

Escorts.co.uk: An Examination of Four Distinctive Online Escort Markets



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Declaration of Authorship

I, Kristofor Oscar Burghart hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

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ABSTRACT

The first aim of this doctoral research is to analyse online escort advertisements posted by sex workers, in order to provide an understanding of what is 'on sale' to the client. The second aim is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of selling sexual services via the Internet. The extent to which escort services are increasingly divided along class-structured gender lines is also considered. The final aim is to examine escorts' perspectives on the risk associated with online escorting, and the risk avoidance strategies employed.

This research draws on Bourdieu's theory of social distinction and capital alongside Hakim's model of 'erotic capital'. Reference is also made to Giddens' perspective on 'intimacy' and Bernstein's 'bounded authenticity' with respect to the relationship between the escort and client. The theory of a risk society is useful here as it provides an insight into how the idea of risk influences our everyday perspectives as well as the policymaking process.

The study concerns four distinctive independent online escorts markets - male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian. A discourse analysis was conducted on ten online advertisements from each escort sample in order to analyse how different online escorts advertise their sexual services. Twenty-seven separate semi-structured interviews were conducted with online escorts in order to understand their experiences of selling sexual services and to examine the risk avoidance strategies they employed.

The research revealed that discourses relating to social class were not an essential theme within the advertisements, but were an important background factor. Instead the emphasis was on the selling of intimacy and companionship, particularly when marketing to female clients. The study draws attention to the impact of the Internet in allowing these escorts a virtual space to advertise their services to the wider population, and in particular to female clients. Most escorts did not outwardly conceptualise themselves as at risk of client violence in the course of their work. Indeed, the accounts given by female to male and male to male escorts suggest that they hold a sophisticated level of control over the client encounter.

INTRODUCTION

Very little is known about online prostitution services and markets, since most of the criminological and sociological literature on this topic focuses on illegality, deviance and discourses of female street prostitution (Zatz, 1997; O’Leary and Howard, 2001; Weitzer, 2005; Levitt and Vankatesh, 2007; Hubbard, Matthews and Scoular, 2008). This empirically-based thesis demonstrates that previous criminological and sociological analyses of prostitution in England and Wales have continuously overlooked the male heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort markets, subsections of the sex industry that are experiencing significant growth (Sharpe and Earle, 2005; Levitt and Vankatesh, 2007; Cunningham and Kedall, 2009; Weitzer, 2010)¹. The rise of online escort solicitation services and advertisement websites has further augmented prostitution markets both online and offline, with these increasingly organised along class-structured gender lines, catering for different clients’ sexualities and specific sexual desires (Bernstein, 2007; Cunningham and Kendall, 2009). In order to overcome some of the deep-rooted myths about prostitution, this thesis critiques these from a criminological and sociological standpoint, by devoting attention to the vocational aspects of the online escort market, rather than its illegality and deviance.

One of the central aims of this thesis was to explore perceptions of risk amongst online escort workers, as well as the strategies they use to manage the risks associated with selling sexual services. However, I became increasingly interested in the wider culture of selling adult escort sexual services, and in particular the ways in which online escorts represent and capitalise upon their own sexuality through online advertisements, whilst also appealing to the sexual and erotic desires of a range of client groups. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of how escort services were sold via the Internet, and the ways in which escorts perceive and manage risks associated with selling sex online, this thesis incorporates a discourse analysis of online advertisements, as well as a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with escorts. Therefore it was based upon the following research questions:

¹This study uses the term ‘escorts’. Many escorts, or ‘call girls’, are middle class men and women who arrange appointments by advertising in the telephone book, online, through local classified ads, and via other media. Despite a number of male and female escorts advertising their availability for dinners and dates online, the term ‘escort’ is commonly a front for indoor prostitution (Weitzer, 2005; Castle and Lee, 2008; Young, 2009).

1. What are the dominant discourses used in escorts' online advertisements, particularly as they relate to sexuality, gender and social class?
2. What role does the Internet play in online escorts' working lives?
3. Do online escorts use risk avoidance strategies, and are these strategies specific to each of the distinctive online escort samples?
4. Are there any differences in the perception of risk between the different distinctive online escort markets, as defined by the gender, sexuality and social class of their clientele?

Therefore understanding how and why male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort markets differ in terms of online advertising, risk avoidance strategies, and perception of risk was a central aim of this thesis.

In order to gain a greater understanding of the dominant discourses found in online advertisements, discourse analysis was used to examine male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escorts' advertisements. The aim of this strand of the analysis was to examine the language and images used within advertisements for escort services, and to explore their role in defining and sustaining the relationship between escort and client. Central to the analysis was an examination of the understanding between the escort and the customer of their individual roles, and the ways in which the language displayed within the advertisement upheld this relationship, with regard to the gender, sexuality and social status of each party.

Despite widespread academic acknowledgment of the expansion of the online escort market, to date very little research has examined the views and experiences of online escorts (Cheung, 2012; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012). Therefore, a secondary aim of this research was to investigate how the Internet has impacted on the lived experiences and working lives of escorts. Twenty-seven qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escorts, in order to collect detailed information about working practices unobtainable through quantitative research methods.

In addition, with the aim of examining risk avoidance strategies, the qualitative semi-structured interviews explored whether online escorts constructed a continuum of risk,

prioritising certain types of dangers depending on the gender and sexuality of the client. I emphasised the gender and sexual orientation of the encounter in order to understand the ways in which men and women involved in sex work conceptualise, manage and respond to risk. Collected data was then analysed to examine the self-regulatory practices of each distinctive group within the sample, to evaluate if the conceptualised risks faced by online escorts were dependent upon the gender identities of workers and the gender and sexual orientation of the customer. In focusing on men's and women's own accounts of work-related risks, risky behaviour and coping strategies, this part of the research investigated online escorts' reflections on sex work, and the occupational risk involved in selling sex via the Internet.

Interviewees were invited to discuss aspects of self-regulation and their perception of the risks involved in Internet escorting, as well as how important these may be in relation to the performance of their work. This allowed for an explanation of the key risks involved in participation in sex work, and the perception of risk relevant to the gender and sexuality of the client, whilst also being able to ask further questions about these and related issues. The interview schedule consisted of a number of questions focusing on the role of the Internet in online escorts' working lives, whether online escorts used risk avoidance strategies, and whether these strategies were specific to each of the distinctive online escort samples, through inviting interviewees to provide their personal accounts. By using open-ended questions I hoped to allow for unanticipated responses, thus adding to the flexibility and sensitivity of the research process. This research will therefore help to determine the degree to which a sex worker's gender and the sexuality of their client shape how they experience their work, as well as whether the gender and sexual orientation makeup of an escort's services predisposes them to risk. The findings section addresses the theoretical question of whether Internet escorting shares any 'fundamental' or 'essential' qualities irrespective of the gender and sexuality of both the sex worker and client, or whether it differs according to the actors involved (Weitzer, 2007), thus further narrowing the gaps in the literature.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the first chapter consists of a literature review exploring the differences between online and offline prostitution markets, followed by a brief outline of relevant legislation. The review then goes on to analyse the Internet

technologies used by sex workers to facilitate online prostitution, and the effects of this on the self-regulatory practices of structures, in relation to the gender and sexual orientation covered by each of the distinctive market types. The chapter frames the theoretical debate in relation to prostitution and distinctive online escort markets. It then explores a variety of UK and international studies that have evaluated the effect of online escort advertising, and in particular how the Internet has transformed the relationships between workers within distinctive online escort markets and their clients.

Chapter Two outlines the research methodology used to collect the qualitative data, whilst evaluating and assessing the methodological approach with respect to the research questions and aims.

Chapters Three, Four and Five present the findings of this study. Chapter Three presents some of the discourse identified within the distinctive online escort advertisements. The chapter discusses the key themes identified within the analysis and relates them back to the original research aims. Chapter Four outlines the findings from the semi-structured interviews, focusing on the identification of key themes that emerged from the accounts given by escorts in the interviews. This leads into discussion about how the commodification of intimate relations was understood and experienced by escorts, and how developments in online media and communication have impacted on their lived experiences of escorting. Additionally the discussion considers the extent to which escort services were increasingly based along class-structured gender lines that cater to different clients' sexualities and within which specific sexual desires were considered. Chapter Five seeks to understand the ways in which men and women involved in sex work conceptualise, manage and respond to risk. This is followed by a discussion of key themes relating to the perception of risk, highlighting the risk and harm reduction strategies employed by workers within each of the distinctive online markets. In focusing on men's and women's own accounts of work-related risks, risky behaviour and coping strategies, this chapter examines online escorts' understandings of sex work and their sense of occupational risk.

Chapter Six consists of a final discussion, having drawn all the findings together, and returns to the research aims and questions set out in the Introduction to this thesis. The

chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, looking at how the escort trade should be further examined to provide a clearer insight into the escort market within different social contexts.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

In order to establish a context for discussion, the present chapter begins with a broad overview of previous and current legislative and theoretical approaches to prostitution markets, within the United Kingdom, establishing an association between sex and risk in the existing literature. The chapter also acknowledges existing gaps in the literature around understanding of online escorting and the lived experience of workers, as well as its related risks, an area which has received relatively little attention to date. The overall aim of this research is to attempt to fill this void.

1.1. Prostitution: the legislative context

Legislative approaches to prostitution to date have continuously overlooked the significant online heterosexual, gay and lesbian escort markets; this despite the fact that there has been a significant growth in the selling of online sexual services. For example, Alexa.com has ranked punternet.com, a popular heterosexual solicitation website, as the 1,295th most popular website in the United Kingdom. Based on Internet averages Alexa.com claimed that punternet.com is visited more frequently by males who are in the age range 45-54, have no children, received some college education and browse this site from home (Alexa.com, 2011). In addition, Punternet.com has claimed that since it first went online in 1999, 108,228 Field Reports (a review of the escort given by the client) have been published and £13,892,821 spent on the services of escorts who advertise on the website (punternet.com, 2011). These figures alone, from one independent escort advertisement site, can only begin to highlight the significant growth of and demand for online prostitution services.

The introductory section of this chapter provides an overview of previous and current legislative and policy approaches implemented within England and Wales in order both to protect and to sanction those involved in prostitution. The discussion illustrates how aspects of 'indoor', and more specifically 'online', escorting have been ignored in social policy and legislative responses to prostitution in England and Wales.

As has been well-documented, selling sex is not illegal under English, Welsh and Scottish law; instead the law has focused on regulating specific ‘nuisances’ associated with selling sex, including soliciting and running a brothel. Some argue that the control of prostitution dates back to the medieval period (Hubbard et al., 2008), but the origins of current approaches emerged in post-industrial society. One of the first major reviews of prostitution policy in the UK was *The Wolfenden Report* in 1957. This report set out to ensure that the law reinforced morality, with this perspective encouraging “a more systematic policing of the public sphere, with the objective of removing visible manifestations of prostitution in urban areas” (Mathews, 1986: 188–9). The Wolfenden committee argued that criminal law should only intervene when prostitution was seen to directly affect the public. Thus, female street-based sex work and the visibility of those women, was perceived to be far more ‘offensive’ than a sex worker working out of sight (Ashford, 2008). What is also important to note is that during this period the Wolfenden committee neglected to consider both gay and heterosexual male prostitution.

Several decades later the public debate on prostitution was still concerned with the visibility of prostitution, and during the 1980s these debates came to be dominated by the issue of kerb-crawling. Whilst the act of buying sex was not illegal *per se*, the first piece of legislation prohibiting the purchasing of sex, known as ‘kerb-crawling’, was introduced through the Sexual Offences Act (1985). This was introduced as a public nuisance offence, which later became an arrestable offence through the Criminal Justice and Police Act (2001) (Ashford, 2008).

