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**“EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES” AND THE VALUE OF SEX:
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEX WORKERS’ CLIENTS**

by

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B.A. (Honours Specialization),
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THESIS

**Submitted to the Department of Criminology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for**

Master of Arts (Criminology, specialization in Culture, Crime, and Policy)

Wilfrid Laurier University

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ABSTRACT

Clients of sex workers face criminalization and stigmatization in Canada and across the globe; they are commonly depicted by their stereotypes in entertainment and news media and have become a more visible population with the advent of the internet and online erotic review boards. However, these people are infrequently represented by their own voices and stories in academic research and, as such, the reality of being a client is not encompassed by the existing literature. An accurate and comprehensive understanding of the sex industry is particularly important in the twenty-first century, as the laws surrounding sex work in Canada – and around the world – are being challenged, altered, and updated. In this qualitative research project, I address this gap by presenting the voices of fourteen clients, analyzing this data to identify key themes, and providing suggestions for future research which can further investigate the lived experiences of clients.

This project is based on an interpretive paradigm informed by grounded theory and the sensitizing concepts of stigma, risk, and symbolic interactionism. Fourteen male clients of sex workers were recruited through an online erotic review board and interviewed, in person, about their experiences as a client. The results of this data collection and my subsequent analysis showed several key themes, including three unique findings which particularly contribute to this growing body of literature.

First, several clients in this sample hire sex workers in order to manage a physical, sexual, or mental health problem. This is not a motivation found in the literature, even though sex workers have often claimed to provide therapeutic services to their clients; this indicates that there is an entire framework to sex work that is often overlooked,

ignored, or under-emphasized when researchers study sex work from the perspective of the client.

In addition, many of these clients have a fundamental interest and attraction to intimacy. Most client research defines and/or discusses ‘regular’ clients, a subset of clients who pursue strong relationships with one or few sex worker(s); this research either does not address the remainder of clients or assumes that they prefer to pursue a variety of sex workers out of a carnal drive separate from an interest in authentic bonds. I introduce an advanced four-part typology of the client that improves upon the existing dichotomy by grounding these categories in context, intention, and individual impressions of intimacy.

Lastly, I present and discuss the transformation of a very specific hourly rate – in this case, two hundred dollars – from a literal amount of real-world dollars to a symbolic object that represents value, safety, and the ideal experience. This approach to the economy of the sex industry emphasizes the meaning-making process that clients undertake to construct meanings surrounding specific price points.

The participants in this study share their voices in an attempt to expand general knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of clients. In the body of this paper, three unique findings join several prevalent themes supported by the literature to create a window into the lives of fourteen clients of sex workers.

Keywords: clients, sex work, symbolic interactionism, risk, intimacy, emotion, assessing value

To Mom and Dad, Jody and Stef.

For everything you have done to get me here.

I love you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teela Sanders (2008a) wrote that the failure of academia to study both sides of sex work – worker and client – provides a flawed basis for analysis, as the reciprocal relationship of this industry is commonly only represented by one side. The sex industry is a topic of study in a variety of fields, including (but not limited to) criminology, sociology, social work, health sciences, and human sexuality, but research on sex work commonly centres upon sex workers themselves (also see Monto & McRee, 2005).

Due to this gap, studying the clients of sex workers has scholarly value in and of itself; however, since the 1980s the clients of sex workers are facing increasing stigma (see Kinnell, 2006; O’Neill, 2001; Lowman & Atchison, 2006) and criminalization, exemplified by Sweden’s end-demand partial criminalization, which criminalizes the purchasers rather than the sellers of sex (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). As such, it is important to shed light through respectful, thorough, qualitative research. These clients, most frequently men, have been studied, questioned, and defined throughout the literature on this topic; however, they have only infrequently been represented with their own voices, stories, and emotions.

I will present the voices and experiences of fourteen male clients of indoor sex workers¹ who were interviewed during August and September of 2012. While these conversations spanned a wide array of topics, experiences, and stories, I will focus on

¹ These include both incall and outcall escorts, massage parlour attendants, and strip club dancers that provide extra services.

three main themes that emerged most strongly. In this chapter, I will first locate this research in context within existing substantive literature on clients. In chapter two, I will explore this project's epistemological roots in the theory of symbolic interactionism and I will explain the methods used during the course of this project. The findings and analysis begin in chapter three where I will first present a glimpse into the lived experience of being a client; this chapter will include a discussion of the various motives present in this sample, the relevant life experiences and meaning-making processes that influence these motives, and a brief introduction to the many ways that these clients perceive and manage risk. Next, in chapter four, I will utilize a symbolic interactionist perspective to examine these clients' experiences with emotion, connection, and intimacy; in this chapter I will also introduce a new typology of the client that goes beyond defining clients as 'regulars' and 'non-regulars'. Lastly, in chapter five, we will investigate how these clients construct the value and worth of the women they see – or choose not to see – and the meaning-making involved in the dollar value as a symbolic object.

Literature Review

A general focus on sex workers rather than on clients can be interpreted as a reflection of male-centred theoretical approaches to studying crime, deviance, and sexuality; proponents of this position theorize that men fit the rule, whatever the relevant rule happens to be, while women violate notions of femininity, resulting in extensive speculation, interest, and research on the women rather than the men (O'Neill, 2001). In *Prostitution and Feminism*, O'Neill (2001) argues that men are the 'one' to women's 'other'; while women are abnormal for choosing to sell sex, men are fulfilling the rule,

not the exception, by purchasing it. This argument is limited by the caveat that it applies only to considerations of male clients.

The notion that purchasing sex is ‘normal’ and therefore the men who buy it are not of great interest to scholars has a strong historical foothold (O’Neill, 2001). However, a societal interest in the clients of sex workers has been increasing over the past three decades; since the early 1980s, moral censure has been “incrementally extended and, to a degree, transferred from women who sell sex to men who pay” (Kinnell, 2006, p.212). Kinnell’s statement, written in the United States about the American sex trade, is as accurate for Canada; the first substantial federal funding focusing on prostitution resulted in the *Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution* in the 1980s, which included a focus on clients (Lowman & Atchison, 2006).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century research on clients has increased in popularity as researchers attempted to fill the existing gap in the literature. Because a wide array of disciplines are concerned with sex work and the clients of sex workers, it is difficult to quickly assess the full body of client literature; this may be the reason why even recent studies of clients present themselves as filling a ‘gap’ in sex work research by focusing on the client. In truth, recent literature that focuses on the ‘who’, ‘what’, and ‘why’ of clients has become almost commonplace (see Monto & McRee, 2005; Lowman & Atchison, 2006; Busch, Bell, Hotaling & Monto, 2002; Jordan, 1997; Tewskbury & Golder, 2005; Pitts, Smith, Grierson, O’Brien & Misson, 2004). Some literature utilizes the captive population of clients who attend “John Schools”, programs that target men who have been arrested for soliciting sex and purport to teach them the risks and consequences of hiring sex workers (ex. Wahab, 2005; Wahab, 2006; van Brunshot,

2003; Wortley, Fischer & Webster, 2002). Studies on the more abstract aspects of being a client can be found in a variety of disciplines including human sexuality, feminism, gender and masculinity studies, sociology, population economics, and psychology (ex. Plumridge, Chetwynd, Reed & Gifford, 1997; Sanders 2008a; Sanders 2008b; Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Bernstein, 2001; Giusta, Di Tommaso & Strøm, 2009; Joseph & Black, 2012; Khan, 2011; Katsulis, 2010; Monto, 2010). There has also been a growing popularity in studying and surveying the virtual world of clients as the advent of the internet creates opportunity for quantitative and qualitative data-gathering (ex. Holt & Blevins, 2007; Blevins & Holt, 2009; Milrod & Monto, 2012; Earle & Sharp, 2007; Pruitt & Krull, 2011; Pettinger, 2011). This very opportunity seems to have marked a shift away from relying on the stories of sex workers to gather secondary information and make conclusions about clients (ex. Armstrong, 1978; Holzman & Pines, 1982).

Research studies have found that clients do not fit into a specific demographic and often include representatives from multiple ethnicities and races (Armstrong, 1972; Monto, 2010a), a wide range of adult ages (Jordan, 1997; Sanders, 2008b), and various education backgrounds (Lowman & Atchison, 2006). Monto and McRee (2005, p.505) compared a large sample of men arrested for soliciting sex from street sex workers to a national sample (in the United States) and found that that clients “differ from other men in degree rather than quality”. Wellings et al. (1994) found that the likelihood of becoming a client increases with socio-economic status and age, while a large-scale American survey found “no differences in men who buy sex across ethnicity, educational background, socio-economic group, religious affiliation, household income, political spectrum and marital status” (Sullivan & Simon as cited in Sanders, 2008a, p.39). While

there are slight variations in demographics across studies this can largely be accounted for by the methods and sample used. For example, studies that utilize a sample of men arrested for prostitution-related offences may find factors such as low education (ex. Busch, Bell, Hotaling & Monto, 2002) that are indicative of socio-economic status and correlated to the type of sex worker targeted (i.e. less expensive sex workers); these samples likely represent the population of men who have been *arrested* for soliciting sex rather than clients in general. In fact, studies of clients often do not remind the reader that their conclusions are specific to one *type* of client. Sanders (2008a) wrote that the clients of different types of sex workers should be studied separately, as her research found these groups of clients to have very different characteristics.

Researchers have also identified a wide variety of client motives. For example, some clients are driven by unsatisfying sexual relationships with their partners (Jordan, 1997; Sanders, 2008a; Monto, 2010a), an attraction to minimal emotional connection and involvement (Monto, 2010a), an attraction to the ‘thrilling’ or ‘taboo’ nature of hiring sex workers (Monto, 2010a; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Kinnell, 2006) or an emotional need that has not been fulfilled elsewhere (Earle & Sharp, 2007; Sanders, 2008a).

Some sex workers experience violence at the hands of their clients (ex. Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Church, Henderson, Barnard & Hart, 2001; Lowman & Atchison, 2006). Accordingly, a great deal of research on clients focuses on violence against sex workers – whether it is more prevalent within the sex industry or not, what motivates clients to be violent towards sex workers, and how to predict violence against women in the sex industry. Joseph and Black (2012) categorize clients with ‘fragile masculinities’ versus ‘consumer masculinities’ and found that those who are ‘fragile’ or unsure of their

masculinity present more of a risk to sex workers than ‘consumer’ type clients. Lowman and Atchison (2006) found that clients who self-reported being violent to sex workers were also often violent to ‘non-commercial’ partners, implying that this behaviour is not isolated or unique to the sex industry, while Monto (2004, p.176) found that client conceptions that identify violence as a common motive do not apply to the “vast majority” of men who hire sex workers. Evidently there is no overall consensus in the literature as to how ‘violent’ clients are and to what degree violence dictates their involvement in the sex trade.

After considering this literature it is apparent that there is a strong, if relatively small, body of literature on clients from which to draw. However, many studies investigate clients through online observation or survey research; further, this research is largely informed by previous research on sex workers that assumes a sex worker’s perspective on the client will be similar to the client’s experience of reality². Fewer studies conduct qualitative interviews with clients, and even fewer allow the voices of the clients to shape the research process.

Accordingly, this research project will target that gap by using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2010), incorporating the clients’ perspectives of themselves into the project structure and interview schedule, and will focus the analysis in this thesis only on the strongest themes that emerged in the data. In the next chapter I will present the methods used throughout the course of this study, the theory that informs this research, and the emotion work involved in studying the clients of sex workers.

² For example, client research often makes a distinction between ‘regulars’ and ‘non-regulars’. This dichotomy reflects the categorizations that can be made by sex workers of their clients rather than the reality of each individual client. This will be addressed in depth in chapter four.

Chapter 2

Methods

This chapter will introduce and outline the theoretical and methodological approaches utilized during the design of this research project, the collection of data, and analysis. I will first outline entrance into the virtual field, which involved a contextual analysis of the online community prior to recruitment along with careful management of subsequent online relationships. I will then describe the sample. This will be followed by an introduction of the analysis of resulting interview and journal data using the qualitative software NVivo 10 as a coding tool. Finally, I will present a self-reflexive discussion of researcher identity and emotion work as valid points of analysis.

Epistemological Considerations: Ways of “Knowing”

Grounded theory is an approach to research that requires a flexible project structure that is continuously informed by the data being gathered (ex. Charmaz, 2010; Bowen, 2006). In this sense, grounded theorists do not approach research with a rigid interview schedule or theoretical outlook, but allow the data and participants to inform the research process so that the project can shift to focus on real data and experiences rather than preconceived notions of what that population might experience. For the purposes of this project I adopted a constructivist grounded theory stance – an approach that reflects an interpretive paradigm and places “priority on the phenomena of study”. Constructivist grounded theorists also see “both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants” (Charmaz, 2010, p.130). Unlike

objectivist grounded theory, a constructivist approach does not consider data as real in and of themselves, but approaches data and analysis in a relational and constructed manner. In addition, grounded theory can be informed by other guiding principles rooted in substantive and theoretical notions; these guiding principles are referred to as ‘sensitizing concepts’ (Blumer, 1969).

Blumer (1969, p.7) wrote that sensitizing concepts can loosely inform research without the “clear definition in terms of attributes and bench marks” of ‘definitive concepts’. Sensitizing concepts suggest avenues of interpretation of analysis without requiring or prescribing a specific outlook, and can be viewed as “points of departure to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data” (Charmaz, 2010, p.17). Sensitizing concepts give the research a frame of reference and analysis from which to view the data while also allowing the data to speak for itself; if a sensitizing concept does not fit the data, it must be discarded (Bowen, 2006).

I incorporated three sensitizing concepts into the structure of this project: stigma, risk, and symbolic interactionism. The stigma experienced by criminalized, hidden, and/or deviant populations has been researched extensively (ex. Tabibi, 2012; Bruckert, 2012; Hannem, 2010) and yet is largely ignored in studies of clients (with one notable exception being Sanders, 2008a). As such, I wanted to investigate how clients feel and manage stigma in their everyday lives, and my recognition that they may experience stigma influenced the interview schedule and initial analysis. However, this sensitizing concept did not relate as deeply to the resulting data as I had expected, and so stigma became less of a focus as the interviews and analysis progressed.

I was also informed by the sensitizing concept of ‘risk’ after my initial perusal of the erotic review board where I drew my participants. Risk assessments and risk management techniques are a main topic of discussion on the erotic review board and, as such, my substantive and theoretical background knowledge of risk (ex. Garland, 2003; Ericson & Doyle, 2003) was incorporated into the project structure and interview schedule. The interviews showed that clients place importance on considerations of risk and so this sensitizing concept continued to inform my data collection and analysis.

Lastly, this project was influenced by a symbolic interactionist lens. Symbolic interactionism, with its focus on meaning-making and the truth of multiple subjective realities, is particularly well-suited to qualitative research with individuals who hold ‘deviant’ perspectives. While classmates, family members, and even participants in this project have questioned the ‘truth’ of narratives provided by the clients of sex workers, I argue that the notion of objective truth in itself is problematic, particularly as it pertains to qualitative research and the research of deviance. As Thomas and Swaine wrote, “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (as cited in Berg, 2009, p.10); the realities represented by the stories of the participants have intrinsic sociological value and provide rich data for analysis.

The symbolic interactionist tradition has a rich history influenced by John Dewey, Charles Cooley, and George Herbert Mead in particular (Prus, 1999); however, symbolic interactionism was most definitively named and described in Herbert Blumer’s (1969) pivotal *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Symbolic interactionism is an approach to social reality that does not presuppose an objective and concrete ‘reality’ but rather focuses on the intersubjective and social elements of people’s perceptions and how

they interact with symbolic ‘objects’ to construct and create meaning. For symbolic interactionists, “society and self [are] not fixed, measurable, external quantities but a constant flow of action, interaction, and self-reflection in countless situations of human life” (Garner, 2007, p.347).

Blumer (1969) defines symbolic ‘objects’ as everything that a person can interact with, including physical objects, abstract ideas, other people, and their own ‘self’. People interact with these objects to create and develop their own notion of social reality – a reality which is no less ‘real’ by virtue of being created by individuals and groups as they interact with the world around them (Blumer, 1969). The reflective nature of human group life allows for individuals to interact with the object of their self to create and develop meanings regarding their own behaviour and essence (Prus, 1999). During these interviews, clients presented and negotiated their own meanings of themselves and others within the sex industry, revealed their meaning-making processes, and interacted with me to create our own meanings within the sphere of the interview itself. One crucial tenet of symbolic interactionism is the premise that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p.2) and as such, the analysis I conducted on this interview data focused on the meanings of the words and stories shared by clients rather than more abstract considerations of the sex industry.

In *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Blumer (1969) presents two potential modes of inquiry. The first, exploration, is defined as:

“...a flexible procedure in which the scholar shifts from one to another line of inquiry, adopts new points of observation as his study progresses,

moves in new directions previously unthought of, and changes his recognition of what are relevant data as he acquires more information and better understanding.” (Blumer, 1969, p.40)

Blumer’s description of ‘exploration’ is reflective of the grounded theory approach utilized for this study and was incorporated into the symbolic interactionist ‘sensitizing concept’ that influenced the project structure, interview schedule, and analysis.

In this manner, this research project is rooted in grounded theory while also being influenced by three sensitizing concepts: stigma, risk, and symbolic interactionism. There is little existing qualitative research on the lived experiences of sex worker clients, and so it was important to allow the data to speak for themselves, while the aforementioned interpretive paradigm provided the tools with which to approach this topic and interviews in a larger sense.

Research Questions

The research questions are intended to approach the lived experiences of clients, provide opportunities to pursue *criminological verstehen*³ (Ferrell, 1997), and ascertain the prevalence or absence of stigma. These questions ask:

- How does a client view his or her own involvement in the sex industry and online erotic review board?
- How does the act of hiring a sex worker on a regular basis affect a client’s life?

³ To achieve *verstehen* is to “understand behaviour, beliefs, opinions and emotions from the *perspective of the participants themselves*” (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

- What methods (if any) do clients undertake to manage the relationship between hiring sex workers and their identity in wider society?
- How do clients perceive and manage risk? (Sexual, social, emotional, etc.)

I pursued these research questions through semi-structured, open-ended interviews which lasted from forty-five minutes to two and a half hours in length. I conducted thirteen interviews in person (in a semi-public space) and one over the telephone. I drew other data from the recruitment post, personal correspondence with board members and participants, and researcher journaling.

Consistent with the flexible and reflective grounded theory approach described previously, not all research questions led to themes described in this thesis. For example, the third question focuses on the client's management of his identity as a client versus his identity outside of the sex industry. This focus led to interesting avenues of discussion that exposed areas of concern such as managing the risk of discovery by family, friends, peers, and law enforcement. These discussions of risk management were more important to the participants than discussions of identity inside and outside of the sex industry and, as such, the project structure, interview schedule, and analysis shifted accordingly⁴.

Definition of Terms

There are a variety of terms that must be defined when discussing involvement in and movement through an online discussion board. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to define and describe the following terms: 'erotic review board', 'board', 'thread', 'post', and 'private message'.

⁴ See Appendix A for original interview schedule.

An erotic review board is an online location for the advertisement, review, and discussion of sexual services available for hire. The ‘board’ references the local portion of the website as a whole – this encompasses erotic reviews, general non-review discussions, tips and frequently asked questions (FAQs), and also is frequently associated with the community as a whole. In this case, the board will refer to a specific geographic location in Southern Ontario, as the majority of users seem to focus on the city and area they live in (or ‘hobby’⁵ in) and for the purposes of this project I did not consider the website as a whole (nation-wide). For example, a person may ask ‘the board’ a question, and in this sense they are referring to the wider community, while another may refer to finding ‘the board’ as the most general term for the material and conversations available online.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term ‘thread’ to refer to a specific conversation or discussion. Threads are located on the board under specific topics (ex. under a section specifically for reviews, a section specifically for non-review discussion, etc.). Threads begin with a post (sometimes referred to as the OP, original post, or the individual is referred to as the OP, original poster) that generally states a point, asks a question, or contains a review. Resulting replies are stacked underneath the original post, creating the thread.

