of this _____

Finally, if the nature of this project has raised any personal issues for you, the following organisations offer free support and information:

MIND - 0845 766 0163 www.mind.org.uk SAMARITANS - 08457 909090
www.samaritans.org

I have read the above and agree to be a participant in this study under the above terms:

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix B: Male and female escorts: Interview questions

Section A

Could you tell me the story of how you first started to look at the possibility of becoming an escort? Can you remember how you felt about this at the time? How long have you now been escorting?

What was the first experience like for you?

Before you decided to start escorting, did you have any ideas of what the experience or the industry would be like? Or any ideas of why people choose to book themselves an escort? Did you have preconceptions of what the 'typical' escort would be like / look like etc?

What method was used to advertise your services when you first started, and has this changed over time? (for example internet / newspaper ad / private agency etc)

Section B

After this first experience, did you feel happy to continue supplying escort services? If so, why? If not, why not?

When choosing to see more clients, what were you hoping to gain from this? For example, do you perceive it as purely a job and source of income, or as something more?

What do you feel are the things which attract your clientele to you? (for example, certain aspects of your physical appearance, how you advertise yourself, intelligence etc?) Do you purposefully market yourself / your services in a particular way?

Is there anything you would specifically avoid when accepting a client, or anything you would deem a 'turn-off'?

Do you have any safety measures or systems in place whilst you escort? If so, what are they?

Do you have a preference of seeing many different clients, or do you prefer regulars (or a mix?) for what reasons? Do you find your bookings always involve sex, for example, is sex always expected?

What do you think men are looking for when booking a female escort? (This question is deliberately vague to allow interviewee to have freedom to express their views for a while).

What merits and pitfalls does the job hold for you? Do you have another job alongside escorting or is this your sole income?

How do you see the pricing structure of escort services? Do you feel prices are fair, or do you think you should be charging more, for example? If so, why?

What length of interaction with your clients do you prefer? For example, shorter bookings, or longer ones spanning several hours, or days? For what reason?

Part C

Are you able to discuss your decision to become an escort publicly, for example with friends, colleagues or family?

If you have been able to discuss this, how have people reacted? If you are not able to be open, does this bother you or not?

Do you have friends who also work in the industry?

Have you been in a relationship whilst working as an escort? If so, has this posed any problems for you? If you are single, do you think you would still escort if you started a new relationship?

Do you see yourself escorting indefinitely or is this a short term thing? Why?

What constitutes a 'good' escort meeting to you? How do you judge this, for example are there certain things clients can say or do which makes the experience better or worse for you?

Final questions relating to age, ethnicity and location. The interviewee may not wish to be completely honest concerning the above, so rough approximations are acceptable. If interviewee is happy to share, details of condom usage, an 'average' of roughly how many clients they tend to see per week, their hourly rate.