Since the Wolfenden report (1957) the range of criminal legislation relating to the regulation of prostitution has been added to and now includes thirty laws and statutes (Ashford, 2008). The Criminal Justice and Police Act (2001) also added new powers to criminalise the advertising of sex work in public places; however this only took into account the placement of advertising cards in public telephone boxes, not on the Internet. One of the most significant changes in the control of prostitution in the last decade came under the introduction of Schedule 1 of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), which, for the first time, saw prostitution as something in which both genders are engaged. Until the introduction of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), the legal context

of prostitution had been regarded as an activity performed solely by women, and as a street-based practice.

In 2003 a further review of prostitution policy by then Home Secretary David Blunkett called for a 'new' moral framework in order to protect communities, women and children from 'commercial sexual exploitation' (Home Office, 2003). This led to publication of the consultation paper 'Paying the Price' (2004), which aimed to tackle prostitution by placing a key emphasis on the importance of prevention and early intervention in order to prevent children and young people entering prostitution. The focus of this paper was tackling off-street prostitution and targeting commercial sexual exploitation (Home Office, 2004). This was followed by the subsequent paper strategy 'A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy' (2006) (ACPS), which informed the notion that prostitution was not a tolerable form of behaviour (Home Office, 2006), with the focus being on men as the abusers of women and children involved in the sex trade (Gaffney, 2007).

The street-based conception of prostitution, advanced in the Wolfenden report, was thereby still reflected fifty years later in the government consultation papers 'Paying the Price' (2004) and ACPS (2006). This social policy agenda focus, as summarised above, has historically focused on the extreme end of exploitation within prostitution markets, and the visible effects it has on communities. Ashford (2008) argued that both the 'Paying the Price' and 'ACPS' documents were 'unclear' and 'contradictory' due to their dominant focus on street prostitution markets. As Ashford (2008) has noted, the seventy-five page 'Paying the Price' policy report failed to acknowledge any online prostitution markets; instead the document focused on the harms and legislative policies surrounding street prostitution (Ashford, 2008). Regardless of this narrow focus, as Phoenix and Oerton (2005: 77) have noted, both documents represent a "significant change in the official understanding of prostitution in England and Wales". Prostitution was now viewed as a problem in need of intervention rather than a problem that society should tolerate (Phoenix and Oerton, 2005).

Several years later the government launched a six-month review, 'Tackling the Demand' (2008), in England and Wales, to explore what action could be taken by Government and statutory agencies to reduce demand for commercial sexual services

(Home Office, 2008). The review led to the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act (2009), Section 14, which was introduced to amend the Sexual Offences Act (2003) by adding a new section, 53A. S.14 of the Policing and Crime Act (2009), criminalised for the first time in England and Wales, paying for the services of a prostitute who has been coerced into providing sexual services (Home Office, 2009).

The new offence is one of 'strict liability', making it irrelevant whether the person concerned had any intention to offend or knew that the sex worker was coerced into performing the sexual act (Kingston and Thomas, 2014). The argument for a 'strict liability' offence was that any knowledge of the exploitation would render a conviction too difficult to achieve (Home Office, 2008). The use of 'strict liability' therefore allows for the conviction of the buyer whether assessed 'subjectively' or 'objectively', arguably going against a fundamental aspect of the criminal law, namely the principle of 'fault' (Archard, 2008: 157). Although not specifically stated within the act, S.14 is aimed at trafficking and the victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, with the intention of reducing the demand for prostitution, which is seen to be 'fuelling' sex trafficking (Kingston and Thomas, 2014).

This approach closely followed the Swedish model of dealing with the demand side of prostitution (Home Office, 2008), by selectively criminalising by S.14 if the person selling the sexual service had been the subject of coercion. The act was consequently implemented in order to address international obligations relating to trafficking, in particular the council of European Conventions on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2005, and accordingly represents the most recent and radical legislative representation of neo-abolitionism (see also Carline, 2010). The neo-abolitionist approach towards 'tackling the demand' considers prostitution as inherently oppressive and seeks to tackle the dynamics of supply and demand by criminalising the 'buyers' and offering support to the sellers who are seen as the victims. In Sweden, the purchase of sexual services has been criminalised regardless of the market context or whether the sex worker was coerced into performing the sexual act through the Swedish Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services Act (1999). This type of control of prostitution through the use of policy is increasingly being mirrored across different European parliaments, in Norway and Iceland and, to

some extent, by France and Finland (Sanders and Campbell, 2014; Scoular and Carline, 2014).

These changes represent a radical shift in policy, one that now views male buyers of sexual services as the subject of pathologising definitions which were previously endured by female sellers of sexual services. Within this framework, men who buy sex are constructed as incapable of displaying ethical behaviour and women involved in prostitution are criminalised for their own good and protection (Scoular and Carline, 2014).

The Policing and Crime Act (2009) not only aims to reduce the demand and supply of sexual services, by increasing criminal interventions against clients paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subject to exploitation (S.14), but it also introduced Engagement and Support orders (ESO) in England and Wales, alongside the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), to rehabilitate those convicted of soliciting in public places, in lieu of a fine (Home Office, 2009). An ESO requires the offender to attend three compulsory probation meetings with an 'appropriate person', during which they must 'address the causes' of the individual offending, which led to the offence and find ways for the individual to exit sex work in the future. If the order is breached by the individual then he/she may have it revoked, is subject to resentencing by the magistrate, and could face the possibility of a fine.

Unlike the Swedish model, in the UK little emphasis has been placed on supporting sex workers to exit prostitution. Instead, the Criminal Justice System has introduced a zero tolerance policy towards street based sex markets (Scoular and Carline, 2014). Consequently, any attempt to address what may be harmful in prostitution is ultimately and inevitably distorted by the neo-abolitionist approach to sex work which universalises a gendered paradigm, simplifying the causes of inequality and relying on criminal law to reduce the demand and supply of commercial sex, thereby potentially creating more harm (Scoular and Carline, 2014). Arguably, the legislative context of sex work continues to be centred on the discourses and health concerns surrounding female prostitution, which is considered to be inherently violent and exploitative, with the role of the law seen as being to restrict and reduce the supply and demand.

For more than four decades the response to prostitution has remained unchanged within the legislative context of England and Wales, following the introduction of the Wolfenden Report (1957). Aspects of the law were updated in the Sexual Offences Act (2003). However, during this period there was a government push for a distinctive and comprehensive review of domestic prostitution policy (Home Office, 2000: 117). Despite the reform process paving the way for the adoption of provisions founded on the understanding of sex work as a form of work, the focus is nonetheless grounded in the realm of sexual offences, and throughout a neo-abolitionist policy perspective on prostitution became increasingly influential (Home Office, 2004, 2006). The phrase ‘commercial exploitation’ has been propagated throughout the new policy documents, and as a result has now been deployed, in effect, as a synonym for prostitution (Scouler and Carline, 2014). To date, the strict liability offence (S.14) is rarely enforced (Kingston and Thomas, 2014). As a result, the structural causes of exploitation have been ignored, which leaves very little enticement for clients to report cases of abuse or poor conditions in which they visited sex workers. Criminalisation will not eradicate a market, but will simply create and sustain a further underground market, further placing sex workers at risk (Levy and Jacobsson, 2014). Policy reviews of prostitution in England and Wales between 1997 and 2010 have been centred around abolitionist rhetoric and supported by empirical analysis which has positioned prostitution as violence against women (Home Office, 2004, 2006, 2008).

The amount of scholarly attention paid to the public aspects of outdoor prostitution has amounted therefore to a distorted and unrealistic picture of prostitution, when we consider that the majority of sex workers (70-90%) in the UK operate within the indoor market (O’Leary and Howard, 2001, cited in Weitzer, 2004: 214). To date the focus on heteronormative sexual relationships within prostitution legislation has created a gender bias in public policy, resulting in limited study of the male heterosexual, gay and lesbian markets (Weitzer, 2005). In the UK context current legislative approaches to prostitution, as discussed above, have arguably failed to consider market types, and, moreover, the gender and sexuality of both worker and client, reflected in who is included in the policy decision-making processes (Weitzer, 2007). The failure to document the diversity of the sex industry and the diversity of sex workers’ experiences has further added to this distorted view of prostitution (UK Network of Sex Work Projects, 2005: 77; Weitzer, 2010).

Policy developments over the last several decades have been fuelled by neo-abolitionist research agendas which have neglected to understand the lived experiences of both male and female sex workers, whose voices have been subsequently side-lined (see Sanders and Campbell, 2007). What is most striking about recent radical reforms to the prostitution agenda, as Pitchers and Wijers (2014) note, is that sex workers were not consulted, and alternative approaches were rejected without discussion. Consequently, radical reforms were informed by a narrow research platform and based on the experiences of researchers' working in the field of women and violence (see, for example, Hester and Westmarland, 2004). Prostitution markets and services that utilise the Internet as a method of solicitation are yet another example, with the ever-growing Internet presence only serving to further commercialise prostitution services (Ashford, 2008). This research therefore focuses on these neglected elements of the escort industry, which will be returned to in the concluding discussion, where the implications of the research findings for policy and government strategies concerning prostitution will be considered.

1.2. Criminological approaches to prostitution

As Weitzer (2009) has pointed out there were two core criminological theoretical perspectives which dominated the literature on prostitution: the oppression paradigm and the empowerment paradigm, which were diametrically contrasting models founded on very different suppositions. The issue of gender and oppression was a central debate within prostitution; however its relevance to individual sex markets was distorted at times. This section of the literature review analyses some of the claims made by those who embrace either the oppression or the empowerment model, as well as identifying some of the legal and policy implications of these paradigms.

Radical feminists such as Barry (1995), Jeffreys (1997), and Farely and Kelly (2000) argued that prostitution had come to signify the social, sexual, and economic dominance of men over women. Within this context female sex workers, which included pornography workers and exotic dancers, were seen as the victims of the social structures of a patriarchal society. Men who purchased the services of a sex worker experienced a sense of power over women by objectifying the female body as

a commodity (Barry, 1995; Jeffreys, 1997). Radical feminists argued that prostitution was strictly a women's issue and was inherently exploitative, thereby denying sex workers any free will or agency (Agresti, 2009). The radical feminist argument, however, was founded on the perspective that violence, exploitation and gender domination were embedded in prostitution, and that it could never be controlled in a way that would safeguard the physical and mental wellbeing of the worker (Weitzer, 2005).

Weitzer (2005) has critiqued such bold statements, arguing that radical feminists who adopted the oppression paradigm misrepresented our understanding of sex work. Like the social policy responses to prostitution in England and Wales, radical feminists had presumed that all women involved in prostitution were oppressed. Yet, as Letherby and Marchbank (2003: 68) have noted, "oppression and exploitation are not unproblematic concepts, and it is too simplistic to argue that women are inevitably oppressed and men the inevitable oppressors". Rubin (1993: 36) also previously argued that radical feminist literature on prostitution was compiled of "sloppy definitions, unsupported assertions and outlandish claims". Radical feminist accounts were also frequently based on the worst case scenarios of prostitution, and were often too generalised, failing to specify the market type. As Bernstein noted, the terms 'sex work', 'sex industry,' 'prostitution,' and 'pornography' were used in a decontextualised fashion, ignoring important differences within each category (2001: 397). In particular, over-generalisations were evident in analytical writings, and additionally found in many empirical studies (Monto, 2004: 164). As Weitzer (2005) argued, scholars often failed to specify the subgroup upon which their research was based, and instead referred to 'prostitutes' or 'sex workers', when their research was restricted to a sample of street workers from a particular demographic (see, for example, McKeaney and Barnard, 1996: 3; Chapkis, 1997: 23-25).