Lastly, private messages are individual messages sent to individual users that are only visible to the users who sent and/or received them. There was some suggestion that

⁵ Some clients and researchers refer to clients who are particularly submerged in the subculture as ‘hobbyists’, while other research (and legal programming) refers to the clients of sex workers as ‘johns’. I found that some of the clients interviewed did not like or identify with either of these terms and their associations; in addition, some sex workers on the board do not like being referred to as a ‘hobby’, so I have chosen to use the word ‘clients’ rather than ‘hobbyists’ or ‘johns’.

the ‘inbox’ (which listed private messages with title and username) is viewable by those in control of the website, while the content remains private between sender and receiver; however, this has not been confirmed. Considering this, I provided an external email address as a method of contact; I also recorded Eros private messages elsewhere and deleted them out of my account’s inbox in order to minimize the chances that a person could see who was contacting me.

Ethical Considerations

While the ethical responsibilities of qualitative researchers are similar to other types of research, “ethical challenges in qualitative research may be more pronounced due to the nature of qualitative research” (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011, p.63). Focusing this research on the clients of sex workers resulted in a host of ethical challenges. Due to the questionable legal status of sex work in Canada⁶, along with the secrecy and stigma associated with being a client (Sanders, 2008a), the protection of confidentiality and anonymity is often of conscious concern for the clients of sex workers. Considering this, multiple methods of protecting confidentiality and anonymity were employed and communicated to participants. These methods included: the use of pseudonyms in research notes and throughout this thesis; not asking for identifying information during, before, or after the interview; carefully managing my own behaviour with participants outside of the interview room⁷; storing notes and interviews in a secure

⁶ Justice Himel (2010) struck down three laws that make sex work in Canada illegal, although paying for sex in and of itself is not illegal. These laws prohibit solicitation, operating a common bawdy-house, and living off of the avails of prostitution, and were deemed unconstitutional by Himel (2010). At the time of this writing, this decision is still undergoing appeals processes in the Supreme Court of Canada.

⁷ For example, if leaving the interview room at the same time, I made sure that my body language and distance did not imply that we knew each other, unless the participant wanted to continue a conversation.

location; only using pre-approved methods of communication; and erasing electronic connections between this project and the associated online erotic review board⁸.

Before entering the field, I introduced myself to the owner of the online erotic review board, Ken⁹, through private messaging. I requested and received permission to post a recruitment thread. This proved invaluable, as initial comments on the thread questioned whether or not Ken was aware of my presence; his public comment vouching for my authenticity and interest in sharing his story with me undoubtedly contributed to the overall positive reception of my presence on the board. Later, during an interview, Robert reinforced this interpretation by telling me that talking to the owner was a good idea “because [the board members] know that Ken does his homework”. After this initial contact was made I did not approach any members or moderators who had not contacted me first. Further, in order to respect the members of the board and their virtual space, I did not involve myself in discussions outside of those that I started (two¹⁰) for the purposes of recruitment.

Several months after data collection, another researcher posted a recruitment message on Eros without receiving permission from the owner; in addition, this post does not include argot, acronyms, humour, or transparency, and the research was accused of sending unsolicited and therefore unwelcome private messages to members and sex work

⁸ As the recruitment thread included my full name and institutional affiliation, the thread itself was easy to find on search engines using a combination of my name, school, and topic, which would have exposed both the online erotic review board used for data collection and the location. After posting a warning note for any interested members and leaving it for several days, I asked one of my ‘gatekeepers’, a moderator, to delete this recruitment thread and another related thread. In addition, I had the page removed from the Google cache.

⁹ All contact and participant names are pseudonyms

¹⁰ Sarah suggested that I post a second recruitment message specifically speaking to ‘lurkers’. This one did not receive in-thread responses, but a few participants responded to this approach, showing the value of insider support, information, and advice.

advertisers. This thread has been called ‘spam’, ‘intrusive’, and ‘invasive’ both on the public thread and within private messages between board members/advertisers and myself. Evidently, it is difficult to enter the virtual field of Eros without a positive connection with a “gatekeeper” and an awareness of community standards. This is consistent with existing qualitative research that emphasizes the importance of gatekeepers, particularly when studying a ‘hidden’ or ‘deviant’ population (ex. Hannem, 2008; Anderson & Calhoun, 1992).

I was transparent with all participants and board members who wanted to discuss my motives for this research and opinions on sex work. All participants signed an informed consent statement (approved by the Laurier Research Ethics Board, REB #3300¹¹) which included an honest representation of the project along with the methods that would be utilized to protect the identity of all participants.

Entering the Virtual Field

Online Context

A virtual community can be as cohesive and unique as a community developed and experienced offline. This type of community, similar to offline communities, consists of a group of individuals who share interests and/or goals, but in this case these interactions occur primarily through the internet. In addition, this group shares some notion of permanence and/or consistency among members (Ridings & Gefen, 2006). Considering this, I aimed to begin participant recruitment within a virtual community, rather than one of several erotic review boards that do not reflect permanence or

¹¹ See Appendix B for the REB Approval E-mail; see Appendix C for the informed consent statement.

consistency in their membership and discussion threads. Researching within a virtual community would maximize the benefit of positive participant interactions, increase the likelihood of ‘snowball’ sampling (Berg, 2009), and also seemed more likely to reach individuals who consider being a client to be a significant part of their life. Interviews with the participants who responded to this initial recruitment post reinforced the notion that Eros¹² is more than an online space where information on sex workers is collected. One participant, Alexander, explained this in part when he said that Eros is “a bunch of people who, we can’t talk about this at work. We can’t say any of this at work.”

Choosing Eros

Investigating the lived experiences of clients required access to willing participants, and so my original intention when locating erotic review boards rested on finding a virtual space that would provide a platform for the first recruitment thread. Through several layers of web-searching, I discovered four general sites that each covered several major cities in Ontario (and frequently smaller cities and towns in their respective areas). Of these sites, preliminary analysis showed that Eros had the most cohesive community, based on a general consideration of frequency of repeat visitors, length of discussion threads, number of threads and posts, and variety of discussion topics. In addition, in order to conduct in-person interviews I was limited to online communities based in Southern Ontario. After a thorough review, it was clear that the board for one particular city on Eros could potentially provide an access location. The local board on Eros contained over five thousand threads, more than twenty thousand

¹² Pseudonym for the online erotic review board utilized in this study.

individual posts, and is frequented by hundreds of users, many of whom access the board daily or weekly.

Once I identified an ideal virtual community it was crucial to examine Eros in order to enter the community in a respectful, appropriate manner while also providing a baseline from which to create a preliminary interview schedule. This examination and identification of the community occurred in two stages: thread analysis for both content and style prior to entering the field and individual communications after the initial recruitment post.

Contextualizing, Stage I: Thread Analysis

As previously mentioned, prior to developing interview questions and entering the field I needed to contextualize my research in the community of Eros. In order to do this, I read and took notes on several hundred threads, which covered approximately three months of activity on the board. The content revealed that while one main purpose of the board was to review sex workers, the discussions that were not direct reviews were nonetheless crucial to the community. These discussions covered a wide range of topics including: motivations to seek out sex workers; how to manage a significant other while being a client; sexual interests; intimacy and emotion as a client and/or sex worker; client etiquette; violence against sex workers; charity activities initiated by sex workers; how to manage the risk of STIs and other health/personal safety dangers; and topics unrelated to sex work, such as local, national, and international news and politics. These conversations ranged from having no replies and a handful of page views to a dozen pages (or more) of responses and over two thousand page views.

The community exhibited some focuses and concerns¹³ while also showcasing the conversational norms. Conversation styles that were most frequently given positive feedback and generated discussion showcased humour (even when discussing serious topics) that was often somewhat sarcastic or self-deprecating in nature, a tolerant reaction to trolls¹⁴, a willingness to reconsider a position in the face of new evidence/arguments, sexually suggestive remarks and/or jokes, and a utilization of board emoticons¹⁵. This information proved invaluable when I constructed the original recruitment post.

Recruitment Post

While preparing my application for the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University I had prepared a recruitment letter that contained my credentials, reflected the existing literature on clients, described the research questions, methodology, requirements of participants, and referenced anonymity and confidentiality principles. However, after reviewing the most recent threads it was apparent to me that a clinical, academic approach to research may be rejected by Eros or ignored completely. In an effort to reflect community norms while maintaining professionalism, I edited the recruitment post. I inserted contractions, a humorous title, usage of board terminology and acronyms¹⁶, and playful comments. For example, the salutation was changed to

¹³ For example, members frequently discuss areas of ‘risk’ (discovery, arrest, sexually transmitted infections) and risk management techniques, what an ideal location is like, and what degree of intimacy is appropriate with a sex worker.

¹⁴ An internet troll is an individual who posts statements that may or may not be reflective of their actual opinion in an effort to antagonize or otherwise engage the other poster(s) in an argument. These types of statements include overly incendiary language, playing devil’s advocate, and personal attacks.

¹⁵ Small images, stationary or animated, to accompany a statement – often used to show tone. For example, the board hosts a range of classic emoticons (smiley faces, angry faces, etc.) along with more lascivious emoticons (animated figures pantomiming various sexual acts, face slapping, spanking, etc.).

¹⁶ Such as SP (Service Provider, i.e. sex worker).

“Hello to all of the hobbyists, providers¹⁷, and lurkers¹⁸ out there”, which was intended to show a sense of humour in addition to knowledge of local terminology and imply an existing level of awareness of the community.

While it is difficult to know how the original recruitment post would have been received, this post quickly generated an unexpectedly high amount of traffic and discussion. Posted on a Saturday afternoon in August, within sixteen hours I had received nine private messages from a mixture of clients and sex workers, thirty-two public replies on the thread, and the discussion itself had received over seven hundred views. Ultimately this post received sixty-eight in-thread replies and more than three thousand page views. This was significantly larger than the average thread by a wide margin showing the eleventh highest activity level (as measured by page views) and eighth highest number of replies of all active threads¹⁹, of which there were several hundred, in 2012 and early 2013.

Contextualizing, Stage II: Private Conversations

The research plan for gaining access included contextualizing the interview schedule and recruitment message within the wider scope of the online community of Eros; however, an unexpected avenue of insider information and context surfaced when, soon after the initial recruitment letter was posted, I began to receive private messages from female sex workers who had seen my post. These messages were without exception

¹⁷ Word frequently used for ‘sex worker’ (short for ‘service provider’).

¹⁸ A word used on the board to describe people who observe the community but do not contribute questions/statements or post.

¹⁹ This does not include ‘stickies’ (permanent information posts) and reviews, which were located elsewhere on the board.

positive and supportive of the general research goal while also clearly beginning some enlightening conversations. Ultimately I spoke briefly to one female sex worker about her potential involvement as an interviewee and had three more extensive conversations with female sex workers whose words and support proved invaluable. This unexpected and unsolicited community engagement on behalf of four sex workers improved the validity of my interview questions before the first interview, allowed me to inquire about the terminology I should be using, provided feedback on my online presence, and gave me an increased feeling of personal safety.

These conversations impacted the development of my interview schedule. In fact, some comments were unknown precursors to the strongest themes I would find in my data. For example, Gloria wrote in a private message that “[t]oo many people believe that women [in the sex industry] are victims and men are perverts. I am sure you will find with your studies it is more about intimacy and human contact for them than[sic] sex or sexual acts.” As will be discussed in chapter four, this indeed was the case for some of the respondents and questions surrounding intimacy yielded some of the richest data during the interviews.

Private communication with four women involved in the board as sex workers also provided me with an opportunity to clarify preferred language choices for the construction of this thesis. After being asked how Sarah felt about the term commonly used on the board to refer to sex workers and herself, she had the following answer:

“With respect to the ‘service provider’ question, it really doesn't matter what euphemism you use, you are likely going to offend somebody. ... To

be honest though, I'll take sex worker over service provider. That term always kinda skeeved me out. Made me feel like a flesh and blood blow up doll. But that's just me..."

Beyond language, one sex worker provided me with categories for the clients based on her personal experiences²⁰. In addition, these private communications provided an avenue through which to receive feedback on my behaviour on my recruitment thread along with unsolicited advice regarding the men who were posting replies. After I responded to a fairly negative post on the recruitment thread with light-hearted humour, I received a message from Sarah which included: "You are going to do very well here darlin'." This type of positive feedback, advice, and descriptions of the men posting on the thread provided an avenue of inside information that not only affected my ability to develop an interview schedule, maximize my impression on the board, and reflect accurate terminology during the writing phase²¹, but also improved my overall level of comfort, confidence, and perception of personal safety.

This discussion must include the caveat that I did not expect meeting male clients of sex workers to prove more dangerous than meeting any other individual recruited online (although some of my friends and family did assume this). However, as a young woman born and raised in Western society I feel that I have been conditioned to expect a certain degree of risk if I meet men alone that I do not know, particularly if they were discovered online – and to bear a degree of responsibility if any of these meetings were to

²⁰ For example, the term 'hummingbird' to refer to clients who like variety; this will be discussed in further depth in chapter four.

²¹ These conversations and public posts made by other sex workers led me to choose to use the term 'sex worker'.

result in sexual assault (see Bourke, 2007; Baker, 2011). Negotiating my awareness of ‘risk’ as a theoretical notion (ex. Garland, 2003) and the risk identified by my family, friends, and colleagues was a difficult and eye-opening process.

While in part reinforcing this notion, Sarah gave me advice on how to meet with men for the first time. She described a ‘safe call’ system that some sex workers utilize when meeting a client for the first time, and offered to be my safe caller if I wanted. Though touched by her offer, I chose to use a family member for this safe call for the first three interviews, after which I no longer utilized them. The cause and meaning behind this will be discussed later in this chapter. Lastly, I received descriptions of some of the men who were responding to the recruitment post: phrases such as “decent enough guy”, “particularly odious”, and “captain save a ho” were interesting, informative, and at times humorous to read.

In addition, I received private messages from several board members, mostly from clients or those who were interested in being clients. One of these initial messages was sent by Randy, a moderator on the board. This conversation developed into a professional friendship and, although this respondent did not become an interview participant, the relationship yielded valuable information as to the technical workings of the website, the intricacies of privacy and anonymity on Eros, notifications when inappropriate material was posted on the recruitment thread, and support that I deeply appreciated throughout the data collection phase.

Participants

There is a significant body of literature that focuses on the demographics of people who hire sex workers (see Kinnell, 2006; Lowman & Atchison, 2006; Pitts et al., 2004; Wortley et al., 2002). These results consistently show that the majority of clients do not fit a particular ‘type’ (Sanders, 2008a); in fact, as Kinnell (2006, p.223) wrote, “the research available on the socio-demographics of men who pay for sex indicates that they are a cross-section of the population and rather ordinary”. Accordingly, this project focused on narratives, motives, feelings, and stories, rather than demographic information. However, some demographics were gathered in order to describe the sample and contextualize the data, and these demographics reflected the findings in the literature – namely, that there are few common characteristics across clients.

The participants were all male ($n = 14$), appeared and self-identified as Caucasian, and were overwhelmingly heterosexual ($n = 13$), with one identifying as ‘straight’ but ‘curious’ ($n = 1$). In addition, almost half of the participants ($n = 6$) consider themselves Christian or Roman Catholic in some capacity, while the others identified as not religious, atheist, or agnostic. It is important to note that these characteristics could be more indicative of the area this sample was drawn from rather than a prevailing trend across all clients.

Aside from these commonalities, the people who participated in this study represent a range of personal demographics. Participants ranged widely in age; the youngest participant was in his early thirties, while the oldest was “older than sixty-five”. Likewise, occupation and income level spanned the spectrum; one participant ($n = 1$) disclosed that he was a welfare recipient as he recovered from an injury, while the

income of working participants ranged from \$25,000 per year to \$300,000 per year. The occupations of these people included employment in the service industry, information technology, science, finance, factory work, and business. Several participants ($n = 5$) described having a great deal of control over their work schedule (through being a contract worker, self-employed, or otherwise scheduling their own hours), which reportedly accommodated their interest in seeing escorts.

The marital status of those involved in this study was often a point of discussion (albeit a delicate topic), as this frequently was cited as a motive for seeing sex workers, whether single ($n = 6$), married ($n = 6$), or divorced/separated ($n = 2$).

Similarly, the participants had widely varying demographics concerning their involvement in the sex industry. When asked how long they had been seeing escorts, massage parlour attendants, or other sex workers, the answers ranged from “at least twenty-five years” to “less than one year”. In addition, the number of unique sex workers seen ranged from seven to four hundred, with the majority ($n = 8$) having seen between twenty to eighty sex workers in total. Accordingly, the cost associated with seeing sex workers varies between participant based on frequency, use of special ‘menu items’²², the client’s preferred hourly rate²³, and the length of time booked per session²⁴. While one

²² The term ‘menu’ is commonly used to refer to the services offered by sex workers; some sex workers offer special ‘menu items’ which cost extra, such as anal sex (‘Greek’), duos (two sex workers during the same session), and fetishes. Clients who include these extra services pay more per session than those who do not.

²³ The overwhelming majority of clients interviewed identified \$200 per hour as the ideal hourly rate. This was identified as a rate which indicated a high quality, but affordable, escort; remaining around this rate mitigated fears of sexually transmitted infections, robbery, unhygienic environment, and lack of discretion. Several clients related stories of slipping below this price range to save money and having a very negative experience. This is discussed in more depth in chapter five.

²⁴ Most clients interviewed see a sex worker for the standard one hour session, while a minority utilized short sessions (fifteen or thirty minutes) or long sessions (two hours or more).

client spent \$300 on sex worker(s) over the past year, most ($n = 11$) spent at least \$2,000 per year, with two ($n = 2$) spending from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year.

Evidently, the life histories of these participants vary greatly, as do their histories within the sex industry. This sample mostly consisted of white, straight men; however, these participants otherwise provide a non-representative cross-section of the general Canadian population.

Data Analysis: Journaling, Transcribing, and Coding

Data collection began as soon as the original recruitment thread began to elicit responses – these responses, both public (on the thread) and private (in private messages) were saved in chronological order. In order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality, I assigned numbers to each username and these files included only the participant's number, rather than their username (or real name, if given). Accordingly, data analysis began at this time as well through the process of journaling.

I wrote my first journal entry approximately twenty-four hours after initially posting the recruitment message. This initial post occurred as soon as I received approval from the Research Ethics Board at my university, even though I was in British Columbia visiting family at the time²⁵. Journaling during the recruitment process aided me when I began to track the techniques used when interacting with board members; while some techniques (such as the use of local language and acronyms and humour) used in the

²⁵ Although I hadn't expected my location to matter, the three-hour time difference had an interesting effect – much of the thread activity occurred around midnight for the board members, which was three in the morning for me, and I was usually asleep. This meant that instead of being an active participant answering questions, I would check the thread in the morning to see board members answering their own questions in my absence. While I at the time wished I had been active during the night-time conversations, in retrospect this provided insightful data on the place of the project and myself within this community.

recruitment thread were intentional, my reactions to thread responses were often based on my own personal knowledge of internet forum etiquette and intuition from previous perusal of Eros discussion threads. These responses had to be fairly quick, as the thread was very active at the beginning, and some responses were posted within minutes of each other. This excerpt outlines my initial reaction to the first explicitly negative poster on the recruitment thread, along with my surprise at witnessing board members defending the project:

While lots of people have questions, they posed them in an interested and respectful way (with one exception). A few people said 'this sounds great!' and messaged me privately, while others lent their support or interest to the idea without offering to participate. And then my troll appeared!