For Sanders (2005: 336) feminist accounts were theoretically and methodologically flawed in their approach, as they continuously failed to consider the 'informal', 'self-regulatory nature' of sex work, in turn undermining the idea that there were 'levels of organisation'. The focus on heteronormative sexual relationships within prostitution related research was also problematic as it created a gender bias that influenced public policy, thus resulting in limited study of Internet prostitution services, a subsection of

the sex industry that was undergoing dramatic growth (Wiegman, 2006: 45; Agresti, 2009). Also, most of the empirical literature on the sex industry failed to consider gay and female clients; rather it focused on male customers who were described as ‘prostitute users’, and on pimps, and condemned all male involvement in sex work as ‘exploitation and abuse’ of ‘prostituted women’ (Hughes, 2004: 12). Male heterosexual, gay and lesbian sex workers were “considered merely an unusual aberration, more often ignored altogether” (Prestage, 1990: 213).

At the opposite end of the spectrum to radical feminism was the empowerment paradigm, which drew attention to the ways in which the sexual exchange constituted a form of work, thus potentially empowering the sex workers (Chapkis, 1997). Postmodern empowerment paradigms opposed the embedded notions of appropriate female behaviour, campaigning to counter the legal limitations placed upon sex workers’ ‘deviant’ identities. The empowerment paradigm argued that certain types of sex work could enhance an individual’s socioeconomic status, whilst also providing better working conditions than many traditional jobs (Weitzer, 2009). Empowerment theorists had a propensity to argue that sex work could be liberating, lucrative, or self-esteem enhancing, but at the same time neglected to consider those sex workers who had been subjected to negative experiences whilst working within the sex industry (Weitzer, 2009).

Both the oppression and empowerment paradigms portrayed a one-dimensional approach to prostitution markets and services, despite both analysing sex work. As Weitzer (2009) noted there was insufficient evidence to suggest that prostitution could be reduced to one or the other. Thus Weitzer (2009) provided us with an alternative perspective, which he referred to as the ‘polymorphous paradigm’, based upon a collection of occupational arrangements, power relations and workers’ experiences, in relation to self-agency, objectification and victimisation. Weitzer (2009) also argued that aspects of victimisation, exploitation and choice should be treated as variables which differ according to the sex market being worked within, geographical locations, and other structural conditions. The polymorphous paradigm approach was far more sensitive to the complexities and structural conditions that shaped the irregular distribution of agency and job gratification (Chapkis, 2000; Weitzer, 2009). As Brush (2012) argued, Weitzer’s (2010) polymorphous approach to sex markets has provided

us with an innovative way of researching sex work, whilst also presenting an ethical model of a particular sex market that was ethical. The polymorphic approach to prostitution markets has formed the foundation of this research study, and as a result I offer here an in-depth account of specific online prostitution markets. The polymorphous approach has also helped to guide this research study in examining the vocational aspects of online escorting, broadening the focus beyond simplistic ideas about escorts being either oppressed or empowered.

1.3. Assessing the risks of online and street prostitution

There are a number of significant differences between the online escort market and other types of sex work and market types – specifically, indoor and outdoor prostitution services. While there was good reason to study female street prostitution, it was equally important to pay particular attention to how and why it differed in many ways from other types of indoor sex work. As Weitzer (2004: 4) argued “when it comes to prostitution, the most serious blunder is that of equating all prostitution with street prostitution, ignoring entirely the indoor market”. This research therefore focuses on the significant growth in prostitution services on the Internet, specifically in the form of Internet escorts and their use of online advertising (Lane, 2000; Sharpe and Earle, 2003; Quinn and Forsyth, 2005).

Much of the existing research on online and offline prostitution services has allowed for comparisons to be made between outdoor and indoor sex work. A significant proportion of the literature on sex work was derived from studies of sex work as a crime, and its connection to other criminal networks, or health and drugs problems connected with sex work (Giusta et al., 2007). Arguably it is these factors that have, in part, fuelled biases in social policy responses to prostitution in England and Wales (Ashford, 2010). A UK study conducted by McKeganey and Barnard (1996) on street prostitutes concluded that the main motivations for entry were the ‘feeding of a drug addiction’ or the ‘feeding of a family’. Church et al. (2001) documented significant differences in drug usage in relation to market type, noting that 63% of their street prostitute sample reported that their main reason for becoming involved in prostitution was to pay for drugs, compared to just 1% of indoor sex workers. Therefore, the

working conditions and motivations of the street worker, potentially, differ significantly from those of online escorts.

Prostitutes also vary in their access to protection, their freedom to choose and refuse clients, to refuse certain sexual acts, and their reliance on managers and third parties (Chapkis, 2000, cited in Weitzer, 2005). Control over working conditions was perceived to be lower at the bottom end of the sex market hierarchy, with street-based workers having less control over working conditions than escorts based indoors. Generally, the available literature indicates that independent escorts expressed greater job satisfaction and had more control over their work than escorts employed by escort agencies, brothels and parlours (Perkins et al., 1994). Chapkis (1997) also noted that those working in parlours, for escort agencies, and as call girls, all appeared to exercise more choice when becoming involved in the business, and were better able to control conditions. As a result, violence and psychological emotional damage were significantly less prevalent within the indoor market (Chapkis, 1997).

Previous studies have examined some of the psychological effects of selling sexual services. Exner et al. (1977) documented a significant difference in psychological problems between street prostitutes and their indoor sample. The study noted that outcall and indoor sex workers were found to handle themselves to a greater extent, and reported doing well in the occupation of their choice as opposed to working for an escort agency. Furthermore, Romans et al. (2001) compared a sample of indoor sex workers to a sample of non sex workers, noting that there were no significant differences between the two samples in relation to physical and mental health, self-esteem, and social class affiliations. Similar findings have been published by Prince (1986) in a comparative study of street prostitutes, escorts and brothel workers. The study found that within the different prostitution market types, 97% of the escort sample reported an increase in self-esteem after they entered into prostitution, in comparison to 50% of indoor workers, and only 8% of street workers (Prince, 1986: 454).

Market type can also contribute to the types of violence and exploitation experienced by sex workers, with female and transgender street workers being at greater risk of negative experiences (Ford, 1998). A British study conducted by Church et al. (2001)

drew upon interviews with 115 female street workers and 125 women who worked in indoor establishments. The study concluded that the street-based sample reported far higher rates of victimisation, such as rape and robbery, in comparison to the indoor sample. Whitaker and Hart (1996) additionally reported a lower incidence of violence for independent indoor sex workers who worked in flats in London, compared to a sample of street based sex workers. Similar findings have been published with respect to the male sex industry. Two separate studies conducted by Minichiello et al. (2000) asked 2,000 male outdoor and indoor sex workers to record the details of interactions with their clients. The studies concluded that violence towards male workers was uncommon, with only 81 (3.9%) of the participants reporting any act of violence towards them. Although violence for indoor workers was rare, it is important to note that outdoor workers' experience of violence was commonly related to their drug or alcohol abuse, or homelessness, rather than the selling of sex itself (O'Connell and Hart, 2003).

In researching male Internet escorts Parsons et al. (2004) found that male online escorts differed from male street prostitutes in a number of important respects, including education, income, HIV-status, sexual identity, and condom usage. The risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection also varied between street and indoor sex workers, with HIV infection rates varying markedly among street sex workers, with higher incidence rates being found among those who injected drugs (Vanwesendbeeck, 2001, cited in Agresti, 2009). Parsons (2005) also made reference to an 'established racial hierarchy' that appeared throughout the male sex markets, with the authors concluding that the majority of Internet-based escorts were Caucasian. Male online escorts reported a far greater ability to engage in safer sexual practices, expressing limited concerns about law enforcement detection. Male escorts also reported differences in their customers in terms of levels of drug and alcohol intake, as well as perceiving their clients to be mostly of a middle and higher class, and they further suffered lower rates of victimisation than the street based samples (Parsons, 2005).

Forms of victimisation and exploitation, and sexually transmitted infections, were unquestionably highest among outdoor sex workers and those forcibly trafficked into prostitution (Weitzer, 2002; Sanders, 2005). As Weitzer (2002) has suggested, it is important that research does not set out to exclude comparisons in relation to research

which cannot be generalised. Despite random sampling not being possible within the majority of these research studies, most have consistently documented significant variances between prostitution markets and sub-markets, which lends credibility to the general conclusion that there is a need to approach prostitution services in terms of their market type. These significant differences between sex market types reinforce the importance of a polymorphous driven approach, especially when considering the link between prostitution services and technology (Weitzer, 2005).

1.4. Prostitution services and the Internet

The link between sex markets and technology has now been widely recognised (Bernstein, 2007; Ray, 2007; Young, 2008). Lane (2000) has argued that such linkages have shaped the commonly expressed opinion that pornography and sexual services have fuelled the development of Internet technologies, in ways that were difficult to measure, with the ever-increasing popularity and affordability of the Internet having now eased access to prostitution-related websites (Sanders, 2005).

The increasing popularity of the Internet and web-based sexual services forms the basis of the argument that information systems research needs to consider the role of sexuality in shaping such spaces. The ‘cyber exchange’ could be seen to further empower sex workers, in the creation of acceptable boundaries, and in the formation of a marketplace (Ashford, 2008: 41). The manipulation of Internet technology, according to Chatterjee (2005: 15), has created a safer and more productive context for online sex workers, as opposed to an ‘oppressive and harmful’ space. Others have highlighted the role of the Internet in altering the widespread gendered demand for commercial sexual services (Weitzer, 2005; Agersti, 2009). Van Zoonen (2002) previously noted how gendered stereotypes surrounding pornographic content and sexual advertisements focusing on sex as a masculine need have not only been challenged but altered to encourage female consumption. In short, Internet sex markets can now cater for the needs of the female consumer (van Zoonen, 2002).

Current debates about the Internet and social media have focused on individuals who were looking for, and manipulating, information (Sharpe and Earle, 2005). Sproull and Faraj (1997: 38-39) argued that “we should view the net as a social technology that

allows people with common interests to find each other, talk and listen, and sustain connections over time”. Durkin and Bryant (1995: 179-200) have labelled such a phenomenon as computer erotica: “just as the computer had begun to revolutionise crime” it has also altered the parameters of sexually deviant behaviour”. Increased use of the Internet and online communication technologies has also revolutionised interpersonal relationships between escorts and clients by, amongst other things, allowing for the instantaneous transfer of information. The Internet further allows sex workers the opportunity to contribute their own technological skills and knowledge to sex work. By doing so sex workers are able to operate without third party management, with this bringing about the financial benefit of being able to target services, and allowing individuals to avoid detection by law enforcement (Sanders, 2005).

Online requests for sexual acts show some parallels with those made of street prostitutes, but the customer still has to approach a street prostitute to ask what sexual acts they are willing to perform (Ashford, 2008). In advertising online most escorts listed sexual services that were then searchable and widely accessible. Requests for specific sexual acts, as Ashford (2008) noted, became more varied in nature as clients were able to search for such acts within a far wider geographical area by using a variety of online escort advertisement websites. A number of previous studies have also documented how escorts’ advertisements on online announcement boards were commonly searchable by physical attributes, services provided, and price. However, despite this recognition, these solicitation websites were almost entirely disregarded by social service agencies, administrative enforcement departments, the mass media, and research (Sharpe and Earle, 2005). The sheer scale of the Internet, and the difficulties of policing cyberspace, have allowed male and female sex workers the freedom to advertise their services explicitly, whilst avoiding the fear of legal repercussions.

The advent of the Internet and its utilisation by online sex workers, as Sanders (2005: 77) stated, provide “a unique window into underground cultures that are otherwise difficult to access”. The Internet now augments the availability of data and accessibility to sex workers for researchers, providing us with a unique insight into customer beliefs, justifications, expectations, and behavioural norms (Sanders, 2009).

As a result, the Internet's role in facilitating this piece of sociological research is invaluable.