My troll asked some of the obvious questions, but in a manner that showed he probably did not want to be answered, and was only drawing attention to the weaknesses. Things like, how do we know you will be truthful? Why would I bother to do this? You're probably selling the results. Etc.

I answered him politely and (perhaps overly) thoroughly; even though I guessed that he wasn't interested personally, I knew they were valid questions and others might be thinking them but be too shy to type them out. Fascinatingly enough, other people on the board began to defend my project and the whole situation against this troll! ...

Personally, I am feeling very excited and I am shocked at what has happened. I feel like I have been adopted as a mascot, or member, or something; some of the people who have been having complex and private conversations with me via private messaging have been standing up for my research in the hours when I was not online.

These journal entries included personal elements, such as my own reactions as described above, and analytical elements as ethical issues and methodological issues began to surface. However, it was difficult to separate analytical considerations from personal, as my various roles as a daughter, sister, and girlfriend impacted my own

considerations of safety and risk. The following excerpt exemplifies this struggle as I considered the value of the data versus the impact my perceived ‘risk’ would have on my loved ones:

There are a few other issues that have come up, though: my safety, stigma, and whether or not doing a content analysis [of board postings] is ethical now.

First of all, safety: I have to get a home phone if people want to talk on the phone, because I don't want to give out my cell number. That's an easy thing I was expecting. What I was NOT expecting was people like #2, who, based on disclosed paranoia and depression, will not meet in public or in [the sampled city]. We've negotiated it to the point that we are both bringing a companion²⁶ and are meeting in a ballpark in [a nearby town]. The hardest thing for me right now is actually not negotiating my own feelings of safety - although I did not feel safe meeting this person in private in [another town] alone – but how to manage this with my family.

The concern mentioned above regarding a content analysis is not explained in this excerpt – at the outset I had intended to include a content analysis of online posts to consider stigma, but the very suspicious and hesitant reactions I received gave me the impression that this content analysis would be perceived as a violation of the community, even though the Research Ethics Board had given me permission to include this data. Accordingly, I have not included a content analysis in this project.

These safety and family concerns were also raised when I considered the implications of interviewing any clients who self-identified as sex offenders prior to our interview:

²⁶ In this case, the Research Ethics Board approved an addition to my ethics application allowing for one of my committee members to attend interviews if required – one of my committee members accompanied me to this interview to assuage safety concerns.

So, when things happen like the message I got from a self-disclosed sex offender, I don't know what to do. I think the information will still be so valuable, and I logically should not be in danger, but that term has so much weight behind it that I am entirely certain [my partner] would not want me to see this person, and would be so stressed and angry when I did anyways... and my parents would be very similar.

I did interview the client mentioned above. This interview yielded valuable data that suggested a very positive connection between seeing sex workers and managing not to relapse into sex offending behaviour. In addition, this participant mentioned how difficult the label 'sex offender' made it to establish a normal, healthy, adult sexual relationship, as disclosure of sex offender status needed to happen too soon to maintain the relationship, according to this participant.

These journals, the recruitment thread, and personal conversations were included in data analysis; in addition, each participant was asked for permission to record the interview for the purposes of transcribing. Without exception each participant agreed to be recorded. Interviews were transcribed by me, originally due to financial constraints – as a Master's student without an external scholarship, hiring people to help with the time-consuming transcription process was not feasible. However, the act of transcribing itself began to yield valuable, if difficult, data on the emotion work involved in this project, and I maintained the decision to transcribe myself.

I used the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10 as an organizational tool while I coded transcripts and PDFs of client literature. In order to be faithful to the notion of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010), these files were coded in their entirety. For the initial phase of coding I coded line-by-line or incident to incident (Charmaz, 2010), depending

on the richness of the data²⁷. I used axial coding to connect emerging themes and categories together. After identifying the major related themes, I went back to the data and used focused coding to consider each interview in light of the prevalent themes, finding new connections and references that aided in defining and exploring the prevalent concept.

For example, during initial coding I found that references to the ‘economy’ of sex work were occurring frequently and I grouped a growing list of more than a dozen codes under the category ‘economy’ – these codes referred to discussions of cost, value, the risk of financial involvement, and perceptions of the financial climate of the sex industry, among many others. After examining how these categories and codes related to one another, I found the theme that will be covered in chapter five – the notion that sex and sex workers have ‘value’ that is deduced from a complex set of variables, and the meaning that this value has for clients as they describe and examine the overall experience of a session. Using focused coding I coded the data again with this new theme at the forefront and found other references to value that expanded on the theme as a whole.

Researcher Identity and Emotion Work

At the outset of this project, I acknowledged that investigating the lived experiences of male clients of sex workers from my perspective, the perspective of a twenty-four year old woman, could be problematic. Through several years working

²⁷ Some clients told lengthy stories about sex workers or other clients and their analytical value was largely per incident, rather than per line, making incident to incident coding the appropriate way to approach the meanings inherent in these stories.

(serving and bartending) and volunteering (tutoring and community service) with a wide range of demographics largely out of my control I felt that I was experienced enough to develop rapport with the participants. Self-identifying as a social and empathetic person, my interest and belief in the intrinsic value of the participants' stories is a fundamental reflection of my approach to social interactions in every aspect of life. While I had heard concerns voiced from family and friends regarding the potentially sexual nature of the conversations,²⁸ I felt that my skills outside of academia combined with my professionalism and training as a qualitative researcher would protect me from becoming overly affected by the interviews themselves and would aid me in maintaining control over conversational paths. In retrospect, this assumption identified my lack of knowledge of the emotional involvement (and toll) involved in the qualitative research of sensitive topics.

Through the data collection phase of this research I interviewed thirteen men in person (the length ranged from forty-five minutes to two and a half hours), one over the telephone, and interacted with twenty others through private messages. Initial contact and interviewing seemed to be positive – the interviews were yielding rich data, I had gained access, my growing reputation as a researcher on the board was yielding more participants, and I expected to exceed the number of respondents predicted and hoped for at the outset. While all of this was occurring, I began to feel reservations, confusion, and concern; these feelings were difficult to identify and even more difficult to explain. As the interviews progressed these feelings also progressed in complexity; by the tenth

²⁸ These discussions showed that some people in my life felt that I would, in a sense, be victimized purely from being looked at or spoken to in a sexual manner, which I do not agree with either in an academic or personal capacity.

interview, I was experiencing an uncomfortable and inexplicably visceral reaction before, during, and after interviews, culminating in the fourteenth interview, which left me in physical, mental, and emotional turmoil. Later, through reflection and consulting my journal, I realized that my emotions were being affected by the research to the point where my personal life, mental wellbeing, and thesis progression were suffering.

The emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) aspect of this project was not planned, nor was it expected; however, emotion work and associated topics became influential aspects of this project by impacting the interviews, my interpretation of them, transcription and analysis, and writing. The emotion work element that emerged during the course of this project was not a methodological or analytical focus at the outset of this project, and an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the experience, affect, and consequences of this emotion work will be explored in future research.

Conclusion

Conducting a qualitative research project on the clients of sex workers has proven to be a complex and rewarding undertaking. This complexity manifests itself in a variety of ways. First, entering the virtual field required background knowledge and a delicate balance of professionalism and adherence to local conversational standards. Second, the official and personal ethical considerations of this project affected several changes to the project structure in the beginning stages (as, for example, I decided not to include a content analysis based on community reactions to the presence of a researcher). Lastly, the personal impact of the emotion work required was unexpected, embarrassing, and, at times, debilitating. Through research (ex. Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Hannem,

forthcoming) and conversations with more than a dozen qualitative researchers²⁹ I have come to understand that emotion work is a common occurrence for researchers studying sensitive topics, although it is rarely explicitly discussed in academia, and the emotion work of the researcher often positively impacts the depth and richness of the gathered data. Overall these methods resulted in successful recruitment, rich data, and positive feedback from the participants involved.

²⁹ I was lucky to find many mentors on emotion work at Laurier as my supervisor, committee members, and one other professor were open to discussing our experiences with emotion work. In addition, I presented on my experience with emotion work at the Qualitatives 2013 conference and had the opportunity to discuss this topic with many skilled researchers attending and presenting at this conference.

Chapter 3

Motives and Risk Management:

How did they get here and what is it like?

A great deal of literature on clients focuses on asking ‘Who?’ and ‘Why?’ (ex. Kinnell, 2006; Pitts et al., 2004; Wortley et al., 2006; Sanders, 2008a; Armstrong, 1978; Monto, 2010; Lowman & Atchison, 2006). Searching for a motive for entrance into the sex industry, through the role of a client or any other role, explicitly draws attention to and confirms the ‘deviant’ status – and associated stigma – placed on those involved in this industry (Sanders, 2008a). For these reasons, I initially set out to *not* ask “why” clients had become clients and choose to continue being clients. Surprisingly, most men that I interviewed had prepared their answer to this question ahead of time and would explain to me why they were in the sex industry whether or not I asked. As my interview questions changed to fit the data I was encountering, I began to ask “why”.

In this chapter I will focus on the lived experiences of clients and how these experiences inform(ed) their entrance into and behaviour within the sex industry. First I will discuss the motives of these clients and the relevant, associated life experiences. Next I will discuss a theme that emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews: the perception and management of risk.

The circumstances and feelings that motivated these participants to become clients vary widely, and indicate the individual nature of this lifestyle or activity (depending on their level of involvement) and the heterogeneous nature of this

demographic as a whole. These findings are consistent with the literature, which shows that men who hire sex workers have various backgrounds (ex. Lowman & Athicson, 2006; Pitts et al., 2004) and a variety of motives (ex. Kinnell, 2006; Monto, 2010). However, while this group is heterogeneous, most clients interviewed distinctly identified themselves as men who did *not* see street sex workers. This data suggested that clients who see escorts and massage parlour attendants may comprise a different group than men who will also (or exclusively) see street sex workers – this finding reflects Sanders’ (2008a) observations of men who see sex workers and suggests that research on clients should identify what type of sex worker(s) each respondent frequents.

The answers to ‘motive’ questions frequently expose the problems inherent in certain methodological approaches. Monto (2010) conducted survey research at John Schools and found that the most prevalent attractors to the sex industry were: the illicit nature of hiring a prostitute, wanting sex that their partner does not want, being too shy and awkward, control, and variety. Wortley, Fischer, and Webster (2002) also used survey research and identified sexual addiction and other sexual ‘problems’ as potential motivators, although it must be noted that this report does not attempt to unearth deeper motives and problematizes the purchase of sex as a whole. Another project took a common ‘motive’ in the literature – violence – and, utilizing a mixed methods approach including a survey, attempted to confirm or deny violence against sex workers as a motive for involvement in the sex industry (Lowman & Atchison, 2006).

One flaw of survey research is that it is difficult to account for every possible option; for example, while the interviews conducted for this thesis frequently brought up discussions of mental and sexual health as a motivating factor, none of the surveys

described above provided room for respondents to claim health as a motivation to seek sex workers. This methodological shortcoming is often overcome by qualitative research, such as Teela Sanders' (2008a) pivotal work investigating the lives of clients in the United Kingdom.

In *Paying for Pleasure: Men who buy sex*, Sanders (2008a) categorized client motives into two types: 'push' factors, or factors from their own lives that push clients toward the sex industry, and 'pull' factors, which are factors that *draw* clients toward the sex industry. I will use these terms to describe the various motivations that were discussed and exposed during the course of these interviews while also adding a third category: situational factors, or factors that can push and/or pull, depending on the person's individual circumstances.

Push Factors

In her qualitative study, Sanders (2008a) identified four main 'push' factors: emotional needs, stages of the life-course, unsatisfactory sexual relationships, and unease with conventional dating etiquette. All four of these push factors are somewhat present in the current data, but there are many others as well.

The key push factors found in this data are:

- Health concerns (physical, mental, and sexual)
- A need for an emotional, physical, or mental connection with another person
- Simplicity (versus other methods of experiencing sexual activity, including a lack of pressure to perform emotionally or sexually)
- Lack of sexual and/or emotional fulfillment in current relationship

- Risk management as compared to casual sex or affairs (ex. sexually transmitted infections, risk of discovery of significant other)

Pull Factors

Sanders' (2008a) 'pull' factors centered on the perceived 'glitz and glamour' of the sex industry, fantasy, suspending reality, taking a 'time out' and the excitement clients felt being involved in a taboo or 'deviant' industry. The pull factors found in this research reflected these notions, in part, but also expanded upon this glamour-centred approach to the draw of the sex industry.

- Glamour
 - Sexual gratification and fantasy; The "calibre" of woman is not available through conventional means of courtship (due to age, confidence, or perception of his own attractiveness as a partner)
- Adrenaline, thrill, and excitement
- Opportunity to fulfill "needs" for connection, intimacy, power, control, and attention
- Availability of experienced and nonjudgmental sexual partners

Situational Factors

Situational factors are those that do not neatly fit into the 'push' and 'pull' categories because their significance to the client is very complex. These factors may be a 'push' for one client but a 'pull' for another, or may exert multiple directions of force simultaneously. Only one situational factor was identified in this data:

- Escape – the client is escaping *from* something and/or escaping *to* the sex industry, depending on the client being discussed

For individual clients, these factors are often linked to others and cannot be examined independently. For example, Justin had to leave his job due to significant health problems, which he said he felt depressed about. He felt very unhappy in his life, and these factors lead him to examine why he resisted his lifetime urge to see sex workers. Justin told me that seeing sex workers is:

“...a coping mechanism for other stuff that was going on in my life, it was just a very nice escape from the things I was dealing with at the time ... for me, that was a big part of it, escaping a problem. Just making me feel good for an hour.” (Justin, age 39)

Justin’s experience with physical, sexual, and emotional health problems made ‘escape’ both a ‘push’ factor, as he wanted to escape the sadness and loneliness in his life, and a ‘pull’ factor, as the sex industry beckoned as an attractive solution to his problems.

Many of these push, pull, and situational factors overlap; for example, Justin identified the beauty of available sex workers, his health, and escape as all crucial motivations for his involvement in the sex industry. We will now discuss the four factors with the strongest themes: health, simplicity, glamour, and adrenaline.

Health

Many researchers have found sex workers who identify a therapeutic element in their work. These therapeutic elements include confidence and ego-boosting (Franke &

Carnes, 2010), comforting through emotional distress (Lever & Dolnick, 2010), a combination of therapy and education (Weitzer, 2010a) and aiding in their general well-being (Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2010). In one study, “[s]everal call girls recognized a parallel between their work and the psychotherapist’s; in fact, seeing oneself as a type of therapist is one source of pride for some call girls” (Franke & Carnes, 2010, p. 198). As these sex workers clearly identified clients in need of this therapeutic relationship, it is a logical step to investigate mental health as a motive for clients’ involvement in the sex industry. However, the health of clients – whether it is physical, emotional, mental, or sexual – is not frequently discussed in the literature beyond investigations of sexually transmitted infections and predispositions to violence. One psychiatric case study from Portugal (Gysin & Gysin, 2013) claims that psychiatrists should actively explore paid sex experiences when treating depressed men. Gysin and Gysin (2013) found that global standards for questioning depressed men about their sexual experiences refrained from investigating their history (or lack thereof) with the sex industry, which may partially explain the lack of documented research on mental illness and sex worker patronage.

Like Justin, many clients interviewed in this study referred to a variety of health problems or emotional and mental needs. Sometimes, as in Justin’s case, these health problems are consciously linked to their motivation to join and remain in the sex industry. Kevin (age 44) referred to his sessions as “stress management”; Joe identified depressed feelings and his experience going through a divorce as one reason he started to see sex workers:

“I was depressed. ... I was alone, lonely. ... I was on dating sites and it really wasn’t going anywhere. ... I did not see myself being able to go

through the whole relationship again, so I mean on a dating site I wouldn't actually be actively pursuing anything.” (Joe, age 38)

A long-term illness or physical injury also seemed to be relevant when discussing motivations; Donald and Justin both experienced long-term physical health problems that impacted their ability to maintain a relationship outside of the sex industry. Donald was sexually involved with a woman prior to becoming sick, but at the onset of his illness lost any interest in and ability to continue the relationship:

“... for some reason when I got sick ... she kept trying to come see me and stuff? And I'm like, I'm not, I'm sick... as it is, I had to move in with my brother because I couldn't take care of myself, I couldn't walk. ... [Weight gain] is a factor too, in what's preventing me from dating. I've put on a hundred pounds since I've gotten sick”. (Donald, age 33)

From his perspective, Donald's illness formed a real physical barrier to a relationship, while Justin's long-term illness instead contributed to his emotional and mental need for connection.

“A few months before I started doing this I had some health problems, I had to leave my job, and I was just kind of depressed about that”. (Justin, age 39)

At other times, the client may not fully know their own motives. Chris shared his experience with sexual dysfunction:

“I have, even, erectile problems ... I think it *might* have something to do with motivation. I don’t know. Maybe if I went to a psychotherapist then we will find out that’s part of the problem. ... I found it very comforting to be with a little bit older women who knew what they’re doing and who wouldn’t be surprised, and young girls think, ‘yeah pff, fatty’ or ‘old guy, what are you doing here?’ ... So in the beginning I saw older women, even some older than me.” (Chris, little over 40)

While Chris was the only client to explicitly identify his sexual health as a possible motive, six other clients specifically referred to an incident or condition related to sexual dysfunction without being asked any questions on this topic. These stories were linked to a ‘pull’ factor: the availability of experienced and nonjudgmental women. Clients who experience sexual dysfunction may or may not enter the industry strictly *due* to their performance anxieties or unique sexual requirements, but many certainly saw an advantage to having a sexual relationship with a woman who likely had experience facing dysfunction while also not risking future rejection due to these perceived shortcomings.

Of course, it is also possible that health issues can compound one another, such as medications for depression impacting sexual performance (Coleman et al., 2001), and there is a recognized link between sexual dysfunction and depression, although the causal direction of this link is difficult to determine (see Araujo et al., 1999; Bonierbale, Lançon, & Tignol, 2003). This link was never explicitly identified by the clients interviewed for this study, although medication for mental illness was sometimes referred to. For example, when explaining his emotional and mental experiences in life (inside and outside of the sex industry), Bart said:

“I take a lot of drugs to keep sane. To keep my depression in check. And it’s tough. It is very tough sometimes. You’re always empty.”

(Bart, age 35)

This conversation quickly exposed the function of the sex industry for Bart.

“Zoey: So what does this industry do for that, you think?”

Bart: My depression?

Zoey: Yeah.

Bart: Makes me feel like a million dollars.

Zoey: How long does it last?

Bart: Not very long. It’s like anything. Any good feeling is always temporary. And it’s like getting a fix. And for that, for that slim moment that I have those two hours or hour and a half... I feel good. And it’s not even necessarily the sex. The sex is just, it’s part of the full service.”

Bart’s description of feeling “good” during his session, above and beyond the act of sex itself, is similar to the conversation with Justin where he shared that seeing sex workers made him “feel good” for the length of the appointment. There appears to be an important dynamic at play here that requires further research investigating the link between depression, sex, and intimacy, whether or not the market of the sex industry is involved. Evidently, the client lifestyle can be of major importance to the maintenance of mental health. These statements reinforce the opinions of many sex workers that position

them as therapists providing a much-needed emotional and physical service (ex. Lever & Dolnick, 2010; Koken et al., 2010).

The Simplicity of the Relationship

Eight of the fourteen clients interviewed explicitly identified simplicity as one of their main motives. However, ‘simplicity’ for each participant was somewhat different. For example, Justin was attracted to the one-sided nature of being with a sex worker: namely, that the client does not necessarily have to be attractive as a partner.

“I mean, that’s the whole point, right? I don’t *have* to do anything, right? I can just be myself and it doesn’t matter. If they don’t like me, then...

(laughs) I’ve already paid, so, you know, I *want* them to still, but... yeah.”

(Justin, age 39)

This element led Justin to feel that he could be himself with sex workers, since he did not need to fear being rejected.

On the other hand, Alexander and Chris both identified the sex industry as an ideal avenue to pursue extramarital sexual encounters without the added complications of an affair. Both clients had desires that could potentially jeopardize their marriages if they were acted upon, and embarked on their sex industry involvement as a form of risk management.

“Years ago I’d had a brief affair with somebody I met at work, and it was too... complicated? I... I love my wife and all that, I have no intention [of leaving], I’m quite happy with that. ... I’m not looking for a replacement.

I'm looking for someone who's willing to... allow me to explore a little more freedom?" (Alexander, age 44)

"My wife is ... terminally ill ... and has a heart disease and it's difficult to... perform sex. ... I thought let's not look for a fling or look for another girlfriend. Let's just pay somebody to let that little bit of, you know, of intimacy taken care of." (Chris, little over forty)

Through the conversations that I had with both Alexander and Chris it became clear that their avoidance of affairs was motivated by two desires: a desire to continue their marriage and a desire to protect their wives' feelings. Accordingly, both clients managed the risk of losing their marriage by fulfilling their sexual and emotional needs in a manner they perceived as 'safer' than romantic and sexual involvement with women outside of the sex industry. While Alexander acknowledged that his wife would be hurt if she did discover that he hired sex workers, he seemed to think that this would still be less damaging to her feelings than an affair with a friend or co-worker. Chris is currently separated from his wife but remains occasionally active as a client of sex workers, suggesting that other motives are at play to influence his continued involvement in the industry.

The simplicity of a relationship with a sex worker (or multiple sex workers) was also attractive to many clients as a practical alternative to maintaining a relationship with a non-sex worker due to job and family restrictions or emotional exhaustion. Kevin is a single father of two dependent children, and felt that a relationship outside the sex industry would be more practical when his kids were older:

“I just decided... my situation, that’s kinda what I need. ... Single dad, no time. Women don’t, it’s... it’s tough, from my experience, for women to come into my life with an ex-wife that’s, you know, always on the phone.”

(Kevin, age 44)

Kevin also reiterated a point that came up frequently during these interviews: “I don’t pay girls for their time, I pay for them to leave.” For Kevin, this meant that he did not have to worry about the logistics of introducing another person into his complicated life. Robert, another client who seemed to appreciate the simplicity of relationships with sex workers, also used this approach to explain his involvement in the sex industry:

“... the advantage is that ... it’s not that you’re really paying them for their service. What you’re paying for is for them to leave when they’re done.”

(Robert, age 53)

Phil identified a ‘need’ for intimacy and sexual gratification, but felt that he had aged out of pursuing casual sexual encounters at bars and clubs; this limited his exposure to single women his age. Phil also noticed that when he did manage to meet a woman and begin a relationship, his relatively new job impeded his ability to fulfill her needs and expectations.

“I was finding I was having a hard time with relationships when I started this job. Because I will go into hermit mode ... and girls get very annoyed with that, cause they’re like, you’re not answering my calls ... and it’s not fair on the girl. Cause they want to be the top priority, and I understand that, but I’m not willing to do that.” (Phil, age 31)

For Phil, the simplicity of the sex industry allows him to fulfill his emotional and sexual needs while accommodating a demanding work schedule; as he works from home on creative tasks, it is important to Phil to give his inspirations a high priority and manage his needs in between jobs or waves of inspiration.

Lastly, Donald and Ralph both seemed to identify emotional exhaustion as a motive – they wanted an easy, hassle-free relationship and found that difficult to achieve outside of the sex industry. Donald was still preoccupied with his first and only long-term girlfriend, who has been dating his brother for the last couple of years. After the various painful experiences he has had surrounding this relationship, he found the dating world for a mid-thirties male to be relatively intimidating. He has difficulty courting and seducing women, even when they show explicit interest, and found online dating to get too serious, too fast.

“I’ve already been almost married, I’m not looking to get into that again right away. ...nah, I don’t want to do this, this is way too much. I want to be... just, I want to date a girl that’s nice and I can have fun hanging out with and have crazy awesome sex with.” (Donald, age 33)

Ralph, on the other hand, seemed to be adept at finding relationships (in and out of the sex industry), but had a difficult time finding the right one.

“...my marriage split up seven years ago. And since then I’ve been looking for somebody, and it’s just... it’s been a nightmare. I’ve been in relationships and every time it becomes a real hassle, right?” (Ralph, over forty)

As a solution to this predicament, Ralph essentially has long-term relationships with one or two sex workers at a time; these relationships frequently transverse the typical boundaries identified in the sex industry and fulfill his physical and emotional needs while maintaining control of the degree of ‘hassle’ and commitment involved.

It may be tempting to draw the conclusion that ‘simplicity’ as a motive represents a lack of interest in forming a relationship with a person while still being able to be sexually active with a client’s demographic of choice. While this may be true in part for some clients, these isolated quotations and analyses of motive do not do justice to the frequent recognition of – and respect for – the sex worker as a person in and of herself. Most of these clients not only receive sexual gratification from their sex worker(s) of choice, but also value the intimacy and human contact involved in their sessions. In essence, while sex workers represent an alternative to ‘conventional’ relationships (i.e. without an exchange of money for services), from the perspective of the client, the interactions that occur between clients and sex workers are also very similar to these relationships. Due to the nature of the sex industry market, clients learn to discuss sex workers in term of cost and value (as will be discussed in chapter five) and their own descriptions of motive seem to reflect this calculating approach. However, even while they discuss physically and emotionally intimate experiences in terms of ‘service’ and other emotionally removed language, the content of these interviews show that many clients’ motives are more emotionally complex than this calculating language seems to suggest.

The Draw of Glamour

The element of sexual fantasy inherent in the sex industry was a strong draw for several clients and a minor attraction for many others. Each client's identification of 'glamour' was slightly different and revealed unique priorities while still drawing a picture of a thrilling world of adventure, beauty, and sexual gratification. In order to maintain the image of the sex industry as a glamorous world, many clients told me the stories of 'their' sex worker(s) in order to show that the woman (or women) involved did not fit an undesirable stereotype. These stories centred largely on intelligence, beauty, integrity, education, and financial success. Many clients constructed the sex worker(s) they visit for me in this manner in order to explain, in part, the thrill involved in being with these admirable women; this phenomenon seems to reflect the constructed reality of the sex industry, as this reality relies heavily on each client's interpretation of the sex workers within the industry itself³⁰. As such, sex workers that give their clients a 'classy', 'upscale', or exclusive impression seemed to be preferred:

"The ones I see *repeatedly* tend to be on the higher end, the classier end ... those are the ones I like talking to the most, too. Those, the smarter ones."

(Justin, age 39)

"Sexual pleasure, with women that are *extremely* beautiful, like more beautiful than I'm ever going to get on my own, I know that..."

(Justin, age 39)

³⁰ Chapter five will discuss in further depth how clients assess the value and worth of sex workers.

Donald (age 33) visits a specific brothel because “it’s as classy as [this city] gets”; Jacob (age 57) referred to this same brothel as “upscale”, sharing that he prefers to go there because it’s a “more professionally run organization or business”.

To Eric, the calibre of woman that he encountered seemed very important to his overall perception of the sex industry; his perspective likely also impacts his perception of his own sessions and experiences.

“Some of the girls I’ve met, I have been *shocked*. Like absolutely in disbelief ... I just could not believe that a girl like that does *this*. ... It just blows my mind. Just very, very intelligent, very beautiful, like they could do anything with their life. They probably don’t have to do this, they probably have other options, and they come from good families. I don’t think they’re desperate for money to pay for school or anything like that, I just... yeah. Mostly just very intelligent, very classy, very *clean*, very, just everything. Everything good! (Laughs)” (Eric, age 39)

It was very important for Eric to make sure that I did not assume sex workers were dirty or otherwise undesirable, and the message in this passage was repeated through various anecdotes throughout our interview. Eric’s approach exemplifies how the glamour of the sex industry can be connected to the positive qualities held by the sex workers themselves.

Adrenaline

Not all of the glamour and excitement was derived directly from the women involved in the industry; there also seems to be an element of adrenaline and physical thrill involved in the act of being a client that had less to do with the individuality of the sex worker in question. A client's approach to this adrenaline seemed strongly connected to their frequency preferences. Those who felt excited by the adrenaline were more likely to see multiple sex workers, while those who abhorred this feeling more frequently avoided seeing new sex workers unless their regular sex worker(s) were unavailable.

During the interviews, the excitement of the build-up was brought up by the participants several times. For example:

“The first time I did it ... my heart was beating faster than it's ever beat before in my life.” (Justin, age 39)

“... the thrill, all the things building up to [the session], are *phenomenal*. Absolutely phenomenal.” (Eric, age 39)

Jonah expanded upon this idea and attempted to fully explain to me the intensity of the pre-session experience:

“It is a skydiving kind of adrenaline. ... Especially when, you know, the door opens, and crack-whore Zelda opens the door. It's a big letdown. That was a shitty jump. If you're jumping out of an airplane to go parachuting, and you're up there and you're ready to go, ready to go, and all of a sudden it's like, I'm sorry, the winds have picked up, you can't

jump. That's kinda what it is. It's that let down, and that, *fuck*. Right?

But... you know, the perfect dive, everything goes smooth ... you're doing flips and twirls ... that's fantastic. And when you hit the ground when it's all over, you're like... *wow*. And yeah, you probably do get a bit addicted to that adrenaline side of things. And that's probably part of the reason why I do occasionally go out looking for something... different.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

By using this skydiving analogy, Jonah conveys the extreme level of thrill, adrenaline, and excitement that can be an aspect of the life of a client – a level of thrill that may be due, in part, to the risk of a ‘letdown’. Jonah was not the only client to use the word ‘addiction’ to describe his feelings in the sex industry, although he was the only one to explicitly connect it to the adrenaline itself.

While many of the clients interviewed adopted persuasive stances at some point, Eric in particular wanted me to truly feel what it is like to experience the degree of thrill, freedom, and control that he does through his role as a client.

“... that's the part that really thrills me. I love it when they open the door and you see their surprise and excitement, or you hate it when you see the disappointment. But there's something about doing it. I mean, think of all the people in your life that you've met that you wanted to have sex with, and just couldn't, they were this, they were that, they weren't available, they were a movie star, whatever. But imagine being able to turn that and

at the flip of a coin just be able to say ‘I want him’ and go. Think of the thrill, the freedom, how that makes you feel inside.” (Eric, age 39)

These four key motives – health, simplicity, glamour, and adrenaline – are four of the five strongest motives described by the clients in this study³¹. The fifth prevalent explanation for involvement in the sex industry was a need for intimacy; however, the involvement of intimacy in the sex industry goes beyond a discussion of motivations and therefore will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Managing Risk: Perceptions and Reactions

‘Risk’ is a weighty word and is used to mean slightly different things in a variety of colloquial and academic contexts. There are several bodies of literature on risk (Garland, 2003) that describe and unpack the complex history, theoretical foundation, and consequences of risk calculations in modern society (ex. Garland, 2003; O’Malley, 1992; Shearing & Stenning, 1992; Ericson & Doyle, 2003; Giddens, 1990). A theoretical analysis of clients’ risk management strategies is beyond the scope of this thesis, and therefore I will be speaking of risk and risk management in largely descriptive terms.

The term ‘risk’ refers to a possibility of a negative outcome; it is a “measure of *exposure to danger*” (Garland, 2003, p.50). Risk is an abstract assessment of this exposure to danger³². The participants in this study discussed risk and risk management throughout various topics in their interviews. After analyzing the data I have identified four areas of risk: the risk of arrest, the risk of discovery, the risk of becoming the victim

³¹ The others are listed under ‘push’, ‘pull’, and ‘situational’ factors previously in this chapter.

³² ‘Danger’, on the other hand, is an objective term.

of a crime, and the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Most clients did not refer to all four areas of risk but focused on whichever area(s) concern them the most. The perception and management of risk is an important part of each client's meaning-making processes within the sex industry³³.

Arrest and Discovery

As per current regulations and laws in Canada, clients who see escorts occupy a grey but relatively safe legal arena. All of the participants in this study currently see escorts and/or massage parlour attendants, although several have hired street sex workers in the past. Paying for sex or companionship in Canada is not illegal, although being found in a bawdy-house (brothel) or soliciting for sex in public could previously result in criminal charges against the client. Canada's anti-prostitution laws are currently being challenged for unconstitutionality; as of June 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada has not yet reached a decision on this case, meaning that 'sting' operations and the prosecution of sex work 'crimes' are likely suspended until the legality of these charges is decided. Many Eros members seem well-informed as to the legality of sex work and their place within it while others are not as well-versed on their position within the law.

The risk of arrest and the risk of discovery are connected for many clients in that one negative side effect of arrest would be public or private exposure. For example, Alexander's perception of risk has been informed by previous anti-prostitution initiatives run by the local police station and the public:

³³ Risk informs other areas of meaning-making such as negotiating 'value' and choosing a sex worker – see chapter five.

“There’s a big street walker presence [in that neighbourhood] ... and for a while [the local] police, and the people [in that neighbourhood], were taking pictures of your license plate and posting it online.” (Alexander, age 44)

This public shaming relies on clients like Alexander who do *not* want their friends, family, and co-workers to discover their involvement in the sex trade. Alexander’s awareness of this initiative – even though he has not been caught by it – has informed his perception of his own risk. In Alexander’s case, the symbolic objects of ‘law enforcement’ and public exposure impact his meaning-making processes of the sex industry as a whole, infusing a feeling of danger and risk even though he does not frequent street sex workers.

Other clients are informed by their own experiences with law enforcement or other exposure. This process can leave a very different impression depending on the client. For example, Chris (little over 40) narrowly avoided law enforcement one night when the sex worker he was visiting was arrested prior to his arrival; he noticed people walking around in her house and did not go inside. However, this did not seem to bother Chris too much and he said that he did not feel “scared” of law enforcement because he is not doing anything wrong³⁴. In contrast, Joe (age 38) was caught by an undercover street sex work sting operation and that experience had a major effect on his involvement in the industry. While Joe’s arrest and experience in “John School” evidently did not stop him

³⁴ Chris is from Europe and has only been in Canada for a few years. He recognized that his approach to sex work is informed by growing up in a culture that did not criminalize or stigmatize the clients of sex workers.

from being a client, he said that: “It really stopped me from seeing anyone except for my current girl.”

There were also many clients who focused solely on the risk of exposure to the family without considerations of law enforcement. For example, almost every client I spoke to engaged in some aspect of risk management through the administration of their Eros profiles by using anonymous usernames, keeping personal details off of the website, and using specific anonymous email addresses for correspondence.

This sort of risk management impacted this research and narrowly avoided preventing recruitment on Eros. After posting the recruitment thread and scheduling several interviews I received notice from a prospective participant that they had been ‘informed’ that my project was a sting operation intended to target the spouses of the men on the board. According to his ‘reliable source’, I was not an academic but possibly a journalist intent on revealing the identities of my participants – because of this ‘information’, this client withdrew his participation after a stern reprimand on my supposed research methods and motive. Luckily this client did not share this evidently inaccurate rumour in the public sphere; after seeing the extent to which risk management dictates many clients’ lives, and the degree to which they visit other erotic review boards, I suspect that participants would have been more difficult to find if this rumour had reached a wider online audience.

Victimization

While the clients described above were concerned about the risk of external forces, other clients worried about the potential physical or financial risk involved in

seeing sex workers in outcall³⁵ locations. Chris' story exemplifies the impact this perceived risk can have on the overall experience:

“Those girls I saw in the first year I saw always more than once, cause the first time I was petrified. I didn't bring my wallet, I just brought the exact amount needed to pay. ... Not so much for police or something, but you never know what's behind that door. Although I'm a man and she's a woman, still. You never know if there's a boyfriend or whatever behind that door as well.” (Chris, little over 40)

One risk management technique Chris used was to not bring identification (which could be used for blackmail purposes) or extra money that could be stolen. Other clients mentioned a fear of being “mugged” or “attacked”, and the ‘exact change, no wallet’ tactic described by Chris was mentioned by other clients as well – although some lamented forgetting enough to add a tip for service that exceeded expectations.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Calculations of risk surrounding STIs were by far the most prevalent risk assessments made by these participants during our interviews³⁶. Many of the clients actually perceived a low degree of personal risk for transmission of STIs due to their own risk management techniques in addition to the perceived risk management techniques of the Eros sex workers. For example, both Jacob and Ralph have an explicitly positive

³⁵ ‘Outcall’ refers to a location where the client needs to go somewhere to meet the sex worker – a hotel or motel, apartment, house, brothel, etc.

³⁶ Even though STI prevention and pregnancy prevention can be pursued through identical tactics (such as condom usage), no client mentioned a fear of impregnating a sex worker.

impression of the local sex workers and this knowledge helps them mitigate their own feelings of risk. Jacob felt that the local sex workers were educated and careful enough to be safe for protected and unprotected oral sex:

“In terms of, you know, covered blowjobs, bareback blowjobs, I would say the majority of providers in this area would be almost a hundred percent safe. You could get it if that’s what you’re looking for.” (Jacob, age 57)

Ralph sees risk management as a mutual responsibility and visits sex workers who he thinks are safe:

“The biggest thing for me is safety. And that’s the other thing I like about the board. ... I know, myself, I get tested monthly. And the girls I know for a *fact* get tested monthly, because every time I’m there, they’re there. And I think most of the board members ... it’s never going to be 100% safe, but you’ve created a safer environment. That’s the most important thing to me, that one.” (Ralph, over 40)

By seeing ‘safe’ sex workers and being responsible for their own sexual health, many clients create meanings for themselves that encompass this notion of safety within a ‘risky’ environment³⁷.

There are many types of risk identified by participants in this study; however, some risk management techniques are almost universal. For example, avoiding street sex

³⁷ Some clients were proud of having the skills required to navigate the sex industry safely and responsibly.

workers and free online advertisements³⁸ is a risk management technique for clients concerned with arrest and discovery, becoming the victim of a crime, or sexually transmitted infections³⁹. Other risk management tactics included electronic secrecy (maintaining anonymity online and managing evidence left on their personal computers), utilizing the Eros community to avoid sting operations and risky people, and being very cautious when a new person – even a researcher – emerges on the board.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented two key aspects of clients' lived experiences: how and why they entered (and remain in) the sex industry, and how they perceive and manage risk within the sex industry. While a large variety of factors were identified as motives, the four most common and/or influential motivations are: health, the simplicity of the relationship, the draw of glamour, and adrenaline.

'Health' as a motivation for clients is a significant finding, as this was not found in the literature as an explanation for industry involvement; this suggests that future research on the link between sex work and health must be conducted in order to more accurately understand the sex industry and the people who shape it. Within this sample there was a clear and influential link between pursuing paid sex and attempting to mitigate physical, sexual, and/or mental health problems. This finding reinforces claims made by sex workers that compare their profession to other therapeutic or caring

³⁸ Some websites are designed to allow sex workers to post free advertisements while other websites and print sources charge a fee.

³⁹ This is also reflective of the neighbourhoods where street sex workers are commonly found and may be related to considerations of class and the stigma of place discussed in chapter five.

professions (see Franke & Carnes, 2010; Lever & Dolnick, 2010; Weitzer, 2010a; Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2010).