Not only has the Internet provided sociological data about sex workers, but also about their clients and those clients' experiences. Several previous studies have documented how online escort advertisement websites commonly feature restaurant style reviews, which provide the facility for clients to describe their sexual encounters with the sex worker, whilst making recommendations to other users of the site (Sharpe and Earle, 2007; Castle and Lee, 2008). Such reviews were commonly coined as 'field reports' or 'reviews', similar to the book reviews that appear on amazon.com or hotel reviews on tripadvisor.com (Cunningham and Kendall, 2009; Young, 2009). The opportunity for clients to leave a review about a sex worker allowed clients to create and sustain a normative world of purchasing sexual services. Such sites have also protected the rights of the customer by educating others about the nature and quality of service received (Sharpe and Earle, 2002).

The opportunity for clients to leave reviews about workers has become an important feature of the online escort market, allowing the sex worker to build and maintain a trusted public reputation for quality of service, as well as attracting new clients for whom review postings provide reassurance that the escort is unlikely to be fraudulent or dangerous (Argesti, 2009). Within sex workers' advertisements online escorts frequently direct potential clients to read their reviews. Argesti's (2009) analysis of male and female escort advertisements emphasised the importance that workers place on positive reviews in attracting new clients. As Sharp and Earle (2005) note, the fundamental changes which have occurred with the introduction of sites dedicated to men's 'reviews' of the prostitutes whose services they have purchased allowed researchers an unprecedented insight into men's accounts of their involvement in paying for sex.

Some of these advertisement sites even provide links to an escort's personal blog, featuring their day-to-day activities and thoughts (Ashford, 2008), thus allowing potential clients an insight into the services provided and also the escort's personality (Bernstein, 2007). Therefore, the use of the Internet has led to the creation of what Ashford (2008: 42) described as 'deeper personas' between the escort and the client

within the online prostitution market, with the Internet escorting websites providing important resources in the form of community forums, which potentially provide further opportunities for the normalisation of prostitution services, thus promoting the humanisation of online escorts (Argesti, 2009).

1.5. Market segmentation in online escort services

Internet escorting has experienced significant growth in recent years, yet the research into this market type is woefully lacking, specifically in the field of heterosexual male escorts, lesbian escorts who cater for female clients, and use of the Internet in advertising these sexual services. The online escort sex industry is a unique market within the field of prostitution due to its specialisation in services relevant to the gender and sexuality of the customer. The question of when and how sex sells in the heterosexual male and gay escort markets takes an interesting turn in the context of non-heterosexual sexuality (Sanders, 2005), and this is something I will explore in the analysis chapters.

As when advertising any product or service the business and marketing aspect of online advertisement is a crucial factor in appealing to new clients. This was demonstrated by the content and design of advertisements and the choice of website host. Escorts who advertised sexual services online did so in an aggressive market, often facing fierce competition, in what was becoming an increasingly specialised business. Online escorts utilised several strategies to remain competitive in this ever-growing industry, encompassing an incredibly high number of providers, which continually increased (Argesti, 2009; Scott and Cunningham, 2009). The handful of studies which have drawn comparisons between female heterosexual and gay male sex markets have identified experiential differences, by type of work, solicitation and advertising (Sharpe and Earle, 2005; Castle and Lee, 2008). Furthermore, Lee-Gonyea and Castle (2009) noted that online escort advertisements and the self-regulatory practices of escorts may have varied when it came to male and female sex workers advertising, and the sexual servicing of female clients.

Thus the online escort labour market was becoming increasingly divided along gender lines, which catered for different clients' sexualities, whether male or female, and

whether heterosexual, bisexual or gay (Weitzer, 2007). Therefore, the fundamental aspect of online escort advertisement websites was that they allowed escorts the opportunity to attract and match with clients who otherwise would not have patronised sex workers on the street (Cunningham and Kendall, 2009; Ashford, 2010), particularly female clients seeking either male or female sex workers. As a result, the individual escort could market more resourcefully, by specifically targeting his/her products or services directly to those interested clients they could serve well and most profitably (Thomas et al., 2007: 334). In this way the individual sex worker was faced with far less competition, as fewer competitors were targeting a particular niche online market segment, and the keyword search ability of the Internet enabled specialisation.

With the majority of online escort-client websites being searchable by keyword and phrase within search engines (Sullivan, 2002) most of the escort advertisement website hosts distinguished their market through company logo and website address (for example escortguys.co.uk, DykeGirlz.com, londongaymaleescorts.com). An agency or individual online escort that practiced segmentation marketing was adapting its offers to meet the needs of one or more of its target market. For example, Agresti (2009) noted in her study of male and female online advertisements, that many of the female escorts reported being available for couples, multiple partners, or threesomes with other female escorts or customers implying bisexual tendencies. The offering of 'bisexual' services potentially doubled their market demand, by targeting both male and female clients, or could simply be a ploy to play up to the sexual desires and fantasies of a male scrolling through escorts' advertisements (Burghart, 2008).

Internet escorts' advertisements are, in the Internet age, also able to directly target, through wording, specific client groups seeking specific characteristics in an escort, or harbouring an interest in specialised sexual services. However this also depended on sex workers' willingness to provide that specialised service (O'Neill, 1997; Bernstein, 2007; Scott and Kendall, 2009).

Sex workers could choose to design and upload a web page independently, which required some computer knowledge on the part of the worker (Bernstein, 2007). However, many chose to seek the services of specialised web hosting sites exclusively for escorts, and within their specific sexual market; often these sites provided a

uniform template that facilitated the design of the advert and its content (Scott and Cunningham, 2009). As a result, online sex workers could reach a far more substantial number of clients through informative advertising styles, and via the use of online solicitation websites specific to a particular market segment, thus reaching a wider clientele than would be possible through traditional methods of solicitation (Scott and Cunningham, 2009; Ashford, 2010).

This business characteristic of online escorting was demonstrated by the content and design of an escort's advertisement or website (Agresti, 2009). Castle and Lee's (2008) analysis of online escort advertisements found significant differences in the professionalism of the sites, although they noted that pertinent features were consistent throughout the various websites, indicating a global template design. Agresti (2009) has noted that both independent escorts and those associated with an agency displayed a standard template in the content and design of their advertisement, exhibiting many collective characteristics, such as photographs of each escort, most of which displayed the escort in a semi-nude position, with their faces often blurred or blanked out.

As noted in several studies, detailed information, commonly given in the form of a biography or 'stats', were universally used within escort advertisement websites, and these commonly included a description of the escort's physical measurements, and personality traits (Sharpe and Earle, 2005; Burghart, 2008; Argesti, 2009). While the vast majority of biographical sketches provided were short, they also commonly shared the same characteristics and marketing ploys. The sketches typically highlighted the escort's interests or hobbies, such as 'likes to work out', 'travelling', 'love of music', 'fond of lingerie', 'love of food' and so forth (Argesti, 2009). Online escort advertisements were therefore fundamentally used to attract the interest of potential clients, and certain types of clients. As explained by Ray (2007: 52) "Lily found that the wording of her ad, as well as the photographs she used, made a big difference in terms of the types of clients she could get: Photos shot from a low angle attracted submissive men, while photos featuring her in conservative outfits baring little skin attracted 'vanilla' clients who were easy to get along with." This use of different photographic poses and styles within the advert demonstrates how the sex worker has used different advertisement styles to attract her preferred clientele group.

With regard to male to male and female to male advertisement styles, Parsons, Bimbi, and Koken (2004) noted how male escorts also advertised intimacy within the sexual service as ‘bounded authenticity’ in the selling of the Boyfriend Experience (BFE). Additionally, Parsons et al., (2004) noted that male escorts were more likely than female to include ‘their preferred sexual activities and physical assets’ in their biographical profiles. Additional market patterns were also noted in a study by Saad (2008), in an analysis of waist-to-hip-ratios of female internet escorts, concluding that women within the study took advantage of ‘evolutionary-based mating preferences’. Agresti (2009) has noted that male advertisements focused, at times, explicitly on the specifics of the size, shape and description of the escort’s genitals, as well as how male to male escorts frequently make reference to their role in intercourse within their biographical sketches (i.e. top, bottom, or versatile). Therefore, all of these studies’ findings suggested that sex is marketed differently depending on the gender and sexuality of the worker.

Furthermore, when considering the content of escort advertisements, Parsons et al., (2004) highlighted that male escorts often disclosed more personal detail and explicit information, such as telephone numbers and location, on their profile, than did females, concluding that these findings may suggest that male escorts were less susceptible to the negative aspects of selling sex, in terms of perceptions of victimisation. However, regardless of the differences in explicitness in content, Argenti (2009) suggested that there was an ‘industry standard’ for the inclusion of certain information, although as Castle and Gonyea (2009) noted, such ‘industry standards’ in escort advertisements may be different for male and female escorts.

Therefore, the literature about online escorts’ advertisements has emphasised a number of similarities and differences in male and female advertisement styles and client expectations, however, little is known with regard to advertisement styles used by heterosexual male and lesbian escorts to attract customers. Therefore, further empirical investigation was required in order to examine the boundaries placed on the sexual and descriptive content of male and female online prostitution services orientated towards the female consumer, and their expectation of the sexual service. Such research would provide an understanding of the role of the Internet within prostitution, whilst also

contributing an understanding of the roles and sexual orientation of women and men as sex workers, and those of the customer.

1.6. The middle-class sex worker

The rise of online prostitution services is not the only reason for the variety in sex work and market types. Social class and the socioeconomic status of both the sex worker and their clients, are integral to understanding prostitution, and especially online escorting services. As Bernstein (2008) has discussed, technological influences, particularly the Internet, can be seen to further widen the class distinctions that were already present between the different sex market sectors. This research therefore focused on this issue, and attempted to identify the dominant discourses used in escort online advertisements, particularly as they related to sexuality, gender and social class.

According to Bernstein (2007), and Ray (2007) the social class, structure and organisation of sex workers was a key element in the construction of the online escort market, not only in the targeting of middle class clients, but in the implementation of middle class values in its self-regulatory structuring. Previous research has since supported these claims, with Ray (2007: 49) stating that “one of the most powerful changes the Internet has brought to the sex industry is that it has created a vast and visible middle class of sex workers who cater to middle-class men”. In addition, Young (2009) has since suggested that advancements in electronic technology have supported the self-regulation of online escorts, having brought prostitution from the margins of society to the middle classes.

Interestingly, Ray (2007: 49) noted a further degree of self-stratification within the online escort tier, based on class divisions and deviance, and argued that escorts who advertised on certain websites, such as Craigslist, faced disapproval from some escorts, due to it being “considered by many sex workers to be the bottom of the barrel because of the type of clientele it attracts”. Ray (2007) suggested that class divisions within the online escort trade were further stratified by the online marketing sites that the individual escorts decided to use. The Internet has therefore reformed the predominant patterns of sexual commerce to the advantage of middle class sex workers who are able to further manipulate its benefit (Bernstein, 2007). Middle class sex workers were

now able to manipulate online sexual commerce in order to suit their working needs. Therefore, not only has the Internet allowed sexual commerce to prosper as a result of increasing the information available to clients, but it has also allowed for shared values and norms in what was previously regarded as a discreditable activity (Bernstein, 2007). However, when considering social class, as it related to indoor and outcall prostitution, Bernstein (2007: 489) noted that the previous decade had witnessed a growth in middle-class sex workers, whom she referred to as members of the 'new petite bourgeoisie' and who embraced sexual experimentation, fluidity, and independence. The sex workers who now fitted into this category of worker were well-educated, technological and business savvy in nature, echoing the type of worker who would utilise the Internet to work as an independent escort (Agresti, 2009). Similar studies have documented that male escorts have a higher status than male street sex workers due to their being self-employed, with this placing online sex workers on a similar level of operation to other small business owners and independent contractors (Gaffney, 2003).

Interestingly Parsons et al. (2004) had previously noted significant variations in educational achievements between indoor and street sex workers, with their study noting that 90% of the male web-based escorts had some degree of higher education, compared to 30% of the street sample. Similar findings are documented by Minnicheillo et al. (1998), who reported that the male escorts within their study were not only well-educated but also reported fewer financial problems. In a follow-up study Parsons et al. (2004) noted that the main reason for male escorts becoming involved in prostitution was for monetary gain, alongside the additional personal benefits of this type of prostitution, such as travelling to different countries. Male escorts were reported to adopt an independent entrepreneurial approach, whilst also having the ability to pick and choose their clients, and what services and positions they would commit to providing (Parsons et al., 2004).

Male escorts were also less prone to view sex work as a long-term occupation and were more likely to engage in safer sex practices and working environments than street prostitutes. Similar findings were corroborated by client characteristics, as reported by the escort sample, who reported that the substantial majority of escort clients were white and middle to upper class, whereas the street prostitute sample perceived their

clients to be of a lower socioeconomic class (Lever and Dolnick, 2000: 88). Other findings indicated that contact with indoor sex workers frequently took place within the client's home, rather than in a hotel, outdoors, or in a car, as was the case for outdoor sex workers (Lever and Dolnick, 2000: 88). For these reasons the social status and class of outcall workers were considered to be higher than that of the average outdoor sex worker (Parsons et al., 2004).

Much of the research suggests, but does not confirm, that the relationship between social class and prostitution has altered. However, relatively little is known with regards to the transformations of social class and sex work (Bernstein, 2007). Nor was there enough evidence to suggest that the notion of the 'middle class' Internet escort was reflective of male and female Internet escorts who targeted female customers. Such a gap in the literature reinforces the importance of this research, which examined the dominant discourse in online escort advertisements across different market types, and in relation to gender, sexuality and social class.

1.7. Economic approaches to prostitution: sex work as a commodity

Economic perspectives can offer some insight into the market segmentation of the online escort industry, in terms of why it differs distinctively from other prostitution sectors. As Thorbek and Pattaniak (2002) have explained, the commercial sex trade is a multi-million pound transnational industry regulated by market type through various mediators. Most economic perspectives on prostitution have focused either on presenting prostitution services in a manner similar to other service industries, or focusing on prostitution as a form of crime, through examining the costs and benefits of alternative regulatory management, based on the premise that the main motivation behind prostitution was economic (Giusta et al., 2004). Other theoretical approaches have directed their attention to the modelling of prices, the supply characteristics of demand determinants, health risks, and the effects of condom usage upon pricing (Cameron and Collins, 2003). Other perspectives have focused on sex markets and the ways in which urban geography models reflect the supply and demand of different types of sexual transactions (Collins, 2004).

Economic analysts have also attempted to model sexual transactions from a number of different perspectives. Moffatt and Peters' (2004) UK based study of client reviews of online prostitution services estimated the determinants of price for a sexual act. The study concluded that the weekly earnings of a female prostitute were double that of a typical non-manual female worker. Moffatt and Peters' (2004) study also showed that the prices charged by sex workers were reflective of the duration of the transaction and the location and age of the prostitute, while the satisfaction and price paid by the client for the sexual encounter were affected by different factors. Garofalo (2002) provided a more sophisticated explanation for the prices paid in the different prostitution markets, in the context of institutional configuration of the exchange, based on the power asymmetries between the contractual parties. Garofalo's (2002) perspective was based on the functioning of patriarchal systems in the creation of gender asymmetries, producing a gendered and economic analysis of prostitution services. As Monto (1999) concluded from interviews with clients, in exchange for money or gifts the client demanded the 'control of sex' rather than sex itself, placing emphasis on the effort and costs involved in attracting a sexual partner who was willing to fulfil their sexual preferences.

Several studies, including Cameron's (2002), have attempted to explain the high wages within the various prostitution markets. The studies' justifications focused on compensation for social exclusion, risk, physical effort, and the inconvenient working times endured by the sex worker. Munro and Giusta (2008) further contributed to such a perspective by suggesting that any given individual would start to sell sex if the price surpassed its opportunity cost; in other words, the higher the price paid for sex, the more likely an individual would feel inclined to provide prostitution services. More recent developments within economic empirical research on prostitution markets have focused on online escort services. A study by Cunningham and Kendall (2009) found that most workers who solicited online engaged in safer sex practices, engaging in lower risk behaviours than traditional street-based workers, but that as a result they see significantly fewer clients than street prostitutes.

Another economic approach to prostitution has been to consider it 'erotic capital', a theory introduced by Hakim (2010). She described erotic capital as a fourth personal asset alongside economic, cultural and social capitals. Hakim (2010) argued that

'erotic capital' was not only a beneficial advantage, in terms of relationships and marriage markets, but could be equally significant in labour markets ranging from the media, politics, advertising, sports, the sex industry and the arts to everyday interaction. Hakim's (2010) concept of 'erotic capital' was based upon recent research on the adult entertainment industry, and applied to both heterosexual and homosexual men and women. Hakim (2010) believed that women possessed more social capital than men, as they worked considerably harder at it, and that this provided them with an advantage in negotiations over men. This was particularly pertinent when considering men's demands for sexual services and erotic entertainment which, according to Hakim (2010), exceeded women's interest in sex, as she argued that there was an imbalance between men and women in terms of their sexual drives. The male sex drive was more intense and uncompromising than the female sex drive, thus creating ideal grounds for women to exploit their erotic capital. Hakim (2010) also argued that one of the main aspects of patriarchy had been the assembly of 'moral' ideologies which placed restrictions on men and women who wished to exploit their 'erotic capital' in return for financial and social benefits. Hakim (2010) also discussed the role of feminist theory within the oppression paradigm, which she believed had continuously failed to separate itself from the patriarchal perspectives of male dominance and control over women, thus placing a 'moral' constraint on the behavioural, social and economic activities of woman.

Central to Hakim's (2010) 'erotic capital' perspective was beauty, with the main argument being that in choosing a mate or partner men desired females who were physically attractive to them, whilst women tended to choose men who were desirable overall to them. Hakim (2010) suggested that 'erotic capital' was similar to human capital, both requiring a basic level of talent and ability. Therefore, 'erotic capital' and its components, according to Hakim (2010), could be studied in the same way as other elusive elements of social structures, cultures and social interactions, and could therefore prove a useful asset to those who enter prostitution and are willing to exploit their 'erotic capital'. This concept of 'erotic capital' has been widely applied to commercial sex entertainment industries, and was equally evident within both the heterosexual mainstream population and minority gay cultures (Hakim, 2010). Despite social constraints being most forcefully aimed at young people who direct their sexual efforts into appropriate forms of behaviour and matrimonial relationships, Hakim's

(2010) perspective offered insight into why some young people were willing to trade their sexual capital within the commercial sex market, and in particular on the online escort market.

Hakim's (2010) concept of 'erotic capital', as a fourth personal asset, reflected Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) theory of individualism. Beck (2003: 23) had previously stated that "the contemporary individual [...] is characterised by choice, where previous generations had no such choices". This element of choice was evident in many spheres of social life, allowing for the development of individual identities. This perspective argued that individuals in western societies were now responsible for their own enterprise, making rational and calculated decisions with respect to their chosen identities. Such a perspective proposed that the development of an identity could no longer be regarded as a social accomplishment, as identities could also be regarded as separate external commodities that could be purchased and then easily disregarded (Marques, 2010).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) theory of individualisation may offer some insight as to why an increasing number of middle class men and women actively choose to become online sex workers (Bernstein, 2007). This perspective suggested that both men and women were subject to an individualised biography designed for themselves, in a time of changing feminist attitudes and a sexual revolution. However, such an account could prove useful when reconsidering the economic changes within the sex industry, and the shifts in the social class and socioeconomic status of sex workers (Scambler, 1997).

1.8. Intimacy, pleasure and the customer

Economic perspectives on prostitution can provide a useful insight into understanding the pricing and the supply of prostitution; however, this research takes a more sociological approach to the selling of sex, recognising that intimacy is also being sold. As Giddens (1992) previously noted, the concept of 'intimacy' has considerable currency. Sociological evidence has suggested that emotional interaction between the escort and the customer is a fundamental requirement of their interaction. Kern (2000) has documented the expectation for escorts to engage in 'emotional sex', which goes

beyond mechanical paid sex. Online escorts were also, in some circumstances, expected to provide counselling and emotional support to clients, as well as providing a sexual service (Lever and Dolnick, 2000, cited in Weitzer, 2005). Similar patterns of escort and client interaction have also been found in the encounter itself, where street prostitutes have only momentary interactions with clients, with escorts more likely to engage in practices with clients that resemble dating experiences; commonly referred to as the 'girlfriend experience', which included services such as a conversation, kissing and hugging (Sharpe and Earle, 2005; Weitzer, 2005). Ray (2007: 57) refers to this as 'bounded authenticity' in the exchange of the boyfriend/girlfriend experience.

Edwards (1993) has also noted that escort services commonly provide a far more extensive range of sexual services in authenticating the 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend experience', including domination and fetish services, and various other fantasies, such as duo services. This level of intimacy between sex worker and clients also significantly differed between sex markets. Lever and Dolnick (2000) noted, in a study in Los Angeles, that 30% of escorts, compared to 2% of street prostitutes, reported receiving nonsexual massages from their most recent customer; also 42% of call girls, compared to 3% of street prostitutes, claimed that their most recent customer had kissed or hugged them; and 17% of escorts, compared to 4% of street prostitutes, reported that they had received oral sex from their customer in their most recent transaction. The expectation of mutual pleasure within the escort market goes even further, with an earlier large-scale study by Prince (1986) reporting that 75% of call girls, 19% of brothel workers, but none of the street prostitutes had an orgasm with customers, and in another similar study 70% of street prostitutes reported to have never experienced an orgasm with a customer. These findings appear to suggest that, sociologically, escorts, and in particular online escorts, could at times appear to enjoy client contact more than street or brothel based sex workers.

Therefore, it could be argued that the sexual gratification between a sex worker and client distinctively depends on the market in which they operate. However, it is important to note that all sex workers, to some degree, must emotionally distance themselves from their work, and not all client contact is enjoyed by sex workers. As Scambler (1997) has noted, sex workers adopt a number of strategies to distance themselves from their sex worker identity. The consistent use of condoms and fixed

price codes was a central strategy, and a positive example of a social norm existing within indoor sex markets. Sex workers regarded the differentiation of sex within their private life and that with clients to be the symbolic use of the condom as a psychological barrier, with the use of a condom during sex with a client acting as a barrier to emotional attachment (Plumridge et al., 1997; Sanders, 2002). However, while the offering of sexual services without a condom within the escort market may benefit the individual financially, not practising safe sex would make business difficult for other workers at the lower end of the markets, because clients would expect all women workers to sacrifice condom usage (Scambler, 1997).

There is some research evidence to suggest that the intense emotional connections that escorts provide for their clients could lead to feelings of sexual dysfunction within sex workers' private lives, and Herman (1992) has documented how dissociation could sometimes occur as a result of the extreme stress faced by some women involved in prostitution. Several other researchers have also noted that detachment, depression, and other temperament disorders were found to be common among sex workers who operated within street prostitution and escort markets, and for women who worked within the erotic dancing market (Ross et al., 1990; Vanwesenbeeck, 1994; Belton, 1998). Pateman (1988: 207) argued that "women's selves are involved in prostitution in a different manner from the involvement of the self in other occupations", and as Hochschild (1983) noted in a study of flight attendants, the concept of emotional work and emotional labour involves "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has an exchange value" (7). These aspects of romance and intimacy involved in escorting highlight how forms of courtship, in the selling of sex, often reflected those found in non-commercial sexual encounters. However, as Earle and Sharp (2008) have noted, whilst emotional labour is a fundamental element in the escort market, the commodification of pleasure should also be considered as an important factor, as the available empirical literature strongly suggests that the enactment of sexual labour involves the commodification of intimacy and emotion (Earle and Sharp, 2008).