In addition, as this chapter has explained, perceptions of risk and risk management techniques are fundamental concerns for most of the clients interviewed. These calculations of risk hint at other processes, such as a ‘stigma of place’ that influences many clients’ perceptions of a given area, in addition to a connection between risk and overall value, which will be addressed in further depth in chapter five. These two areas of narration – motive and risk – comprised the bulk of the interviews and were important to each participant’s perception of himself as a client.

Chapter 4

Investigating the Emotional Landscape:

Meaning-Making and Intimacy from the Client's Perspective

Intimacy in sex work has been studied directly and peripherally in the sex work literature from the perspectives of both sex workers and their clients; these studies often find that intimacy is a crucial aspect of the client experience (see Lever & Dolnick, 2010; Bernstein, 2007; Sanders, 2008a; Sanders, 2008b; Enck & Preston, 1988). The data collected during this study confirmed these findings as most clients valued intimacy and a “connection,”⁴⁰ although the balance of sexual desires to intimacy desires varied between the participants. In order to examine the experiences of intimacy pursued and felt by these clients, first I will present the various forms that intimacy can take and the symbolic objects with which clients interact as they construct intimacy with their favourite sex worker(s). Next I will introduce a new typology of the client that emerged from my data, expanding on the existing dichotomy of ‘regulars’ and ‘non-regulars’. This typology includes a consideration of intimacy when creating categories based on client patterns. Lastly I will introduce and discuss ‘interrupted intimacy,’ an aspect of romance and sexuality that is relatively unique to the sex industry.

⁴⁰ Many clients in this study referred to a “connection” but the definition of “connection” varied between clients. A connection can be sexual, non-sexual physical (such as kissing and touching – discussed later in this chapter), emotional, and/or mental. While the type of connection varied, the term was always used to identify some type of link or bond that the client experienced with a sex worker. For the purposes of this chapter a “connection” refers to this link or bond.

Forms of Intimacy: Objects involved in the meaning-making of intimacy

Most of the clients involved in this study referred to some sort of ‘connection’, ‘click’, or ‘intimacy’. For some, intimacy was the primary goal, with sexual relationships being almost an afterthought. For others, it was a surprising but welcome result of their foray into the sex industry, and for still others, a connection was seen as a positive accompaniment to the main goal of pursuing fulfilling sexual experiences. However, while a discussion of intimacy and connection was almost universal, the symbols and objects⁴¹ of intimacy varied. These symbolic objects were brought forward during discussion as indicators of intimacy and connection, ‘proof’ presented to the interviewer – myself – as the client explained or acted out their relationships, experiences, and desires.

Of course, it is impossible to determine the objective ‘reality’ of the intimacy and connections identified by these participants. Honest friendships and relationships between sex workers and their clients certainly do occur (ex. Lever & Dolnick, 2010), while ‘off-the-clock’ interactions and symbols of intimacy could also be an extension of the ‘emotional labour’ and fantasy maintenance acted out by many sex workers (Sanders, 2005; Lever & Dolnick, 2010). However, instead of trying to discern this social reality from the perspective of the sex worker, I will assess how clients create meaning within their relationships with sex workers and how they interpret and interact with objects during this meaning-making process.

⁴¹ As described in Chapter 3, ‘objects’ in this context refers to the symbolic interactionism definition of ‘objects’.

Many clients shared a common avenue of meaning-making: explaining and discussing the development of the non-sexual relationship between the sex worker and themselves. In order to explain their connection, the client would use language that expressed his respect and attraction to the *personality* of the sex worker, his interest in talking and ‘hanging out’ with his favourite sex worker(s), and/or his interest in intimate – but not entirely sexual – physical interactions. For example, Justin said:

“A lot of the time I want to get it done quick, because I like the after time. I like just laying there and relaxing and, oh yeah. It was everything, the first year was just like therapy ... I loved everything about it. It wasn’t just the sex at all. Especially the ones I saw multiple times, those were the girls I really liked talking to, so I’d just go back to them. Actually, there were some times I went that I think I just wanted to hang out with them and just talk more than anything, but I spent all that money, so I might as well do everything!” (Justin, age 39)

Jonah also valued conversation and felt that the connection itself could impact how sexually attractive a given sex worker might be:

“It’s really weird, but you get drawn to those people that you can chat with, that you can talk to, that you find connections with. That whole physical appeal side, it changes depending on the personality of the person you’re talking to.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

Later, he expanded on the importance of a candid and friendly relationship:

“Sexuality is much more than body. Much, much more. And... I don't know. That's not the appeal for me. ... I was [with] somebody I had seen regularly, and we just started chatting and chatting and chatting and chatting, and then we got into things, and all of a sudden she was like, 'Oh my God, somebody's going to be here in like five minutes!' So it's like, clothes on... but it was out of respect, you know, she has a business, and that's how she's supporting herself. And... I've been the guy sitting in the parking lot being like, 'What do you mean, five more minutes, five more minutes?' No. Okay, I'm way over the time. I was supposed to be there for an hour and we were an hour and a half, hour and forty-five.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

The manner in which Jonah creates meaning around the encounter described above shows that part of the appeal of the session seemed to be these moments of intimacy and trust, the symbols that indicated to him that he is a special and privileged client. The extension of the session purely because of ‘chatting’ and connection – and without extra cost – provides a measure of mutuality⁴², a symbol that the sex worker enjoyed spending time with him as much as he enjoyed spending time with her. Further, through his description of this event he interacts with his own self and his own meaning of the sort of client he is – in this case, one that is respectful of the sex worker's business and has sympathy for fellow clients.

⁴² Some psychology literature refers to the positive impact that perceived mutuality can have on perceived feelings of intimacy within romantic relationships (see Oliphant & Kuczynski, 2011; Zimmerman, Holm, Daniels & Haddock, 2002).

Further in this interview Jonah suggested that the anonymity present in sex work encounters actually *increases* the intimacy:

“...especially if you’re with somebody that you’ve already been [with] and got to know, and have a bit of trust built there... the walls are down. And... that anonymity ... between the two of you, she doesn’t really know who *you* are, and in a weird sort of way you can both just kind of... let go.”

(Jonah, mid-thirties)

Symbols of Physical Intimacy

Another common object surfaced as the clients revealed their intimacy meaning-making processes: symbols of physical intimacy. Kissing was one object or symbol frequently linked to intimacy. This object interacted in the meaning-making processes of several clients as they described the degree of intimacy involved in their sessions. In some instances, the client felt kissing was so indelibly linked to intimacy that they could not enjoy a session with sex workers who restricted kissing in their ‘menu’⁴³.

“Several girls I’ve seen advertised in the past have advertised very adamantly, ‘no kissing’. You know I mentioned trying to play it safe, [but] that’s something I can’t *not* have. It’s not... there’s no link, there’s no emotion, there’s no... if it’s just straight sex with no kissing, it’s just...”

(Jonah, mid-thirties)

⁴³ A ‘menu’ is the advertised sexual services of a sex worker, often describing – in code – particular sex acts that they will or will not accommodate.

When Ralph visited his first sex worker – a massage parlour attendant or MPA – he quickly learned the intimacy value connected to the ‘kiss’.

“She told me the first time ‘no kissing’, and I was like, (in a disappointed voice) ‘no kissing, okay’, well I guess. I don’t know anything about this, and she said ‘you know, the girls don’t kiss’. ... I go back a week later, started getting intimate with her ... oh my God, she kissed me like I’ve never been kissed in my life.” (Ralph, over 40)

Bart’s preferences further support ‘kissing’ as an important object of intimacy within the sex worker/client relationship; he expands to include other indicators of physical – but non-sexual – intimacy, such as touching and showering together after the session.

“I lack intimacy in my life, so for me it’s not about sex. I could care less. I could have sex with anything. But it’s the connection, it’s the kissing, it’s the touching. ... [and] shower for two after. Nothing goes on in the shower other than talking, touching, washing. Very basic, almost basically what a couple does. ” (Bart, age 35)

Like Bart, Kevin compared an ideal session to a traditional heterosexual romantic encounter as indicated by symbols normally associated with a ‘date’:

“I like to talk first, chat, if the TV’s on, whatever, see what’s going on, and all that type of thing. And just basically, I like it to feel like, you know, a date. Start on the couch kissing, something like that.” (Kevin, age 44)

Abstract Objects of Intimacy

Beyond these physical objects of intimacy many clients engage in more abstract meaning-making processes that influence the intimacy they feel in their relationships with sex workers. For instance, Kevin feels a great deal of sympathy and concern for sex workers who are coerced into the sex industry or are otherwise unhappy there. He wonders to himself:

“How do they see *themselves* after I leave?” (Kevin, age 44)

If these concerns come to him during a session, he sometimes finds himself unable or unwilling to engage in sexual acts. However, he makes sure that the sex worker’s feelings are not adversely impacted:

“You know, I’ll sit there and hold hands, whatever, watch TV, if it doesn’t go right. I’ll make sure, you know, ‘it’s not your fault’, cause some girls will feel guilty. It’s like, ‘well you know you paid me for’, and I’m like, ‘no! I want to sit here, talk, have a smoke, whatever.’” (Kevin, age 44)

Kevin’s perceptions of the ‘object’ of the sex worker takes into account the socio-economic context within which she may exist, a phenomenon not overly common amongst these participants. Enjoyable and fulfilling sessions have an associated meaning reflecting willingness and mutual enjoyment, rather than the negative aspects of the sex industry that bother Kevin. When the session is interrupted due to these concerns, he further reinforces his constructed meaning of the sex worker as a person with feelings by catering to his idea of how she might be feeling and trying to make that situation better for her.

Sexual mutuality was another abstract object present in many clients' meaning-making processes. The very nature of the sex industry relies on the sexual desires of the client and the willingness of the sex worker to accommodate those sexual desires; flipping this dynamic and providing sexual pleasure for the sex worker gave many clients a feeling that they had a more intimate connection and, in a sense, rewarded or placated a sex worker who may not generally enjoy her job. This finding is consistent with Giddens' (1992, p.3) definition of intimacy as "a transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals" as many clients created meanings of authenticity and intimacy after attempting to create equality in sexual pleasure. Donald explains:

"If there's a genuine connection of any sort on any level and you can play that up, if I can give them an orgasm, that helps a great deal for me. That's why I like oral sex because then I can at least give them *that*, and they can put up with me for a while." (Donald, age 33)

Ralph also prefers sessions if the sex worker is also enjoying herself:

"I'm there because I want a GFE, number one, and number two is, I care. I want the interaction between us, I want that time together to be mutually enjoyable. So I want the woman to be pleased as much as me. So I'm really, I focus on them. I want them to come if I can. And I try." (Ralph, over 40)

Like many clients, Donald associated oral sex with pleasuring the sex worker:

"So often, I'll, you know... (quietly) eat a girl til she gets off and then we'll have sex. Um, and that's an ego thing for me too because it gives

me more confidence, because I'm like, hey, I got her off, I don't know if everybody can do that!" (Donald, age 33)

In these cases, these clients engage in pleasuring the sex worker⁴⁴ for a variety of complex reasons largely tied to sexual enjoyment, mutuality, and an interest in fostering intimacy. Many other clients described their prowess at giving sex workers sexual pleasure with varying degrees of awareness that the enjoyment exhibited by the sex worker may or may not be authentic.

There are many objects of intimacy and various indicators of clients' intimacy meaning-making processes. While each example found in this data is beyond the scope of this thesis, this overview shows some of the most prevalent forms of intimacy found: an emphasis on the non-sexual side of client/sex worker relationships; physical indicators of intimacy, connection, and comfort; and abstract 'objects' that clients interact with to form their perspective on intimacy within specific sessions and relationships. Next, we will go beyond these specific forms and examples to consider the notion of the 'regular', how these definitions apply to this sample, and what this means for future research on clients.

Addressing the 'Regular'

Sex work research frequently refers to the 'regular' – a type of client who sees the same sex worker over a series of sessions and develops a bond with her or him (ex. Sanders, 2004; Egan, 2006; Browne & Minichiello, 1995; Sanders, 2007; Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006; Sanders, 2008a; Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Brewis & Linstead, 2000;

⁴⁴ This need likely increases the emotional labour required by the sex worker (see Lever & Dolnick, 2010) as the client requires them to exhibit sexual and emotional enjoyment during their session.

Joseph & Black, 2012). From the escorts' perspective, regulars also have an array of associated positive characteristics such as "safe" (Sanders, 2004), "easy" and "nice" (Browne & Minichiello, 1995, p.608), and they also represent job security (according to Simone, one escort on Eros). Further, Sanders (2008b) argued that the relationship between a regular client and a sex worker mirrors heterosexual male sexual scripts and traditional notions of romance, making this relationship not as different or 'deviant' as society generally believes. Research on sex work describes men who are *not* regulars less often; Sanders (2008a) refers to them as "one off" clients, which implies that a subset of clients move from sex worker to sex worker without forming long-term emotional bonds. Sarah, an escort on Eros, referred to these 'non-regulars' as "hummingbirds" – referring to their tendency to flit from sex worker to sex worker, pursuing variety for sexual titillation. Sanders (2008b, p.404) also wrote that "[n]on-regular clients ... appeared to be different from 'regular' clients in both their motivations to seek out commercial sex and the commercial relationship dynamics."

The dichotomy of regular clients and 'hummingbirds' informed this project's structure, and I expected to be able to classify participants as 'regulars' or 'not regulars' (or 'hummingbirds', after speaking to Sarah) based on interview data. However, the data gathered during this project did not support the dichotomy of 'regular' and 'hummingbird', nor did it make it easy to even define regulars as they are in the literature. In fact, four categories of intimacy and frequency were revealed: the traditional 'regular'; clients who were a 'regular' with one (or two or three) sex worker(s) while also pursuing variety on the side (this was recognized briefly in Sanders, 2008b); clients who saw a variety of sex workers because they could not find the right one to be a 'regular'

with; and clients who are so immersed in the local sex work subculture that they are familiar with most sex workers in the Eros scene, making their ‘regular’ status difficult to determine. This data suggests that a client’s negotiation with desired intimacy and familiarity is more complicated than it has previously been presented.

There are a variety of potential explanations for this complexity and the absence of the obvious ‘hummingbird’. First, it is distinctly possible that being interviewed by a woman impacted the narrative shared by these clients and which aspects of their experiences they chose to focus on (see Gailey & Prohaska, 2011). Second, the men who volunteered to take part in this study seemed to be particularly immersed in the ‘client’ lifestyle (with a few exceptions⁴⁵), and these types of clients – sometimes referred to as “hobbyists” – may be more likely to pursue a connection even during casual sex worker encounters. Lastly, it is possible that some of the “one-off” or “non-regular” clients identified in previous research are still engaged in connection- and intimacy-seeking, albeit on a briefer level; this type of complexity would not be captured by common survey questions on frequency and length of relationship. The complexities discovered within this sample suggest that future research of clients should further investigate the meaning-making processes and intimacy needs of ‘hummingbirds’ as the categories of clients may not be as simple as ‘regulars’ and ‘non-regulars’.

⁴⁵ There were two identified motivations for participation: 1) Heavily immersed in the client lifestyle and Eros subculture and they wanted to talk about their experiences; 2) Not particularly immersed in Eros or being a ‘client’, but had some experience with academia and wanted to support research on clients.

The Regular

Several participants fit the traditional definition of the regular: they pursued close bonds with a small number of sex workers and maintained those bonds over a long period of time. For two of these clients, finding a new sex worker was often a nerve-wracking and negative experience, and there was a degree of comfort present when they found a sex worker they could see regularly:

“For me, definitely, variety’s not the spice of life. (Laughs) ... so it’s been for me, like, eighteen months, about that, I would say, [for] the SP⁴⁶ in question. There’ve been, I think, three that I’ve been *really* comfortable with.” (Jacob, age 57)

“I go with the same girls. ... After three or four, five times, and I’ve talked to them, I don’t get nervous anymore. It gets more fun.” (Kevin, age 44)

Three other ‘regulars’ described their relationships in intense and intimate terms. These clients have a preference for relationships that seemed to mirror the respect, courtship rituals, intimacy, and confidante quality of traditional heterosexual romantic scripts (as identified in Sanders, 2008b) and pursue relationships with sex workers that often blur the boundaries between sex work and non-paid relationships. For example, Ralph related a history of long-term, intense, sometimes monogamous relationships with sex workers. In one relationship, he shared that he ‘got her out’ of an abusive relationship, unsafe home, and the sex work profession in general. He became her only

⁴⁶ SP stands for ‘service provider’ or sex worker.

client, but mentioned that he had hoped she would eventually stop sex work, even with him.⁴⁷

“Got her away from all that, right? It was hard, but I did it, set her up in the apartment building next to me. She started working as my assistant, part-time, and helping me out in my business. ... we talk about letting somebody into your life, right? Like I knew that when I did that, but I made a commitment, right. And I thought, I gotta keep helping her, and so then we were seeing each other every day for about two months.” (Ralph, over 40)

Other stories from Ralph exposed that he sometimes has a relationship with a sex worker develop to the point where he doesn't pay for sessions; rather, he adopts a “sugar daddy” sort of role where they go shopping and on trips in a subtle exchange for sex and a relationship. Sometimes these outings would include a sex worker's child or children, further blurring the lines between sex work and non-paid relationships. In these cases, the sex worker would often still be seeing other clients and so were not technically “sugar babies” full time, although Ralph would be a priority.

“She's kinda nice, she knows how I feel, like I don't want to see her after she's been working all day. So she knows she sees me first.” (Ralph, over 40)

⁴⁷ Sarah typified clients with this attitude as “Captain Save-A-Ho”, showing that Ralph is not unique in wanting to ‘save’ his favoured sex worker (at the time) from the industry and her own life circumstances.

While Ralph did not seem outwardly jealous of other clients or other non-paid relationships, he was very aware of who his current sex worker might be seeing, inside and outside of the sex industry.

Bryan also shares intense connections with the sex workers he sees regularly, although these relationships do not include monogamy or off-the-clock services.

“There are three to four people who, you know, three people, really with whom I feel that sense of kinship. And I’m talking about escorts. If I met them on the streets... or actually, I will share with you that I’ve had business dealings with two of them. Because I trust them and they also operate different lives as well, but they trust me enough to bring me into that. I’ve used their services and, you know, one’s a travel agent, another does other work.” (Bryan, age 62)

This client described one sex worker in particular as “a key component to my emotional landscape”. Bryan only sees new sex workers if he ‘needs’ to – if his regulars are ill or out of town.

“I feel conflicted about that, because for some strange reason, this is bizarre, I feel I’m cheating on the other person. And isn’t that crazy?”
(Bryan, age 62)

Both Ralph and Bryan described characteristics that are indicative of heterosexual relationship scripts (Sanders, 2008b) including trust, respect, intimacy, mutuality, and even a tendency toward monogamy – or, in Bryan’s case, feeling guilty for seeing other

sex workers. Joe, on the other hand, experienced a less traditional relationship with his one regular sex worker:

“... recently it’s more been, she just comes when she needs her fix, of money, and it’s been, I’ve had a financial setback so I can’t actually afford... so often it’s just, every other week she comes by to borrow forty or sixty dollars, and she might stay for a bit, usually not.” (Joe, age 38)

In Joe’s case, he became very emotionally attached to the first sex worker he hired; as her circumstances became more dire and her demands increased, he struggled to meet her needs even as the relationship only infrequently led to sexual activity. He was not sure if he could even call himself a ‘client’, since she was not frequently a ‘sex worker’ for him and he could not afford to see someone else. Joe cited his unrequited feelings for her and pity for her life circumstances – including pregnancy – as reasons why he could not often turn down her requests for financial help.