1.9. The female customer of escorting services

Most of the prostitution-related research to date has concentrated exclusively on female prostitution markets. However, it is important to acknowledge the small, yet growing, body of literature paying attention to both heterosexual male and lesbian orientated sex workers, which also sometimes acknowledges the existence of female clients. The available literature shows that there is still a general lack of understanding with regards to the significant differences between sex market types, and in particular the demands of the female client.

Most recent theoretical perspectives on male prostitution have shifted from a moral deviation perspective to a social perspective, which has frequently been coupled with concern around issues of health and welfare, leading to increasing research on this population (Gattari and Spizzichino, 1992). The heteronormative focus in prostitution-related research created a gender bias that has influenced public policy, resulting in a lack of studies directed towards heterosexual male, gay, and lesbian online escorts (Ashford, 2007), with most of the literature focusing on male outdoor sex workers, and the related health concerns of HIV/AIDS (Williams et al., 2003). Other social concerns amongst male sex workers include sexual abuse, violence, and drug and alcohol abuse, which has indirectly sustained the negative perception of male sex work (Weber et al., 2001). Despite such studies being invaluable in their contributions, not all male sex markets should be associated with social problems, as this fails to reflect the diverse experiences of sex workers throughout the spectrum of the sex trade (West, 1993).

However, the comparatively small body of research on male prostitution has emphasised a number of significant similarities to female heterosexual markets, as well as important differences in relation to market hierarchy, with both male and female sex workers being stratified into street or indoor sex work (massage, bar, escort, call boy services) (Perkins and Bennett, 1985). For the majority of men, participation in sex work was framed as an occupational choice where the decision to enter the trade was a rational one, with most viewing sex work as part of a transition undertaken while they seek and await other opportunities for employment; while others, more entrepreneurial and independent, treat sex work as a career choice (Browne and Minichiello, 1996; Sanders, 2005; Weitzer, 2005). Parsons et al. (2004: 29) reported

that many sex workers viewed “sex work as a legitimate form of work which can be a constructive and positive force, in the lives of those in the commercial sex industry, as well as those who seek their services”. Yet the differences in experiences of exploitation for male and female sex workers are still not fully understood.

Like their female counterparts, male street prostitutes were considered to be at the ‘lowest level’ within the career structure in sex work (Weitzer, 2009). Previous studies have highlighted that outdoor male sex workers rated their work far more negatively, and therefore maintained poorer relations with customers, than their indoor counterparts. While male escorts were more likely to view sex work as a profession, and to be far more comfortable with it (Minichiello et al., 2001), the many distinctions between the practices and forms of male sex work could lead to difficulties in generalising the phenomena empirically (Kaye, 2001). A further weakness in the literature on prostitution, in relation to gender and sexuality, is the assumption that clients of male and female sex workers are predominately male (Scott, 2003). Although this research does not begin to deny such a statement, due to the complex mix of biological, social, and economic realities, it does however argue that the existence of the female client must also be recognised.

The question of men providing sexual services to female clients has received very little attention internationally, with the exception of limited studies which have focused on the male to female sex market and sex tourism (see Weitzer, 2007 and Phillips, 2009). To date, research focused on the female clients of male sex workers has exclusively focused upon the ‘female sex tourists’ who were typically middle aged female tourists seeking the sexual company of heterosexual male prostitutes in the Caribbean and other vacation spots. Research concerning female customers of UK sex workers has been woefully lacking (Pruitt and LaFont 1995; Sanchez, 2001: 75). Moreover, this type of research was also lacking in European or western countries, and as a result very little is known about the typologies of straight male escorts, in terms of individual demographics and market forces.

Also with respect to the demand of female clients for male escorts, there has been increasing recognition of female clients’ demands for lesbian-orientated escorts working within the U.K. Although such a claim is not yet supported by empirical

literature, this is possibly due to the fact that lesbian escorts are harder for researchers to access due to their smaller population size, let alone to understand and target (Jordon, 2005). As Bolso (2001) has explained, scholarly research attention has appeared to uphold a cultural blindness towards women who sell sex to other women. Similarly, Irvings (1998, cited in Bolso, 2002) has noted that women are not present within discussions on prostitution other than as providers of sexual services. As Grace and Wells (2004) also noted, lesbians are a highly educated group in comparison to the general population and, despite their unequal earnings in comparison to men, are a group that bare significant purchasing power. Lesbian desires, when it comes to the purchasing of sex, appear not to have obtained a place alongside the traditional heterosexual markets (Grace and Wells, 2004). Issues surrounding sexuality within a lesbian context bring to light a new set of dilemmas for scholars, related to possible negations of power asymmetries between the parties entering the sexual economic exchange. The identification and recognition of such a subculture has the potential to provide researchers with an analytical perspective for discussing power and sexuality within the commercial sex market as a whole, and in particular within the female to female sex markets (Bolso, 2002).

Acknowledgement of female to female sex markets is long overdue; an insight into the size of the market and demand for such services was required, in order to provide a more balanced understanding of the prostitution market as a whole. A previous Swedish study, conducted by Borg (1981:52, cited in Bolso, 2002) approached the topic of the female client. However, the study concluded that the question had a “very limited scope in Sweden” (Borg, 1981: 52, cited in Bolso, 2002). Brown (1992) however, has suggested that the unrecognised demand and documentation of female to female prostitution may be a result of women tending to be more economically disadvantaged than men in general, or conceivably that bisexual or lesbian women are not willing to pay for sexual services clients (Brown, 1994). It would also be interesting to discover if a similar study in contemporary British society would uncover similar findings to those of Borg’s (1981) Swedish study, considering the dramatic expansion of Internet technology and accessibility. These questions have yet to be answered, with another interesting question being whether such information would help to evaluate if a customer’s gender and sexuality impacted upon the character and subjective significance of the sexual encounter and on escorts’ perceptions of risk.

1.10. Risk perception and regulation

Risk management becomes a central feature of a sex worker's working life, in their attempts to improve agency through the transformation of risk into safety, and during the sexual encounter safety is a primary concern for both the sex worker and the client (Ashford, 2008). As Fring et al., (2010) has noted, risk is not determined by varying dispositions to risk-taking and avoidance, but by its competing preferences, a mixture of individual risk and the social and cultural environment.

Giddens (1999) has put forward the concept of external risk, which he perceived typically to be found in traditional societies, and which presented a 'natural' exterior agent, whereas manufactured risks were a direct result of human actions and the consequences of these. Manufactured risks are characteristically associated with industrialising societies, and often with new forms of technology. These types of risks could be seen from a macro level to be prevalent in online escorting (Warr and Pyett, 1999; Beck, 2002), as online escorts undertake a range of 'manufactured risks' within any given outcall sexual encounter, in relation to the disclosure of information exchanged, screening and communication (Giddens, 1999). As Marques (2010) discussed, when a sex worker arrives at his or her client's abode, or at their hotel room, it may be the client who is most likely to feel safe as they are in their personal environment, but this clearly creates risks and dangers for the sex worker. For the escort, there is the risk of violence, sexual assault, and perhaps arrest, and for both parties the potential risk for blackmail, fraud and robbery. Safe sex opportunities also contributed to the risk aspect of the encounter, and as Fring et al., (2010) stressed, the boundary connecting safe sex and danger was often considered an important enticement to clients, and an inherent risk to sex workers.

The work of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) opened up a considerable scholarly debate in social policy about the development of a risk society (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006). The theory of a risk society is useful here as it provides this research with insight into how the idea of risk began to influence our everyday perspectives and the policymaking process. Central to Beck's (1992) analysis was a process of 'individualisation' and the notion that technological developments in society drove and created new risks, and that such anticipated risks must be negotiated by individuals

in society (Warr and Pyett, 1999). This approach to risk evidenced that some individual groups were more predisposed to certain risks, where others were less able to be planned for and dealt with, such that contingencies needed to be considered (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006). In the context of research that has directed its attention to online escorting and associated risks, to date much of the research has suggested that a number of new risks are posed by technology in relation to the provision of prostitution services, but research studies have not confirmed a change in the relationship between risk management and prostitution. This has led to the risks inherent in prostitution receiving a greater focus in the field of sociology, particularly in relation to market tiers.

Beck's (1992) analysis of a 'risk society' can offer an insight into why so many 'middle class' men and women actively choose to engage in sex work. As Petersen (1996) has explained health risks have been increasingly connected to an individual's behaviour, with health promotion programmes emphasising self-management and self-care. As a consequence, if an individual fails to protect themselves from risk they are regarded as lacking self-will and as having failed in their citizenship duties. This research sought to examine the ways in which male and female, heterosexual, gay and lesbian escorts self-regulated and 'coped' with risk. When considering if risk behaviour was a rational decision, Douglas (1986) suggested that individuals consider a number of factors when assessing risk. He argued that a person must first understand the likelihood that the risk will occur, the implications of the risk, and the realisation of their own ability to manage the specific risk. However, as Douglas (1986) also noted, in familiar situations individuals could have a tendency to ignore, deny, or underestimate risks, and as a result may experience and interpret their world as a safer place than it actually is. Douglas' (1986) analysis and perception of risk is related to one of the central aims of this research, which sought to discover if heterosexual and homosexual, male and female escorts constructed or perceived risks differently.

Harcourt and Donovan (2005: 204) have described Internet escorting as a 'high risk' form of sex work, despite a number of studies on Internet prostitution that have highlighted the role of the Internet in increasing the safety of sex workers (Argesti, 2009). The Internet provides a 'virtual world' of communication and support for sex workers, including for sharing details relating to their own working practices.

Saafe.co.uk, EscortWatchUK, GuardianAngel and Ugly Mugs are a few examples of online websites that have created supportive online communities for independent online escorts. The websites provide information, extensive tips, and case studies on topics such as 'ways of working', relevant crime reports, paying tax, and dealing with difficult clients, as well as an opportunity to upload reviews and warnings about clients, thus aiding in the screening of clients (Davies and Evans, 2007).

Client screening websites such as 'Date-Check' also enable escorts to screen new clients via a system whereby other escorts provide the client with a reference, and many sex workers refused to see a client without a reference from another sex worker (Young, 2009). The system was based on worker-to-worker verification, highlighting the universal concern for other sex workers' safety, across the online market. As Ray (2007) has suggested, such sites have the potential to reduce an escort's independence, due to the cost of membership and reliance on the service. However, as Brooks (2009) has noted, the Internet could also be utilised by escorts to perform more informal screening methods, by simply searching for the clients' personal details, such as name and telephone numbers, through Internet search engines. Other methods of screening included communicating with a potential client via telephone and email communications several times before arranging the location and time of the encounter. Thus online sex workers who operated via email as well as by telephone were employing stringent screening techniques.

A further advantage of communication via the Internet was the use of an additional screening process in the rejection of 'time wasters' who sought unsafe practises or services (Sanders, 2004). During the process of screening the sex worker planned cautiously if and when they would reveal their address, in order to limit the number of people aware of it, and to first ensure the client intended to visit (Sanders, 2004: 9). The process, referred to as triangular telephone communication, involved the client revealing certain information to the sex worker or the agency, who then checked with a third party, such as colleagues, online, or through specific online review sites. Sex workers had also learnt to analyse language styles and attitudes expressed through telephone and Internet communication, in order to assess if they should meet the client in person (Lowman, 2000). The structure of the escort trade, according to Lowman (2000: 23) "is such that the clients often have to identify themselves" by demonstrating

that their intentions and expectations of the sexual encounter are genuine, thus reducing any potential risk posed by the encounter.

Most of the literature surrounding those working practices of escorts that guard against inherent risks has focused on the female sex market. However, such accounts could only provide a limited picture of the working practices that guarded against violence, robbery and the use of unsafe sexual practices within the sexual encounter. As Hobbs (2001) noted, such practices did however form part of an integral common code of practice identifiable within Internet escorting. Sexual negotiation techniques demonstrated how, at work, sex workers respond to potential risks, through methodologies of control (Manning, 1977). A number of studies, such as the one conducted by Hobbs (2001), have pointed to the importance of verbal skills in potentially violent situations, claiming that sex workers quickly learn to communicate with clients strategically, and to negotiate, through emotions, mood and body language, as part of their preventative repertoire. Sanders (2004: 278) also noted how sex workers across all markets, within her study, were 'exceptional' in keeping themselves safe, with violence being a relatively rare event. As McKeganey and Barnard (1996) have noted, safety strategies and risk avoidance techniques employed by sex workers provided them with the confidence to continue their work throughout the various sex markets. Wacquant (1995) has also documented that sex workers, within his study of street based and indoor work, used risk avoidance techniques, with all being engaged in a range of tactics, behaviours, and attitudes in relation to displaying their 'bodily capital', whilst avoiding risk, and in turn displaying competent working bodies.

Other 'risk avoidance' techniques that sex workers often displayed were the use of a manufactured identity, or work persona, in order to satisfy the fantasies and expectations of customers, and separation of their personal self from their work life (Chapkis, 1997; Sanders, 2005). The manufactured identity of a sex worker was an example of creative control over the product of their labour, which in turn determines their self-image, as well as that of their customers (Marques, 2007). Sander's (2002: 563) study highlighted a number of differences between how indoor and street prostitutes discussed the risk of physical danger, also noting that street prostitutes exhibited a form of 'fatalism', perceiving the risk of victimisation to be an inherent

part of the job. In contrast, many of the indoor workers who had not been victims of violence, although recognising the vulnerabilities of their profession, did not consider themselves as necessarily exposed to such risks, due to their comprehensive, and largely successful, harm minimisation strategies (Sanders, 2002).

Walklate (1997) has noted numerous factors which affect the perception of risk for the individual sex worker, including the objective calculation of risk, and the propensity to take the risk. She further suggested that there were a number of assumed gender differences in risk perception, such as the assumed routine risks of criminal victimisation faced by women in everyday life. However, relatively little is known with regard to the gender differences in how risks are managed within Internet prostitution by both genders, and specifically by those who target female heterosexual and lesbian clients. The available evidence suggests that males and females may not significantly differ in their preference for certain types of risk-taking behaviour, but each gender may be more compelled to take specific risks, and to deal with those specific risks from a gender standpoint (Walklate, 1997). Further investigation into self-regulatory practices and the perception of risk relevant to gender and sexuality could help evaluate whether the gender and sexuality of the customer influences escorts' use of risk minimisation strategies.

The link between technology and how it can enhance the safety of sex workers has been well documented (Chatterjee, 2005; Davies and Evans, 2007; Parsons et al., 2004; Sanders, 2005; Young, 2009). However what the literature has failed to consider is that these technological developments have also rendered Internet escorts vulnerable to new sets of personal security risks, such as financial fraud or blackmail. Several studies (see Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Mechanic, 2000; Davies and Evans, 2007) have documented a number of new personal online security risks faced by sex workers, that go beyond the well documented terrestrial crimes against sex workers (see O'Neill et al., 1995; McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Campbell and Kinnell, 2001; Church et al., 2001; Sanders and Campbell, 2007). For example, virtual violence and aggression, harassment, stalking, blackmail and fraud are also apparent in online interactions, but have received very little academic acknowledgement. The implications of such threats can undoubtedly generate a universal sense of fear amongst online escorts. Online aggressive behaviours can include threats of physical violence, harassment and other

forms of threatening behaviour (Mechanic, 2000), further adding to the fear of violence already bedded into the culture of sex work (Bretns and Hausbeck, 2005). As Davies and Evans (2007) have noted, the virtual aggression faced by many sex workers may come through people who may not use the services of sex workers but feel that they can verbally attack sex workers without fear of discovery. As a result of the anonymity that the Internet offers, users are able to construct and project individualised online identities that afford them the anonymity to say what they want.

Several studies have also suggested that online sex workers are increasingly susceptible to forms of on and offline stalking. As Davies and Evans (2007) reported in their study of UK online escorts, many female escorts reported that some of their clients had “fuzzy understandings about their relationships”, often misidentifying intimate affection they purchased as a genuine feeling on behalf of the escort (545). Physical aggression towards sex workers is considered unacceptable by those who are engaged in prostitution, and arguably to some extent by law enforcement officials. However, virtual violence, online harassment and cybercrimes against online escorts are somewhat less clear due to the act not being physical. Nevertheless, the threat of violence and unwanted attention generates looming psychological threats to those involved in the sex industry and leads to fear directly related to their work.

In this context, the marketing of sexual services via the Internet has created a new set of risks for online escorts. As Whittaker and Hart (1996) have discussed the social organisation and work venue for sex workers shape the risk management techniques employed by the worker. Similarly, the workplace structure in which online escorts operate requires relevant safety precautions in order to reduce risk.

1.11. Conclusion

Most of the literature reviewed in this chapter documents a number of significant differences between the prostitution markets with regard to the victimisation of sex workers. It could be argued that online escorts fit the empowerment model (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter), however, it would be too simplistic to argue that sex workers are all liberated and empowered until a clearer picture has been achieved of men and women who sell sex to female clients. The inclusion in research

of male and female escorts who advertise to female clients would add another level of validity to the testing of perceptions of risk taking in relation to gender and sexuality. Findings would allow for an evaluation of how risks are managed within prostitution, by heterosexual male and lesbian escorts, whilst also identifying any differences in the self-regulatory techniques and screening methods used by online escorts in order to keep safe.

This research has also expressed the need to drive towards the third paradigm, the polymorphous approach, which incorporates a number of factors, integrating the multiple realities of sex workers and their relationships with clients (Weitzer, 2007). Such an approach informs research design, and as a result offers an evidence-based perspective on a specific and unique online prostitution market in the South-East of England. The polymorphous approach is used to guide this research in examining the vocational aspects involved in online escorting as they are relevant to the sexual orientation of the service provider and customer, rather than simply claiming that those involved are either oppressed or empowered.

Research that has drawn comparisons between heterosexual female and gay male prostitution has identified substantial differences with regard to market type (West, 1993). Most of the literature on Internet escorting has suggested that male escorts may be less susceptible to some of the negative aspects of escorting; however it has also been noted that there are a number of assumed gender differences in risk perception, such as the assumed routine risks of criminal victimisation faced by women in everyday life (Walklate, 1997; Aggleton, 1999). Walklate (1997) also noted that male and female escorts may not differ in their preference for certain types of risk taking behaviour, but that they may be more compelled to take specific risks.

With the aim of examining risk avoidance strategies this research study set out to investigate whether online escorts constructed a continuum of risk, prioritising certain types of dangers in relation to the gender and sexuality of the client. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with male and female, heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escorts, in order to collect detailed information about their characteristics and working practices that were otherwise unobtainable through quantitative methods. A secondary role of the qualitative semi-structured interviews

was to examine whether perception of the risks involved in online escorting differed according to the service provider and customer. Findings from the data analysis would then help to address whether the gender and sexuality of the escort influenced their perception of risk, and whether certain risks were already predetermined via mainstream social values.

Also, within this research, the systematic and comparative analysis of online escorts and their advertisements aimed to identify core similarities and key differences between heterosexual male and female, gay, and lesbian sex workers. Access to the relevant sub-markets would be a challenge in itself; however such a task had to be overcome. The comparative research study aspect allows for an examination of sex workers' objectification, exploitation, and victimisation, which could then be used to establish the extent to which individual sex workers structured their time and experiences with customers, and with third parties.

CHAPTER TWO

The Research in Practice: Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

2.1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the methodological framework of the research, including the ontological beliefs and epistemology that influenced the chosen methodology design (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). The interpretivist framework is closely linked with the researcher's beliefs, aligning with the relativist ontology that there are multiple realities constructed through meanings and understandings, which are then developed through social experiences and methods of enquiry (Denzin, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). These realities are socially constructed and fluid, and negotiated within cultures, social settings and relationships with other people (Denzin, 1997). Such a framework allowed the researcher to explore the online escort market through the unique experiences of the participants, whilst acknowledging the differences that would be encountered due to diverse realities. The researcher also recognised a subjectivist epistemology, in that he cannot be separated from himself or from what was already known and is therefore within his awareness, and that all of the researcher's values were therefore important within the research process, with truth only negotiable through the dialogue apparent within the research study. This subjectivism allowed the research to be based on the logic of interpretation, understanding that each participant could offer differing interpretations of the perceived risks involved in online escorting, and that through such negotiations there could be multiple, valid claims to knowledge (Angen, 2000).

This sociological research study presents a gendered examination of the online escort industry, focusing on the vocational aspects of the selling of sexual services online and the management of risks associated with selling sex. As discussed in the previous chapter, the research is focused solely on the online escort market in order to divert the focus away from street prostitution, which has been largely characterised by drug use, male coercion, violence and exploitative 'pimping' relationships, and limited material resources (Church et al., 2001; Hart and Barnard, 2003). In contrast, the

majority of men and women who work in the online escort market in the UK do not operate on the street, but instead from indoor locations (Weitzer, 2005).

Most of the data collected through previous studies on prostitution, regardless of how rigorously, could be challenged by opposing parties. Therefore, when performing research on sex workers, it remains paramount that appropriate and valid research methodologies are employed (Sanders, 2005). Examination of the gender and sexuality of the escort and customer allowed the researcher an insight into the contemporary occurrence of online prostitution services, social sex forums and networking. The researcher thereby hoped to achieve a way of understanding previously unrecognised areas of social and cultural sexual services (Weitzer, 2007).

The research design was developed through an inclusive approach and understanding of the online escort market, with escorts of different genders and sexualities taken into consideration. As Weitzer (2005: 213) has previously noted, focusing on the supply and demand aspects of those escorts who also cater for female clients would allow for the analysis of a 'gender essentialist' model of escorting, relevant to the sexuality of the worker, and this would allow for it to be far more culturally sensitive to the nature of contemporary online prostitution services. This research aims to disregard stereotypical accounts of heterosexual and homosexual norms, entwined with the sexual behaviours of both genders, and in particular women, whose purchasing was commonly interpreted and judged differently from that of heterosexual males, simply because they are women (Weitzer, 2005). To overcome such societal bias it was crucial that a research design strategy was developed that would provide an informative approach, in which the diversity was highlighted between each of the examined online escort markets.

The study consisted of two strands of research methods, on heterosexual male and female, and gay and lesbian escorts, in the South-East of England, during 2012, in order to address the following questions as set out in the introduction to this research: (1) What were the dominant discourses used in escorts' online advertisements, particularly as they relate to sexuality, gender and social class? (2) What was the role of the Internet in online escorts' working lives? (3) Did online escorts use risk avoidance strategies, and were these strategies specific to each of the distinctive online

escort samples? (4) Were there any differences in the perception of risk between the different distinctive online escort markets, as defined by the gender, sexuality and social class of their clientele? Understanding how and why male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort markets differ, in terms of online advertising, risk avoidance strategies, and perception of risk was a central aim of this research.

The first qualitative method used in the data collection was a discourse analysis, in order to gain a greater understanding of the dominant discourses found in online advertisements. As Bernstein (2008) has previously suggested, the social class of sex workers and their clients remains a fundamental starting point in understanding sex work, and in particular the online escort market. Therefore, the researcher felt that one way to measure this suggestion was in the ways that these social class structures were presented within escort service advertisements. This method was also chosen in order to analyse the types of language used within the advertisements, and its role in the offering of a relationship between the escort and the client, in relation to the sexual orientation of the encounter.