Jacob, Kevin, Ralph, Bryan, and Joe could all be classified as ‘regulars’ in the traditional sense, but the quotes and descriptions in this section show how varied their individual experiences really are. Each of these five clients forms strong and intimate bonds with his regular sex worker(s) and there is a radical variation in degrees of personal investment and the resulting impact on their lives.

The Regular Hummingbird

Some clients mentioned that they see a pattern among new clients: they see and review many, many women when they are first introduced to the sex industry and then slowly ‘calm down’ over time. Justin’s comparatively short history as a client – around

three years – exemplified this notion. Justin is one example of what we will call the ‘regular hummingbird’, a client who forms bonds in the midst of variety and whose client patterns are both ‘regular’ and ‘hummingbird’.

“When I started, it was a *lot* of variety. Like just different girls all the time, but there were a few that I’d seen more than ten times. There were a few favourites over the years. Like one girl I saw was one of the first girls, and I saw her again probably a couple months ago ... she’s been spread over three years but I probably saw her ten times, spread over three years. And then other girls I’ll see five times in two months, and I won’t ever see them again. It’s weird.” (Justin, age 39)

Justin’s excerpt exemplifies the changing nature of a client’s frequency preferences and need for a ‘connection’ while also showing how pursuing variety need not exclude the potential for being a ‘regular’ client. Robert, another ‘regular hummingbird’, shared one reason why a connection can be beneficial even for men who like variety: building a rapport with select escorts reveals more information than reviews can encompass. As he put it:

“That’s also where you get a rapport with one or two of them that you see on a regular basis, just as we’re all humans we all have good days and bad days, and, you know, if it is the first time you’ve seen an escort and a review goes up saying ‘yeah, she was nice, but her service sucked’. Well I’ve seen escorts more than a few times and I’ve had everywhere from mediocre service to out-of-this-world service. Some of that is a two-way

street as well, and you deal with it. If you see them long enough, hey, they had a bad day. If you've only seen them once and they had a bad day, oh, her service is terrible.” (Robert, age 53)

Robert was one of the few clients who seemed to acknowledge ‘service’ as a dynamic variable, rather than a static one, and ‘regular hummingbirds’ are particularly suited to see the advantages and disadvantages of different types of relationships within the sex industry. Another client, Phil, said:

“It’s nice having a regular sometimes, you kind of get a connection with them, but variety’s fun, too.” (Phil, age 31)

Phil’s approach suggests that the ‘regular hummingbird’ might have a variety of needs and interests that require different types of relationships. Further in Phil’s interview he explained that sometimes he desires and needs connection and intimacy, while at other times a purely carnal ‘porn star experience’ (or PSE) is more attractive.

Chris is another ‘regular hummingbird’ and, like Justin, he became more interested in connections and intimacy the longer he was in the sex industry.

“I started with the massage [parlour] girls, trying some escorts in the beginning but mainly massage. Then escorting, and after a year I got bored with escorts, so I actually got a girlfriend. ... Like a sugar baby ... it’s not a girlfriend. I paid her. But [it] was a little fun, to focus on one girl.” (Chris, little over 40)

Lastly, Jonah provides yet another approach to being a ‘regular hummingbird’. In his case, he sees a vast volume of sex workers; by his calculations⁴⁸ he has between one and twelve sessions per month, resulting in forty-five in 2012. These sessions are split between regular sex workers and new ones, depending on his mood.

“There have been times where it’s been two times in a day, and then maybe a day or so later, again! And not necessarily the same one. Like it... you know, there’s girls that I have regularly visited, and then there’s other ones where you’re just kinda looking for something strange.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

However, Jonah did not feel that his interest in variety was focused on the excitement of a new body, but the draw of meeting and understanding new people:

“I’ve always had ... an interest in the differences in people, and in women, [it] fascinates me. Like how different one woman is from another. And then when you actually get into an intimate sort of setting with them, how different they all... some have tried to condition themselves to [think that] this is what they do for work, but yet... the intimacy that happens there is *very* different from person to person.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

These five clients have some degree of attraction to ‘variety’ in their sex workers but also formed bonds and connections with sex workers whether or not they intentionally pursued intimacy. Further, long-term bonds may not be the only way to foster and feel

⁴⁸ Jonah keeps track of the number of sex workers and dollars spent per month, and forwarded this document to me several months after our interview.

intimacy; for example, Jonah's interest in variety does not seem to preclude intimate interactions. This challenges the typical archetype of the 'regular' by fulfilling major requirements of the definition (such as repeat visits and some type of connection) while each client also found satisfaction in short-term relationships or 'one off' sessions that did not fit a heterosexual romantic script.

The Searcher

During data collection, a third 'type' of client emerged: the client who is searching for something. In Alexander's case, he previously had the connection he desires (and could have been called a 'regular' then) but lost that connection⁴⁹.

"I like to find a regular... there was one in [this city]. I don't know what click or chemistry or whatever you want to call it, we got along very well, but she's no longer around. So lately I've been *trying*, and I don't go that often, maybe once every two months. ... I'm trying to find that one person that I'm comfortable with." (Alexander, age 44)

Defining Alexander as a 'hummingbird' or 'one-off' client would encompass neither his need nor search for intimacy and meaningful connection within the sex industry, and yet his recent patterns would identify him as such. Alexander is a prime example of the limited nature of current client typifications. While the literature might define Alexander as a client who pursues variety over intimacy, in reality his patterns in the sex industry

⁴⁹ A story of interrupted intimacy was not unique to this 'type' of client; interrupted intimacy will be discussed in more depth further in this chapter.

are very similar to methods commonly employed by people outside of the industry looking for the right connection.

In contrast, Donald seems to still be searching for sexual fulfillment and cannot find the right sex worker or client pattern to eliminate his frustration. He shared that he sometimes does not reach a climax during his sessions, leaving him sexually frustrated and searching for an answer.

“Sometimes, I’m like, can I make it somewhere else? I’ve done that before, I’ve gone through three different experiences in a night, until I finally found one where I got off. And that’s just the thing, man, what a waste of everybody’s time and my money. I should’ve just gone to the last person first, or been smarter about how I did this.” (Donald, age 33)

Donald may be the closest to a true ‘hummingbird’ client that I interviewed during the course of this study, but his dissatisfaction with his sex worker patterns suggests that he has not yet found a comfortable and fulfilling way to satisfy his needs.

Lastly, Bart is searching for a sex worker who can fulfill all of his emotional needs *without* presenting a potential emotional risk. As mentioned in chapter three, Bart has serious mental health concerns and utilizes the sex industry as a way to manage depression and other mental health needs.

“I have tried to find... one escort that I can currently see on a regular basis. Has not happened. Some have tried. ... I have a very extensive list, or criteria that people have to meet, and if they don’t meet it, then I don’t see

them ever again. Because if my needs aren't met then I'm wasting my time and my money.” (Bart, age 35)

While Bart says in this excerpt that he has not found one escort he can see regularly, he did mention making strong connections with escorts and deciding that he had to stop seeing them for fear of getting ‘too attached’.

Each of these ‘searchers’ is searching for something different, or is searching in a different way and with different criteria. However, they all are trying to find something specific in the sex industry that they have yet to find – or something that they have previously found and lost.

The Insider

One final type of client was identified in this data and is represented by a single participant. I will be presenting this as a ‘type’ – rather than a description of one person – because of the likelihood that there are others fitting a similar description. The ‘insider’ is a client who is so thoroughly immersed and involved in their local sex work subculture that they are familiar with most of the active sex workers in that subculture, meaning that they can see large numbers of escorts with whom they have existing or prior relationships. In addition, being involved in the subculture may provide non-traditional (i.e. not advertisement-based) avenues to seeing escorts.

Eric represents the insider; he has been involved in the sex industry for decades and is particularly familiar with the group of regular escorts on Eros. While Eric was the only one who identified a behind-the-scenes relationship with many Eros escorts, the

conversations on the Eros board and the number of people involved in board administration/management suggest that this could possibly apply to several Eros clients.

This situation directly impacts the intimacy (or lack thereof) that Eric pursues and experiences in the sex industry.

“I do get the opportunity to see a lot of new girls, but I don’t want to come across as egotistical and I don’t want to be seen as... you know, high and mighty, I’m not doing that. But what has happened is, because I’ve been around so long, because I have networked with a lot of the people, a new girl comes on the board and wants to try the industry out, many times I will be asked to be her first client. Just because I am classified as a good client, I’m not gonna be overly aggressive, I don’t have ... wants and needs that are over the top, and I’m trusted. I’m heavily trusted by most of the girls on the board, I’ve come to their personal residences, I’ve met their kids, I know them personally. So I will get that opportunity.” (Eric, age 39)

In essence, Eric does not seem to view himself as solely a client; he views himself also as a trusted friend and confidante, making his role – and the question of whether or not he is a ‘regular’ – more complex. The ‘insider’ represents a cross-over category, a client who is not *just* a client and is involved in the sex industry on a deeper level than the average sex worker client.

These four categories of client – the ‘regular’, the ‘regular hummingbird’, the ‘searcher’, and the ‘insider’ – provide an expanded typology from which to view clients.

These more specific ‘types’ take into account not only the objective reality of a client’s patterns but also the *intent* behind these patterns and, if relevant, the associated desires. In this manner, we can take into consideration the meaning-making processes of the clients themselves, rather than imposing a set definition based on number of partners, frequency of visits, and the meanings that these numbers have for outsiders.

Interrupted Intimacy

We have established that many clients develop complex and meaningful relationships with their sex workers, some of which, as Bryan (age 62) said, form a “key component” of their “emotional landscape”. However, the secretive nature of the sex industry provides specific challenges to maintaining intimacy in this industry, and several clients have experienced some degree of interrupted intimacy.

In this case, the phrase ‘interrupted intimacy’ refers to intimate relationships that are interrupted unexpectedly, usually by external forces. One form of this interrupted intimacy can manifest each time a session ends. For the clients who do not have experiences off-the-clock, the end of the session itself produces an interruption:

“I’ll be honest, it’s not always easy, because sometimes when you’re having a great time with, you wish they could stay because it’s that good.”

(Robert, age 53)

The timed nature of the session creates an experience that is always temporally bound regardless of the enjoyment and intimacy present, presenting a unique challenge to creating and maintaining feelings of intimacy and closeness.

Another manifestation of interrupted intimacy is experienced mostly by clients who see sex workers at a brothel or through an agency; these management styles prevent the sex worker from directly contacting the client and vice versa, meaning that a sex worker who leaves a brothel or agency will likely lose many clients through a lack of communication. Jacob has experienced this on multiple occasions:

“There’s the one that is not longer at [an agency]. I would have seen her over a three or four month period and she’s not there anymore, and because I have no way of contacting her or vice versa, I don’t see her at all anymore.” (Jacob, age 57)

“The one that I *was* seeing the most, she left [a brothel] so she’s not there anymore. And so it was kind of funny, it wasn’t like breaking up, I don’t mean that at all. But it was kind of weird that one day she’s there, and one day she’s gone.” (Jacob, age 57)

Donald experienced a different variation of this communication problem. He met a girl at a brothel but found the intimacy too intense:

“Basically I was falling for her ... and I kept wanting to go, and I was like, no this isn’t good, she doesn’t care. She might think I’m a sweet guy, but she’s twenty-three or something, she’s got... her life. She doesn’t need this. ... Then, about two months later, I was like, you know, I really do want to see her again, because [it was] the best experience I’ve had, even just physically, right. And she wasn’t doing it anymore. So. I was a little sad, because I totally lost touch.” (Donald, age 33)

Both Jacob and Donald experienced problems that are unlikely outside of the sex industry – in non-paid relationships, individuals would likely exchange contact information and notify one another of a change in this information. This interrupted intimacy can be painful for clients, such as Donald, who felt a strong connection.

Beyond the communication problems inherent in brothels and agencies, sex workers who leave the sex industry, contract an illness, or pass away can leave an emotional imprint on the clients who cared deeply about them.

“You become very attached to those people, they become a part of you, and you care for them. And so when something happens to them or they decide to leave, which you very often encourage, but still, there’s a loss there. And you feel that sense of loss, loss of comfort. And over the years now ... there have been, I would say, two or three really key individuals who moved away to other cities. In the case of one person who I still miss deeply, [she] contracted MS and, you know, now one person has Lupus, and things like that. So these things that stalk all of us as we age overtake them as well, and you kind of come to think of them as your extended family.” (Bryan, age 62)

The experience and impact of interrupted intimacy on clients is an under-researched area that is clearly important to the overall experience of being a client. The sex industry contains unique rules – both explicit and implicit – regarding communication, the end of a session, and the blurring of lines between ‘real life’ and the

sex industry that can make it difficult to maintain intimate relationships even when both parties are willing and interested.

Conclusion

Negotiating the meaning of intimacy between sex workers and clients is a complex process that is often not encompassed in existing literature on intimacy and sexuality. The aspects of meaning-making and intimacy found in this data represent some of the many unique circumstances and emotions that clients experience in their interactions with sex workers. While a great deal of intimacy in the sex industry parallels intimacy in non-paid relationships (ex. Giddens, 1992) the meaning-making processes of clients need to account for a unique environment that can alter the meaning of physical and abstract objects while also introducing the risk of interrupted intimacy. The new four-part typology of the client described in this chapter requires that each client's intimacy priorities be accounted for when attempting to categorize clients based on their patterns, frequencies, and motivations.

Evidently, the relationships clients form with sex workers can have a great impact on each person's emotional landscape. A client's meaning-making processes surrounding intimacy can be different from that of another client, but it is clear that many of the different clients interviewed had an emotional and mental connection with sex workers beyond a sexual attraction. A thorough consideration of intimacy, how intimacy is defined, and how it is experienced is crucial when examining the lived realities of being a client.

Chapter 5

How Clients Assess Value: Indicators and ‘Two Hundred Dollars’

Symbolic interactionists propose that humans create meaning through interaction with objects and act towards objects based on these meanings. Blumer (1986) transcends the colloquial meaning of the word ‘object’ and uses it to describe everything in the social world that a person can interact with to generate meaning. There are three types of objects: people, physical things, and abstract ideas, and each person develops meanings by interacting with these objects, including the ‘self’ as an object. However, applying this to sex work and the perspectives of clients invites a degree of complexity not commonly associated with this aspect of symbolic interactionism.

Escorts are ‘people’ objects; many clients identify and interact with escorts as human beings with a specific role, not unlike the ‘objects’ of mother, teacher, and friend. Based on the data gathered during the course of this study, there is evidence that sex workers – in this case, escorts – are also seen as *physical* objects through commonly recognized processes of commodification and objectification. Considering escorts as two different types of ‘objects’, sometimes simultaneously, adds a level of complexity to the process through which clients interact with escorts to develop meaning.

This chapter will discuss sex workers as two types of symbolic interactionist ‘objects’ and contextualize this conversation within the broader discussion of commodification. In addition, this chapter will show how clients assess the value of sex

workers and the cyclical relationships that value indicators have with the meaning-making processes of clients.

The Commodification of Sex

The commodification of sex is an aspect of the sex industry and wider culture that is frequently studied, discussed, and analyzed (ex. Brewis & Linstead, 2000a; Brewis & Linstead, 2000b; van der Veen, 2001; Monto, 2004; Gottdiener, 2000; Constable, 2009). While the overall commodification of sex and women is beyond the scope of this thesis⁵⁰, this section will discuss commodification as it relates to the participants and data utilized in this study.

Throughout the data gathering process, clients discussed sex work and sex workers in terms of monetary value, associating characteristics of the experience with the amount of money being spent. This commodifies the exchange as the sex worker and her service are translated by the client into an associated dollar value. The process of transforming human labour into a quasi-commercial, economic exchange is by no means unique to the sex industry; similar processes can be found in a variety of other areas, including academia (Adcroft & Willis, 2006) and social services (Carvalho & Rodrigues, 2008). However, transforming individuals, their physical characteristics, and intimate sexual acts into unique points of economic analysis is less common.

The exchange of sexual services for money fits most definitions of commodification; however, this term comes with a great deal of context, depending on

⁵⁰ For recent literature on the commodification of sex, women's bodies, and women's labour, see: Pickles & Rutherford, 2005; Ertman & Williams, 2005; Reichert & Lambiase, 2006; Purkayastha & Majumdar, 2009; Ross, 2012.

associated ideology and theoretical background. For example, commodification can be interpreted by a social economist as “merely the result of economic logic, rational choices, and free-market mechanisms” (van der Veen, 2001, p.31), or alternatively, by a Marxist feminist, as “a form of alienation as well as an exploitative relation of appropriated labor ... a phenomenon that has proliferated with the spread of capitalist markets, and with gender, sexual, and racial oppression” (van der Veen, 2001, p.32). In addition, commodification can be understood as a *verb* applying to an economic exchange (such as in the first quote above) or it can be understood as applying to an economic exchange *involving a commodity* (ex. Monto, 2004). The former interpretation does not presuppose inequality or objectification, while the latter, applied to sex work, requires that either sex or the sex worker herself is considered a ‘commodity’.

For the purposes of this chapter we will adopt a philosophically and morally neutral stance on the topics of commodification and objectification. We will use the term ‘commodification’ as a verb to describe an economic process involving the exchange of goods for services, while we will use ‘objectification’ to describe the process through which a person is transformed or equated, in meaning, to a physical object. Discussions of sex worker commodification and objectification can be value-laden, a debate often “[f]uelled by fundamental Christian ideals that consider prostitution as a threat to the moral fabric of society and family structure” (Sanders, 2005, p.38). Using a symbolic interactionist framework, this chapter will analyze the meanings that are developed between clients, escorts, and other objects connected to the life of a client. This analysis will consider the differences in the data between escorts as people objects and escorts as

physical objects and this analysis, consistent with a grounded theory approach, will assume no inherent devaluation without data to support this conclusion.

Imposing Meaning Through Language

Social science researchers engage in individual meaning-making processes of their own and these meanings sometimes appear in the language chosen to describe their research. Words, such as ‘commodification’, often draw implications and context to the subject matter they describe. Existing literature on the sex industry and clients frequently showcases language that reflects sex as a commodity; examples include *Paying for Pleasure: Men who buy sex* (Sanders, 2008a); *Sex for Sale: Prostitution, pornography, and the sex industry* (Weitzer, 2010b); “Men Who Buy Sex: A survey in the Greater Vancouver Regional District” (Lowman & Atchison, 2006); “The Meaning of the Purchase: Desire, demand and the commerce of sex” (Bernstein, 2001); “Male Sexual Scripts: Intimacy, sexuality and pleasure in the purchase of commercial sex” (Sanders, 2008b); *Selling Sex: Experience, advocacy, and research on sex work in Canada* (van der Meulen, Durisin, & Love, 2013). These titles treat sex as an objective ‘thing’ that can be purchased and sold, and these phrases commonly occur throughout the body of the texts as well.

By describing men as ‘buying’ sex, and women as ‘selling it’, these authors assume that the sex act itself is fully commodified and their language reflects this conviction. This language permeates discussions of clients even where in-depth commodification analyses are absent. I do not argue that sex is not necessarily commodified by the men sampled in their studies; rather, I argue that expanding this

commodified language to any and all discussions of sex work is problematic. Embedding commodification language into substantive discussions of client experiences attaches this abstract, context-heavy process to descriptions where it may not belong. Conversations of client involvement in the sex industry that frame the economic exchange in terms of “purchasing” and “buying” sex or people makes it difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualize clients as anything *other* than the physical embodiment of commodification and objectification. This is particularly inappropriate where the experiences of the client are being presented largely free of analysis, including discussions of commodification.

The inferences in the above-cited literature frame sex as a ‘thing’ that can be bought, traded, and sold. This notion was not verified in the current project’s data. Language identifying sex itself as an object, tangible or otherwise, was conspicuously absent from most of the interviews. Participants used the words “session” and “appointment” to refer to the time spent with sex workers and did not refer to “buying”, “selling”, or “owning” something, whether it be the act or the person⁵¹ – their language more closely reflected other areas of social life where a person’s services may be paid for, such as therapy, dentistry, and skill coaching. This is similar to Brewis and Linstead’s (2000a, p.210) finding that sex workers perceive their role as selling sexuality rather than “other dimensions of their labour power, such as their social skills or their physical strength”.

This does not mean that sex work is *not* commodified or does not represent the commodification of women specifically or generally; however, one tenet of symbolic

⁵¹ The one exception to this, Phil, is discussed on the following page.

interactionism is that people will interact with objects based on the meaning that the object has *for them* (Blumer, 1986). The fourteen clients interviewed for this study do not approach sex itself as a commodity or a ‘thing’, despite the fact that intimacy and sexual services are being exchanged for money in a commodified process; there is a lack of intention or awareness as far as the commodification of sex itself is concerned. Therefore, as far as this project is concerned, clients do not ‘buy’ sex or sex workers.

While sex as a commodity was not reflected in this data, and while most clients did not approach sex as a thing that they could purchase, there were other aspects of commodification present. This was particularly prevalent during discussions of cost, value, and worth. As intimacy and connection was a relatively important aspect for each client, every participant mentioned and admired some aspect of individual sex workers that they see, showcasing the meanings that they developed for specific women based on individual characteristics, relationships, and experiences of them as people. However, some clients also seemed to approach sex workers as a physical object, rather than a person object. For example, when relating a particularly bad experience, Bart said that:

“She wasn’t like her pictures. She was very mechanical. The only difference between her and a blow-up doll would’ve been a heartbeat. It was nothing like she had advertised.” (Bart, age 35)

Language that seemed to reflect sex workers and/or sex as physical objects akin to products was often present during cost-benefit analyses, as well:

“I actually wanted to do an overnight a few times but I couldn’t justify the money. Like I just thought, I could see the same girl four different times or

have her there for one night for the same price. I mean, that was a girl who was giving me a good deal for it, and I still couldn't do it. I couldn't justify it." (Justin, age 39)

Robert felt that he was unique in *not* treating sex workers as objects, although it is unclear whether or not his impression of other clients comes from exposure to real people or a generalized 'other' (ex. Mead, 1967). In effect, the meaning he creates takes into account a perception of her as a possible physical object, while rejecting that in favour of her personhood:

"... yeah, you may not approve of their profession, but I treat them like a *person*. I don't treat them like a piece of flesh that I'm paying for. And they pick up on that." (Robert, 53)

Bart also seemed to have meanings that crossed the sex worker as a person and as an object; in his pursuit of a genuine experience that is "not fake", he interacts with his perception of sex workers in a way that transforms their self into a physical object in relation to his sexuality, while still referring to their emotions and sexuality.

"I do not enjoy fake ... I want natural. I don't *want* make-belief. ... I can't *stand* these fucking outfits that these girls wear because it's not my fantasy. It's not *me*. I prefer, I mean, some girls love it when I come see them because they wear their Lululemon pants, they wear sweatpants and a t-shirt. ... The more real it is, the better it is for the both of us. ... Even, you know, I saw one girl that had fake hair. And I told her no makeup, no fancy outfits, and she did everything, but she had fake hair. ... I said the

next time I see you, and I *will* see you, you will not have that piece on.”

(Bart, age 35)

During Phil’s description of his cost-benefit analysis he uses language that frames sex and sex acts as commodities – the quote below represents the only time he referred to a sex act in a commodified way. His overall attitude did not reflect sex as a commodity except during this discussion of cost.

“Montreal ... you have to pay to get into the bar, and then you’ve got to buy drinks at the bar, then you’ve got to pay to get into the VIP room, then you gotta pay for it, and by the end you’re paying three hundred dollars for a blowjob, and you’re like, this seemed expensive! I always get buyer’s remorse. I’ve done it twice in Montreal, I always get buyer’s remorse in Montreal.” (Phil, age 31)

The meaning-making processes clients undergo during their involvement in the sex industry are evidently complex and varied. While there appears to be some cross-over in how sex workers are perceived – people or physical objects – each client, regardless of perspective, engaged in a complex analysis to determine the overall value of the sex worker, their experiences, each session, and the industry as a whole.

Meaning-Making: Discussions of Value

The clients interviewed in this study were frequently aware of the approximate dollar values associated with ‘ideal’ characteristics such as youth, a fit body, large breasts, an outgoing personality, and specific sexual acts, such as ‘Greek’ (anal sex), kissing, and unprotected oral sex. As this chapter will explain, this sense of value exists

in a cycle; while clients are aware that specific physical characteristics, behaviours, and acts may cost more and are therefore ‘worth’ more, receiving these aspects and services heightened their impression of the value that they received, whether or not they did in fact pay for the additions to ‘regular’ service. For example, Bart was proud to share that he frequently receives extra ‘options’ once he becomes a regular:

“The more times you see them, the more the options open up. ... Depending on who you are, how you are, and how into it they are, depending. I mean, I’ve had girls tell me to finish in their mouth. I have *never once* seen that in a menu offered, nor have I ever asked for it. I’ve had girls tell me to put it in their bum. No extra cost, never asked for it, they just said, this is what I want you to do.” (Bart, age 35)

Bart began to experience more value for the same, or less, cost – in addition, the feeling of client privilege itself seemed to have some associated value. This is due, in part, to Bart’s perception of the rarity and cost of these extra options, as is evidenced by the examples he chose to give. Here, the meanings that Bart creates and develops *about* himself are greatly impacted, as he associates these privileges with his identity, sexual prowess, and overall likeability, while Bart also develops the meanings that exist between him and these sex workers.

Clients also incorporate various external indicators of value when creating and developing their perception of value and the meaning that each sex worker has for them. The men interviewed for this study engage in a complex assessment of value when they consider hiring a sex worker, whether it is for the first time or not, and these assessments

go beyond physical characteristics, behaviour, and sexual acts. Indicators of value may change from person to person, although some are shared, and appear to evolve as the client learns more about the relationship between specific indicators and their associated value. These lessons come from personal experience, the shared experiences of others, and cultural associations. These indicators include location, advertisements, reviews, and price.

Location as an Indicator of Value

The locations commonly associated with a ‘sketchy’ environment and/or ‘sketchy’ sex workers are mostly those that are visibly disordered⁵² and appear to be low-income areas. This suggests that there may be a classist element to the assessments clients make of a given area as public perceptions of the local socioeconomic and racial makeup can impact impressions of disorder (see Sampson & Raudenbush, 2005). Specific areas in the sampled city experienced a stigma of place as clients construct the definition of an undesirable locale citing socioeconomic factors, perceptions of disorder, and negative experiences. These constructs are communicated, developed, and reinforced through Eros. In addition, a client’s consideration of a session location was frequently connected to his perception and management of risk and value as specific locations were seen as more ‘risky’ and/or less valuable. As Phil put it:

“I’ve heard there’s girls that work out of [hourly rate motels] and I haven’t gone down there, and I’m always dreadful, cause you never know where

⁵² In this case, ‘disorder’ refers to physical disorder (garbage, unkempt lawns, run-down houses) or social disorder (evidence of crime such as graffiti, panhandlers, street sex workers, people who are perceived to be ‘homeless’ and/or dangerous).

they are ... I don't know exactly where you're located until you set an appointment, and I'm always worried they're gonna be like, [intersection in 'bad' area]! Ehhh. (Laughs) Ah, sorry, something just came up! ... going down ['bad' street] just gets sketchier and sketchier and I think if you're working out of that area you're... maybe not... the most up and up person to be doing this." (Phil, age 31)

Discovery, whether by a significant other, social sphere, or law enforcement, was also a major concern of many clients and was incorporated into risk management strategies and assessments of location.

"I don't go to the [hourly rate motel]. There've been times I've wandered in, like okay, it looks shady, keep driving ... from what I've determined, there's a lot of guys in here that have businesses, reputations, right. And money. They're not going to park their Beemer at the [hourly rate motel]. It's like, all of a sudden you might as well have sirens go out." (Jonah, mid-thirties)

However, even a more upscale location presents a social or legal risk. When discussing a popular brothel in the area, which used to be located in a high-traffic, residential area, Jacob said that:

"I've gotta tell you ... where they were, that is not where I would have been going. That was *way, way, way* too high profile. Right. Cause they're right in the middle of, anybody could see your car coming and going ... all

the neighbours knew ... so I don't think you really want to be pulling your car in their driveway.” (Jacob, age 57)

Other clients, such as Jonah and Alexander, learned that a ‘sketchy’ location can indicate areas of concern such as the presence of drugs, bad hygiene, a dirty location, a lack of discretion, and bad service⁵³:

“The worst one ... as soon as she gives me the address I was like, alright this seems sketchy, maybe she rents something in a cheap area just for work. I go in there, and it's like a disaster, it's filthy, and I swear she was high. And I paid her for an hour, I got out of there in about fifteen minutes.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

“The very, very first girl I ever saw, on the board, as soon as I walked in she started asking me, ‘oh your wife's not keeping you happy’, and this and that. No. I don't want, I'm not there to talk about that. ... Her price was very... cheap. It wasn't a great motel, great location. But me being who I am, I seen the price and went, okay! And I learned something from it.” (Alexander, age 44)

These sorts of experiences are frequently shared and immortalized by clients through Eros reviews and discussion threads, extending the associations between location and undesirable outcomes such as increased risk and bad service which impact the overall perception of value. In this manner the specific subculture of clients on Eros share

⁵³ Some of these perceived characteristics (such as drug use and ‘dirtiness’) connect back to perceptions of disorder and the ‘stigma of place’ discussed on page 10.

meanings with one another, providing anecdotal evidence to support the link between unsavoury or highly visible locations and an undesirable experience. Location then becomes an indicator of value whether or not the sex worker and experience involved fit that perceived value; for example, Jonah shared a story of ignoring his usual location rules to accidentally find an escort that he'd seen before.

“... oh my god, I think I had a heart attack. The girl I've seen before, she's hiding from her family. Cause her family found out. ... She's had a really fucked up, rough life. She's a smart girl ... she's the kind of girl that I would hang out with. [I said] you know what, you need to get the fuck out of this motel, right.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

In this instance, Jonah offered to pay for a nicer hotel room for her; she complained that several appointments had not shown, and he identified the location as the problem, much to her surprise. Jonah's story showed that he identified a disconnect between her *value* and her *location*, and recommended she remedy this immediately in order to attract and maintain her clientele.

The meaning of an experience that each client develops appears to be shaped, in part, by the location that client visits. When their experience is bad, they reflect that they should have known better, and that their experience was an example of their previous naïveté in the industry; when their experience is good, they consider themselves lucky and that their story is an exception to the rule. In this manner clients reinforce the stigma of specific neighbourhoods within the community of clients. As their own experiences

and the stories of others undermine or reinforce these notions, the location indelibly becomes connected to the meaning of the session, the sex worker, and the industry itself.

Advertisements and Menu Options

Most of the clients interviewed for this study preferred to have a connection and level of intimacy with the sex worker(s) they visit, while the clients who visited sex workers for purely physical reasons were largely attempting to live out a fantasy. Accordingly, clients create complex meanings with the advertisements of escorts as these objects serve as a crucial step in pursuing each new experience.

Advertisements are often the first point of contact between the sex worker and the client and include information such as availability, the etiquette they expect from their clients, price ranges, and menu options. They also may include photographs, physical descriptions, links to reviews, and frequently convey a sense of personality through font, design, and language choices. In essence, the meaning that a client develops for a particular sex worker begins before any actual interaction between the two people occurs; advertisements and their information helps them choose who to see next.

Some clients reported that there was an element of ‘randomness’ or spontaneity to their attraction to specific ads, a ‘gut feeling’ about who would particularly fit their needs at that particular time. For example, when asked what attracted him to specific ads and not others, Justin responded:

“Sometimes, I’ll be looking at [various ad locations on the internet] and, I don’t know, sometimes it’ll just be a picture, of just a sexy outfit, the right

angle, and oh, that one got me! It's just a very random thing.” (Justin, age 39)

Further, these meanings are not only developed through explicit information intentionally shared by the sex worker; many clients analyze the subtext of the available information.

“... basically how they word things, you know. And it's like, oh I promise this and I promise that. Why do you have to promise? You know? Just, discretion's no big thing to me, I'm not cheating.” (Kevin, age 44)

“I usually like it when they have their own website as opposed to just the ad, it shows they're obviously putting a little more into it ... This isn't something, you know, you just showed up and you're going to [school] and you put up an ad 'cause you want to make an extra couple hundred bucks.” (Phil, age 31)

In these cases, Kevin saw that one sex worker explicitly discussed discretion, which he felt was unnecessary and alarming; Phil, on the other hand, analyzes the quality of the advertisement or website and associates motives and characteristics to the sex worker accordingly. Some clients also drew sexual inferences from the advertisements that impacted the meaning of that particular sex worker.

“Gemini's ad, or advertising schedule right on Eros, it has a hundred and sixty-eight thousand views. How many people has she slept with?! You know? ... I think about it, and I'm like, [other prominent escort]'s been doing this again for ten plus years. She isn't... full time, but... yeah. You

kinda limit your risk a little bit. It only takes one time.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

Jonah utilized advertisements to develop a picture of a sex worker’s sexuality and sexual history, such as calculating the number of clients she has likely been with. He was attracted to sex workers who had a ‘limited’ menu, explicitly outlined safe-sex instructions in their advertisements, and sometimes had negative reviews because of it:

“I see that all the time in a review, where they’re like, ‘oh yeah this girl’s got a really limited menu’ ... ‘she wants X amount of dollars and you can’t go down on her?’ And it’s like, that’s the girl I want to see! And you know what, you see her once or twice and that menu thing is... not an issue.”

(Jonah, mid-thirties)

Phil also extrapolated based on menu options. I asked him if there were any options that made him less likely to see a sex worker, and he answered:

“Anyone that focuses on foot fetishes. It’s weird, I hate feet, not just women’s feet, my feet too. Any feet, I don’t really (shudders and laughs) ... usually if there’s a lot of focus on that, I’m like, okay, so you’re maybe going to want to try to get into this.” (Phil, age 31)

Clients use information from advertisements and menu options to inform and develop the meanings they create about the sex workers they see or want to see. The meanings created through information gleaned from advertisements are often not directly addressed by the sex workers during their meeting (such as the true meaning of a foot fetish option, or how many men she has been with). In this manner, information gathered

by the client impacts their perception of the sex workers they choose to see, and those they choose not to, while also impacting their interpretation of that person's future behaviour.

Reviews

The primary purpose of Eros is to serve as a platform to post and view sex worker reviews made by clients. The reviews provide the most straightforward evidence of commodification and objectification as sex workers and their services are analyzed in minute detail. One client recognized this process and was clearly bothered by it:

“I'm not going to get on a board and start saying, she's this, she's that, and everything else, because I think... this is more than just being distasteful. I think it's a description of a commodity and I don't really like that. I think it's very disparaging, and yet, and that's the repugnant part of this.” (Joe, age 38)

Unsurprisingly, as this sample was recruited from Eros, most of the participants in this study identified reviews as a crucial factor involved in choosing an escort to visit. These reviews range from simple, one-sentence affairs to lengthy blow-by-blow descriptions that could be termed 'erotica'. However, most of the popular reviews address practical considerations such as how easy it was to book an appointment, the location (and the associated risk or lack thereof), the service provided by the sex worker, and whether or not they would 'repeat'. During our interview, one particularly analytical client attempted to convey the importance of reviews to me:

“They are the most important thing on the planet. Because ... the process of going through and you start looking at all the girls and you start talking yourself *out* of it, those reviews is what strengthens and justifies your resolve. Oh, should I see her? Oh, it’s too good to be true. Oh, but that was a good review, that was a good review, that was a good review. I feel like I can go there.” (Eric, age 39)

Reviews serve a complex function in the life of a client whether they are immersed in the sex industry daily or monthly. The authors of reviews communicate areas of risk and convenience that need to be assessed when entering a new location, communicating this information to new or prospective clients while also lowering or increasing the perceived risk of the sex worker (or location) being discussed. In addition, as Eric described, the reviews help a client deal with any resistance or trepidation he may feel. The reviews are often incorporated into a client’s perception of who he is going to see (or has already seen), how ‘their’ sex worker is with other clients, and what they should be looking for when deciding if they had a good or bad experience.

Several clients mentioned that they would only review good experiences, while simultaneously assessing a sex worker’s value based on their lack of bad reviews and presence of good ones. In this sense, the review process itself appears to be somewhat constructed; while clients did not report giving any *false* positive reviews, they acknowledged that some women were not allowed to be viewed negatively (due to board politics⁵⁴) and that they did not want to negatively impact a sex worker’s business unless

⁵⁴ Several participants referred to informal rules on Eros that protected specific sex workers from negative reviews. These participants linked the ‘protected’ sex workers to Eros members with administrative

she had done something particularly heinous, such as rob them. The specter of missing negative reviews did not seem to concern the clients interviewed in this study, although many perceived a sex worker *without* reviews to be bad, assuming that no one had anything good to say about them.

The most important portion of the review seems to be the discussion of service, which varies from author to author. Some focus on the general feeling of the session, while others go into explicit, pornographic detail to mixed responses. However, while the *content* of the reviews may vary drastically, the purpose of the reviews to the clients interviewed seemed to address two crucial questions: is she safe, and will we make a connection?

Reviewing intimacy and connection itself is a fascinating and complex topic worthy of its own analysis and is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. The data gathered during this study showed that a connection was the most crucial part of ‘good service’, whether or not the client was intentionally looking for intimacy or not; whether the client was pursuing a “girlfriend experience” or a purely sexual encounter, connections were frequently praised while bad sessions were often described as “robotic” or “mechanical”. Therefore reviews showcasing the attitude of the sex worker (outgoing, friendly, warm) seemed to be particularly valuable compared to strictly physical descriptions⁵⁵.

capabilities who could control the visibility of posts and members’ posting abilities. This is a heated topic of discussion on Eros.

⁵⁵ This shows the value of the emotion work of the escort (see Sanders, 2005) as convincing ‘surface’ or ‘deep’ acting will result in positive reviews, a greater impression of value, and increased income.

Besides reporting on the ‘value’ experienced by the author of each review, reviews seem to serve a cyclical function that can enhance a reader’s sense of that sex worker’s value. Phil associated his lack of bad experiences with his reliance on reviews:

“I haven’t had a bad experience, so I really don’t [write reviews] ... anybody I’ve seen that was a good experience already had a ton of good reviews, so I haven’t had a bad experience yet, thankfully.” (Phil, age 31)

Alexander acknowledged that his ‘worst’ experience did not suit his interest in intimacy and connection, but did not classify it as a ‘nightmare’ session, based on his knowledge of what other clients have experienced:

“Mind you, I haven’t had a *nightmare* experience like some of them ... I only see well-reviewed, well-known ladies from that board. I just had experiences where we just didn’t click, right? It just kinda seemed robotic and... okay. Bad day.” (Alexander, age 44)

Here, Alexander showed that the meaning he created for this session is *relative* – he is not comparing it to a worse experience he himself had but to the knowledge, garnered from other reviews, that it could have been much worse. This is an example of how the reviews themselves can impact interpretation and meaning-making surrounding real-world events, even as these real-world events and their associated meanings are communicated back to the Eros community through new reviews and candid conversations.

The meaning of the sex industry, sex workers in general, specific escorts, and other related objects is evidently impacted by a complex series of assessments, lessons,

discussions, and experiences. Each client interviewed exhibited a unique approach to the sex industry based on their particular needs for risk management, their own sexual appetites and desires, the degree of intimacy being pursued, and a variety of other factors. Surprisingly, all of these complex processes, negotiations, and indicators can be represented by a single object: price.

Meaning-Making: The Object of Two Hundred Dollars

Money is a tangible object which can be translated into fairly objective worth relative to the economy within which it is being discussed. The value of a dollar is technically objective, but the true meaning of the dollar is relative to the person considering and interacting with this object. As previously mentioned, the way that people act toward objects is based on the meaning that the object has for them, and the meaning of money is more than the objective dollar value attributed to that amount.

Various indicators of value discussed in this chapter include location, advertisements, and reviews. As clients assess these values they also take into consideration complex risk assessments based on individual needs such as anonymity, health risks, sexual desires, and financial and social repercussions. Each client develops an awareness of the price range associated with their needs, a price which directly impacts their impression of good value for money. Surprisingly, though, the ideal price was nearly identical: exactly two hundred dollars.

Escorts in this city represent a unique market with its own financial norms that are notably different from other major cities in the area. Therefore, it is not difficult to expect that there will be a relatively stable spectrum of prices and, for the fourteen clients

interviewed, the benchmark for good service at an appropriate price is two hundred dollars⁵⁶. Some clients suggested that the sex workers on Eros self-regulate, and new advertisers who attempt to undercut the competition are dealt with harshly. This keeps the average hourly rate for the average ‘ideal’ sex worker at around two hundred dollars. In this case, these ‘ideal’ sex workers are physically attractive, more than competent at satisfying a client physically and emotionally, work out of a secure, low-risk location, have a classy or attractive advertisement, and are well-reviewed.

Two hundred dollars represents the ideal nexus of value indicators. The actual objective economic value of two hundred dollars *outside* of this industry is largely irrelevant to the meanings that it, as an object, has for clients. One client, Justin, identified a range around two hundred that he targeted:

“... generally, it’s two hundred an hour, and you never go below one-sixty an hour, that’s my rule. ... after my first month or so I kind of started to learn, like, what certain amounts of money get and what other amounts of money get. I kind of stay away from the lower end because it’s a little scary.” (Justin, 39)

Of the remaining thirteen clients, eleven identified two hundred dollars exactly as their target price and the average within the escort industry in this city.

“I would say... the average is around two hundred. If it’s less than that, you tend to worry ... and if it’s more, I find it’s too expensive.” (Joe, age 38)

⁵⁶ Of course, the actual dollar value in this case is arbitrary.

“... there are an awful lot of nice escorts out there at the two hundred dollar an hour mark.” (Jacob, 57)

Robert eloquently explains the relationship between saving money – ‘discount sex’ – decreased service and increased risk.

“...guys that want to save money, they go, ‘oh, I can save twenty bucks seeing her versus seeing her. Save forty versus seeing her’. And, ‘I’ll do it’. Then I always die laughing when they turn around, they bitch and complain, ‘yeah went and saw so-and-so, the price was too good to be true. But when I got there, they just didn’t look anything like her, it was a trashy place’. Well, why are you complaining and bitching? You know, you went because of the price. If you want a better deal, spend the extra forty bucks, see someone that’s established, it’s gonna cost you forty bucks more but you’re not gonna cry and complain that you got screwed over because her pictures were ten to fifteen years old and she doesn’t look as hot or tight as in her pictures. Sorry.” (Robert, 53)

Of the men interviewed for this project, eleven⁵⁷ stayed close to a two hundred dollar per hour sex worker, even if they did not actually pay that rate. Some clients mentioned having a reduced rate due to their status as preferred regulars, but made sure to mention what their sessions are ‘worth’: two hundred dollars and all that the object entails. Two of the remaining clients usually book half hour sessions, making this too

⁵⁷ As mentioned in chapter two these participants represent a wide range of incomes, showing that an adherence to the symbolic object of “two hundred dollars” is not necessarily a reflection on each client’s disposable income.

small to assess a similar meaningful rate for this type of session, while a third usually spent several hundred dollars per session in order to fulfill specific fetish or ‘duo’ fantasies (involving two sex workers).

Discussion

Clients engage with a multitude of factors as they create meaning within the sex industry. The indicators discussed above – location, advertisements, reviews, and price – barely begin to encompass the complexity involved in being a client. Previous research (Lowman & Atchison, 2006; Pitts et al., 2004; Wortley, Fischer & Webster, 2002) has shown various demographics, motivations, and life histories of clients, but future research needs to delve deeper into these meaning-making processes in order to attempt to understand the real experience of being involved in the demand side of sex work. This research requires an in-depth, humane, and respectful approach not often applied to criminalized populations. A symbolic interactionist analytical frame suits this type of research by focusing on the meanings made by clients themselves. In this chapter, I have shown how this project’s data reflected (and did not reflect) modern approaches to commodification, how clients assess the value of their experiences through the use of indicators, and the manner in which these indicators can become cyclical in nature. The final example discussed, the object of ‘two hundred dollars’, is one such unexpected indicator.

Two hundred dollars is an economic benchmark, an internal balance of supply and demand that has resulted in a specific price point; two hundred dollars is also an emotional and sexual benchmark, a symbol that represents a safe, fulfilling, exciting

experience. Two hundred dollars may have a financial representation outside of the sex industry, but within this specific community this object provides security that clients often desire as a counterpoint to the risk they court through many avenues of the sex industry.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The sex industry occupies a murky legal position in Canada, a legal position that may be changing dramatically in the near future but will nonetheless still provide legal and social barriers to face. These lived experiences of clients provide an inside look into what it is actually like to *be* a client, and show that the clients interviewed for this project often lead complex and secretive lives as their sexual, emotional, and romantic interests may be hidden from family and friends. However, the role of the ‘client’ is not the only role – each of the people featured in this thesis also have lives outside of the sex industry.

The data I collected during the course of this project yielded several unique and significant points of analysis. First, physical, sexual, and mental health maintenance emerged as a prevalent and influential motive for many clients. This link is almost entirely absent in existing research on clients⁵⁸, reinforces existing claims from sex workers that frames sex work as a therapeutic or caring profession, and suggests a different framework through which to view clients’ involvement in the sex industry.

In addition, the discussions of motives, client patterns, and authentic bonds led to a reimagining of the common typology of clients. Literature on sex work (focused either on the sex worker or the client) typically describes clients as ‘regulars’ or ‘not regulars’ based on the number of sex workers hired by each client and the length of the relationship

⁵⁸ I found only one such reference in client-orientated research: a Portuguese case study written by a psychiatrist who found that one man suffering from depression frequented sex workers (Gysin & Gysin, 2013).

(or number of sessions). The stories shared by the fourteen participants involved in this study indicated that this dichotomy is not reflective of reality – for these men, their *intentions* are more telling than cold numbers divorced from context, and each client’s definition of a ‘bond’ or close relationship was unique to him. In essence, assuming that a strong bond, connection, or relationship can only develop after a specific amount of time (or number of sessions) is a limited approach that cannot accurately represent the experiences of each client. After analyzing these stories, I identified four ‘types’ of clients that exist in this sample: regulars, regular hummingbirds, searchers, and insiders.

The final unique contribution of this thesis to the literature on clients is featured in the symbolic interactionism analysis in chapter five. While previous research has investigated the economy of sex work in a literal sense, I have shown how these clients construct a symbolic object out of two hundred dollars – a price point which, through a complex series of meaning-making processes, has come to mean much more than two hundred dollars.

A Few Last Words

At the culmination of most interviews I asked the participant what they think people should know about being a client. The answers are telling, and often reveal the social pressure that some of these clients feel as they engage in an activity that is so harshly judged by others. A variety of messages emerged from this question and other conversations on social perceptions of the sex industry; these messages are crucial to impart and examine, and so I will conclude this thesis by sharing the messages of six clients.

Alexander felt that the stigma of the sex industry was due, in part, to a lack of real knowledge about the women who are sex workers, and thought this could possibly be remedied if people are better informed:

“I think they need to know that the majority of women that are providers are people trying to get through. They’re trying to get through school, they’re trying to support their kids, you know. ... They’re just normal people that are doing what they want.” (Alexander, age 44)

Kevin also saw a connection between knowledge and stereotypes; he hoped that his story would help undermine the common stereotype of the “John”, a stereotype he felt was reinforced by a lack of information.

“I think society can be unfair. ... Like there are girls out there that are doing it to support drug habits, and that’s... a lot of the emphasis is on those, you know. The bad part of it. You know, that’s why I share my story. I’m different, I’m not cheating, it’s just, out of respect for girls that I would date, I don’t have the time, so... you know. This is what I do.”
(Kevin, age 44)

When asked if he thought there was anything else that he wanted people to know, Phil responded in a more lighthearted manner:

“We’re not creepy! (Laughs) I mean, some of us are, I’m sure, by all means, but not all of us are just kinda... creepy loners or these guys that are just hideous or cannot act in a social situation. Some people just don’t have the time for a relationship but still wanna have sex.” (Phil, age 31)

Bart took a different approach to answering this question – he imparted some advice on current or prospective clients:

“Just be careful. I mean, it’s very easy to imagine that your fantasy is an actual reality. And you can get caught up in it very very very fast. If you are not, if you’re not strong mentally, you won’t make it. You’ll find yourself on the losing end a lot.” (Bart, age 35)

At one point in our interview, Jonah reflected on the secretive nature of the sex industry:

“...it’s really bizarre how isolated you have to be about your activities. My dad could be seeing providers. My brother could be. My best friend. We wouldn’t say a word to you. You wouldn’t know. And that’s really strange.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

Alexander mentioned this secretive nature as well, and he was vocal about the shaming practices that surround men who are caught soliciting sex:

“If you get caught with a sex trade worker, you’re done. We’re gonna tell everybody you know. We’re gonna tell your mom. It’s absolutely insane. It’s wrong. It really is.” (Alexander, age 44)

Finally, Jonah would like you, the reader, to know who clients really are:

“They’re your brother. They’re your father. They’re your son. ... Don’t think we’re crazy social deviants. But that’s kind of the category we’re put in, and they say, it ends up pushing some of us *into* those sort of deviant areas where most of us don’t want to be.” (Jonah, mid-thirties)

These various messages show the extent to which being a client can impact a person's life as well as his perception of the outside world; these messages also convey to people who are not clients what these men wish people knew about them. They are motivated by sexual, mental, and emotional drives, urges, and desires, just like people who are not clients; they experience thrill and heartbreak within the sex industry as many outside of it will also experience in their lifetime. These messages refer to stigma and shaming, the notion of reality, mental health, relationships and intimacy, the stereotype of the sex worker, and the experience of keeping secrets – and they reflect the humanity of sex workers and their clients.

Current representations of clients in academic research do not encompass the entire reality of clients' lived experiences. The crucial emerging themes discussed in this thesis make significant contributions to the existing literature on clients. Even so, I have barely begun to unpack the rich data garnered from fourteen one-on-one interviews, the stories emailed and private messaged to me by clients too afraid or unable to meet in person, the complexities present on Eros itself and the enlightening conversations I have had with women who advertise sexual services on the board. As clients remain a focus of legal scrutiny in Canada it is important to have *accurate* and complete knowledge of the full spectrum of potential and real client experiences. The sex industry generally – and Eros specifically – represents a world that is frequently targeted and stigmatized in the law and in the media, but it is also a world rich with human experiences. Evidently, we must make great strides in sex work research before criminal justice policy can be adequately informed by the reality of sex workers' clients in Canada.

Appendix A: Original Interview Schedule

1. Demographics: Age, level of schooling, occupation, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, children?
2. When did you first decide to hire a sex worker? Tell me about how you made that decision.
3. How did you know how to go about hiring a sex worker for the first time?
4. What happened the first time you hired a sex worker?
5. How did you know what to do?
6. Do you know/spend time with other people who you know hire sex workers?
 - a. If yes: Do you discuss it?
7. Who in your life knows that you have hired a sex worker?
 - a. (If anyone) How did they find out?
 - i. (If anyone) How did you choose which people to tell?
 - ii. How did they react?
 - iii. Have you been 'caught' unintentionally before?
 - iv. How do you feel about this?
8. Who in your life doesn't know that you see (a) sex worker(s)?
 - a. Why?
 - b. How do you think they would react?
9. How frequently do you think that you do ____? (Whatever their involvement is)
10. Do you consider this a large part of your life?
 - a. If yes: What else is a large part of your life?
 - b. If no: What would you consider a large part of your life?
11. What are some other hobbies you have?
12. Do you think other people in your life see sex trade workers?
 - a. If yes: How do you feel about that?
 - b. If no: Why do you think they don't?
13. Do you consider visiting sex workers illegal?
 - a. Which parts?
14. Have you ever been worried about legal repercussions of your hobby?
 - a. If yes: How do you deal with this?
15. Have you ever been arrested for your involvement in the sex trade?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. How did you feel you were treated by the police officer(s) involved? Lawyers? Court system?
 - c. Have you participated in a charge diversion program (i.e. "John School")?
 - i. If yes: Can you tell me about that experience?
 - ii. If no: Do you know about charge diversion programs?
 1. If yes: How do you feel about them?
 2. If no: (Describe) How do you feel about that?
16. Have you ever contacted a community of clients of sex trade workers (change wording to fit how they describe their activity)?
 - a. If yes: What sort of community?
 - i. Did you gain entrance?
 1. If yes: How?
 2. If no: Why not?

- ii. How do you feel about talking to other people who are involved in the sex trade?
 - iii. Do you make friends in that community?
 - iv. Does it impact your involvement in the sex trade?
 - 1. If yes: How?
 - v. Do you feel that you are accepted among other people who are involved in the sex trade?
17. Have you ever traveled to another country for the purposes of sex?
18. How do you think the media represents people who buy sex?
- a. Do you think this is accurate?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - b. Do you have any examples?
 - c. How do you feel about this?
19. Is there anything about your experiences that you wish people knew more about?
- a. If yes: Can you explain that to me?

Note: This interview scheduled was intended as a guideline and not a verbatim example of how questions would be worded and asked.

Appendix B: Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board Approval

August 09, 2012

Dear Zoey,

REB # 3300

Project, "Purchasing sex and negotiating morality: An exploratory study of sex industry clients and stigma"

Expiry Date: August 01, 2013

The Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed the above proposal and determined that the proposal is ethically sound. If the research plan and methods should change in a way that may bring into question the project's adherence to acceptable ethical norms, please submit a "Request for Ethics Clearance of a Revision or Modification" form for approval before the changes are put into place. This form can also be used to extend protocols past their expiry date, except in cases where the project is more than four years old. Those projects require a new REB application.

Please note that you are responsible for obtaining any further approvals that might be required to complete your project.

If any participants in your research project have a negative experience (either physical, psychological or emotional) you are required to submit an "Adverse Events Form" to the Research Office within 24 hours of the event.

According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must complete the "Annual/Final Progress Report on Human Research Projects" form annually and upon completion of your project. All forms, policies and procedures are available on the Research Office website at <http://www.wlu.ca/research>.

All the best for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Basso, PhD

Chair, University Research Ethics Board

Appendix C: Informed Consent Statement

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

for expedited and full review studies

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Purchasing Sex and Negotiating Morality: An Exploratory Study of Sex Industry Clients and Stigma

Zoey Jones (principal investigator) and Dr. Stacey Hannem (thesis advisor)

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of the clients of sex trade workers. This study is being conducted by Zoey Jones in partial fulfillment of her Master's in Criminology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

INFORMATION

Involvement in this study will consist of a single interview. Communication following this interview will share the progress of the project, if so desired by the participant. Follow-up questions may be asked, but involvement in follow-up questions is strictly voluntary and not required for participation in this study.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher (Zoey) is interested in whether or not persons who purchase sex feel stigmatized by society and, if so, how this stigma is negotiated and managed. Questions will focus on your experiences purchasing sex, stigma management, sharing experiences with friends and family, to what degree you feel invested in purchasing sex, and if you have dealt with the legal ramifications of purchasing sex. The researcher will also ask several questions surrounding your general life along with experiences purchasing sex in an effort to contextualize your responses. The interview questions are semi-structured and open-ended, and discussions may move away from this general frame if both interviewer and interviewee are amenable.

This information is sought in an effort to contribute to existing literature that seeks to normalize and destigmatize the purchasing of sex. In addition, first-hand qualitative accounts of persons who purchase sex are rare, as most research tends to focus on the experiences of prostitutes, rather than their clients. As the sex trade could not exist without clients, it is evident that first-

hand accounts of people who purchase sex will prove a vital step toward understanding the sex trade as a whole in Canada.

Participants will consist of individuals who have had some experience being the client of a sex worker.

Interviews will last one to two hours. The project will reach completion by August of 2013.

10-20 participants will be involved in this study.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. This is to ensure accuracy when referring to personal stories, details, and potential quotes. If you would not like your interview to be recorded, please check "no" in the appropriate box on page 2 of this form. Digital voice files will be kept for on a password-protected laptop and password-protected external hard-drive until it is no longer required for consultation and verification, after which they will be deleted. If you decide to withdraw from the project and do not wish for your information to be used in the final report, the digital voice files will be deleted immediately. No one besides this researcher and her supervisor, Dr. Stacey Hannem, will have access to voice files or transcripts. The audio voice files will not be used for any additional purposes without your permission. Consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet until the data is no longer being used for consultation or verification.

RISKS

There are no physical risks involved in this study.

There are minimal social risks associated with this project. The identification of participant answers within the final report by individuals who are aware of the participant's involvement will be mitigated with pseudonyms, interview numbers, generalizations (such as age ranges rather than specific ages) and by altering unique or identifying details in the transcripts. Anonymity may be difficult to guarantee due to the identifying nature of specific stories; however, every effort will be made to minimize this risk.

BENEFITS

Individual benefits involved in participating in this study include the opportunity to discuss your life experiences in a confidential and private environment. Your contribution to this research is important; combined with the experiences of others, this research aims to improve social understanding of the sex trade and the individuals involved in sexual commerce.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality will be ensured by the use of pseudonyms and interview numbers as opposed to the true name of the participant on the digital voice recorder and written transcripts.

Additionally, identifying characteristics of location and job specifics will be kept from the final report or the view of any person besides the researcher. Only the researcher and supervising professor have access to data (voice files, confidentiality forms, transcriptions, etc.). The data will be kept on a password-protected laptop (electronically) and in a locked desk drawer where physical data is concerned. Confidentiality of records will be maintained completely.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Zoey Jones, at jone9890@mylaurier.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (#3300). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The research results may be published and distributed in any of the following ways: thesis, conference presentations, journal articles or book chapters, or workshops. Participants will be offered the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and alter or remove responses. If you would like to review your transcript, please provide me with a confidential way to contact you once the interview has been transcribed. Any information that the participant would like to exclude from the final report or subsequent distributions will be excluded. Participants can obtain a copy of any publications by contacting the researcher at the email address listed above. Digital copies can be emailed, or a physical copy can be mailed if that is the preference of the participant. The initial final report will be available to participants as of September 30th, 2013.

CONSENT

Consent and Privacy Options	Yes	No
I agree to the interview being recorded with a digital voice recorder		
I agree to anonymous, direct quotations from the interview being used in the final report		

I agree to allow follow-up contact by the researcher for clarification purposes.		
--	--	--

I have read and understand the above information about a study being conducted by Zoey Jones of Wilfrid Laurier University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

If you wish to receive copies of research results or publications, please email jone9890@mylaurier.ca or shannem@wlu.ca.

Participant's signature _____ Date

Secure Contact Information (optional)

Investigator's signature _____ Date

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