Given the gaps in the literature discussed in the previous chapter, and the significant growth in online escort services, it was particularly important to ensure that the researcher thought critically and carefully about the meaning of sex as a form of work. The little research attention which has been afforded to socio-technical advances within the various sex markets has presented an unbalanced and misleading understanding of prostitution markets (Weitzer, 2007). This research therefore placed an emphasis on those actors who have received insufficient or no attention – specifically straight male and lesbian orientated escorts working online, as well as their female customers, in order to examine the vocational aspects of both heteronormative and same-sex (gay and lesbian) online escorting. Of interest to the researcher were the ways in which heterosexual and same-sex (gay and lesbian) online escorts targeted specific types of client, whilst at the same time assessing the risks they may pose.

2.2. Discourse analysis of online escort advertisements

As discussed in the literature review, the rise of online prostitution services has not been the only reason for the increased diversity in sex work and market type. Social class structures and the socioeconomic status of sex workers (as previously mentioned), as well as their clients, were also integral to understanding the changes in prostitution, and especially online escorting services. The ways in which these social class structures were presented within escort service advertisements were also of interest to the researcher. A number of researchers had previously examined the language of personal advertisements (e.g. Hall, 1995; Shalom, 1997; Groom and Pennebaker, 2005), but the particular language of online escorts' advertisements in the targeting of 'middle class' clients has remained under-investigated. Shalom (1997) previously defined written personal advertisements as an attempt to describe the advertiser and attract the attention of the intended type of customer. In this context, the sexual fantasy was created by the escort with his or her advertisement, but was owned by the customer, and it was then the escort's role to fulfil it (Stephens, 2009).

Bernstein's (2008) work has provided an insight into how technological influences, particularly with respect to the Internet, have worked to further widen those class distinctions that were already present between the different sex market sectors. In her work she had previously argued that online sex workers were part of a 'new petite bourgeoisie', who strived towards the adoption of social distinction via methods of 'reconversion strategies', in which cultural capital was utilised to professionalise marginal space in the labour market. In order to test Bernstein's (2008) notion of the 'middle class' sex worker, and their targeting of 'middle class' customers, the researcher decided to examine the discourses found within online advertisements, particularly as they related to each distinctive client group. For the purposes of this research, Bernstein's (2008) perception of a 'new petite bourgeoisie' of sex workers was interpreted as representing a new class of sex worker: the 'middle class' sex worker.

The discourse analysis used herein aimed to examine the language used within both male and female heterosexual, and gay and lesbian online escorts' advertisement websites, and its role in offering a type and style of relationship between escort and

client. One aspect of the discourse analysis was to examine the linguistic elements that framed Internet escorting as a ‘middle class’ profession and the escort as catering to ‘middle class’ male and female clients (Bernstein, 2009; Stephens, 2009). This analysis involved a careful examination of ten advertisements for each distinctive escort sample, noting the terms, descriptions, and figures of speech used to refer to the sexual orientation, types and styles of services available. Central to the analysis was an examination of the basis of the shared understanding by the escort and the client of their sexual roles, and how the language displayed within the advertisements sustained this in relation to class distinctions and the sexual orientation of the encounter.

In order to investigate the dominant discourse found within the escort advertisement sample, an understanding of the role of the discourse analysis data collection method was necessary. The focus in linguistic studies has changed in recent decades from the description of formal properties of language as systems to the description of how individuals communicate with each other through the use of language (Caldas-Coulthard, 1993). Powers (1996) described discourse as a language used in everyday speech which is founded on a group of ideas or patterned ways of thinking, speaking and knowing, identifiable within textual and verbal communication. Weedon (1987) previously discussed how language and discourse include subjectivity, which she argued contributed to the conscious and unconscious views and sentiments of the individual, “her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1987: 32).

Discourses were composed of two dimensions: textual and contextual discourse. As Lupton (1992) has summarised, textual dimensions account for the structures of discourses, while contextual dimensions relate to the structural descriptors of the social, political or cultural context in which they take place. The discursive emphasis in this research study involved both textual and contextual aspects, in order to focus on the text as well as giving due consideration to its relationship to context. The examination of social structures and language, and their influence on the production and reproduction of a standardised type of service, could thereby be made visible (Lupton, 1992; Stephens, 2009).

Through the analysis of discourses used this research narrows existing gaps in the literature, whilst linking the ‘new respectability’ of the online sex industry and the emerging new classes of male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian sex workers, who cater for the ‘middle class’ and ‘higher class’ customer (Bernstein, 2008). The research also aims to identify the relationship between escorting and the social and economic status of both the sex worker and their customer. Therefore, central to this discourse analysis was examination of the ‘middle class’ orientated, business-related language used in the advertisements, and an analysis of how such language reinforced the service provider’s portrayal as a specific sexual object attracting the desired customer, whilst also fulfilling the desires of his or her clients for a particular style and type of service.

Discourse analysis was chosen in order to allow the researcher to analyse the language used within the advertisement and its role in sustaining a relationship between the escort and the client. Such an analysis did not argue for or against the ‘truth’ of specific statements in the text; rather, it focused on the existence and message of the texts, and then located them within an historical and social context (Caldas-Coulthard, 1993; Steele and Banhurst, 2003). Steele and Banhurst (2003) has discussed how discourse analysis can allow the researcher to step back and view the language used from an outside perspective, in order to obtain a view of the problem and of ourselves in relation to that problem. Discourse analysis offers the researcher the opportunity to apply critical thought to social situations, whilst also identifying the hidden, or not so hidden, politics entangled within socially dominant and other discourses (Caldas-Coulthard, 1993).

Before utilising the tool of discourse analysis it is important to take into account some of the criticisms of this data collection method. This approach has been criticised on the grounds that the words in a discourse may only be understood accurately in the context in which they occur (Fairclough, 1992). The researcher was all too aware of other data collection methods being available, such as, for example, content analysis. It was felt that a content analysis approach would result in the decontextualisation of words from the discourse being examined, as Billig (1989: 206) has previously noted, in stating ‘this sort of methodology can count words, but it cannot interpret them. Under some circumstances mere counting can lead to misleading conclusions’. For

these reasons, the researcher felt that a discourse approach was the most suitable data collection method for collecting detailed data when identifying the shared understanding of the escort and the client about their sexual roles, and how the language used within the advertisements sustained this type of relationship.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, contradictions arise between the various criminological and social policy approaches to prostitution markets. Therefore, for the purpose of this research these inconsistencies will be understood as a conceptual dilemma, and as such will be treated as an analytical resource for examining how the themes of self-regulation, perception of risk, and the targeting of the 'middle class' customer were portrayed in online escort advertisements. The analysis will pay particular attention to the participants' descriptions of the type and style of service available in relation to the sexual orientation of the encounter, and will then involve a careful reading of the data, whilst observing the terms, descriptions, and language used to refer to aspects of the type and style of service available. The descriptions available are expected to highlight some issues with regard to the type and style of service offered, while also highlighting some of the distinctive characteristics present in the online escort market, in comparison to other prostitution markets and services.

2.2.1. Sampling

In order to select the four distinctive independent advertisement websites that were used to compile a sample of escorting websites. Despite Internet search engines proving very useful in identifying online escort advertisement websites, search results were not always displayed in a uniform manner, and often presented a number of irrelevant search engine websites (Castle and Lee, 2008). Therefore, the websites chosen for the research were initially identified using the search engine Google UK, due to it being ranked as the most popular search engine in online opinion polls by www.searchenginewatch.com (retrieved 23 April 2012). The scope of the study was then limited to escort services, with only four different search terms or keywords having been used: 'female escorts', 'gay escorts', 'straight male escorts' and 'lesbian escorts', in order to identify the relevant websites. Over 12,900,000 results were recorded for female escorts, 10,200,000 for gay escorts, 1,490,000 for straight

male escorts, and 1,610,000 for lesbian escorts, using the search terms previously identified. In addition, two other search engines, Yahoo.com and Bing.com, were also explored to certify that there was not a substantial difference in the results displayed by each of the search engines used. As a consequence of the large number of ‘hits’ for each of the various search terms, only the first hundred displayed websites were examined.

The four websites that were selected for the study advertised independent escort services. Online directories of escort services and agency websites were disregarded, due to the directories being simply a compilation of a list of websites, and therefore irrelevant to the specific search terms. Also only four websites were used within the study, one website for each of the distinctive escort markets, due to issues of practicability, time constraints and relevance to the search term, and because of manageability, and appropriateness for the purposes of a PhD (Blaxter et al., 1996).

For these reasons, the escorts’ advertisements considered as part of this research were selected from the following four websites: Punternet (www.punternet.com) for female escorts catering to heterosexual men, Sleepyboy (www.sleepyboy.com) for male escorts catering to homosexual or bisexual men, Menforhire (www.menforhire.org.uk) for male escorts catering for heterosexual females and Firstcallescorts (www.firstcallescorts.co.uk/lesbian-escorts) for female escorts catering for lesbian or bisexual female customers².

For a five week period during late 2012 ten advertisements from each of the websites were analysed — a total of forty advertisements. An attempt was made to randomise the selection by uploading a full list of advertisements from each website every week and then randomly selecting two from each list. This was done over a period of five weeks, until ten advertisements from each website were collected. This selection method was carried out to ensure that each week of the month was substantially covered, due to escorts tending to repost their advert on a monthly basis. The researcher felt that such a selection process would be more representative of the chosen

²All of the female to female escort advertisements were selected from an agency operated website and in all cases the advertisements were written by a third party. In addition, the researcher and his supervisory team felt that despite the advertisements being selected from the ‘Genuine Lesbian Escort Services’ section of the website it was likely that the selected advertisements were also accessible to male clients.

websites' monthly operations. The number of adverts posted on particular days varied greatly in the female heterosexual and gay male advertisement websites, but was significantly less variable in the heterosexual male and lesbian escort websites.

Separate databases were kept for the links extracted from Punternet, Sleepyboys, Menforhire, and Firstcallescorts, and broken, expired, or otherwise unusable links (e.g. foreign language/disguised pornographic or webcam links) were disregarded. The researcher stopped sampling from any of the given review sites if more than twenty consecutive links were to deferred, broken, or expired websites. All of the examined websites organised their reviews in reverse chronological order, with the more recently posted reviews at the top of the page. Due to the fact that the advertisements were posted daily on the different websites, the lists of reviews were constantly refreshing themselves. The effect of these listing practices therefore impeded the randomisation of the data, such that fully random sampling became impossible.

2.2.2. Coding and variables

Each of the chosen escort advertisement websites was analysed separately. In the first instance the advertisements were divided into different categories and analysed to determine the sexual orientation of the service available and their prospective customers. Then the language used in the advertisements was organised under various categories. In order to identify the dominant discourses used in the escort online advertisement, and how they related to gender, sexuality and social class, a pilot discourse analysis was performed with the researcher's supervisory team. The decision was made to categorise the language as relating to:

- 1) Romance: the code 'romance' referred to language that framed the encounter or escort as romantic, intimate and sensual. Secondly the code referred to the language used to describe the environment or style of setting in which the sexual encounter takes place.

- 2) Safety: the 'safety' code referred to information that alluded to the escort's self-preservation, sexual risk management and perception of risk, as well as escorts honouring their customer's safety or discretion.
- 3) The body: the code 'the body' referred to the escort's physical appearance. Coding around 'the body' was also concerned with how the escort presented the fantasy of their body in relation to the gender and sexuality of their client. In particular it was the use of adjectives and images in the advertisement that promised a type of physique and/or style of escort.
- 4) Sophistication: the code 'sophistication' encompassed escorts' references to having good etiquette, being well-mannered, belonging to a particular social class, and being respectful, trustworthy, and intelligent, or to the provision of a sophisticated service. Also included under this code were escorts' requests for a middle or upper class customer, which the escort would 'honour' with his or her service.
- 5) Submissiveness: the code 'submissiveness' denoted descriptions of the escort's sexual role during the sexual encounter and the escort placing an emphasis on sexually pleasing the client, through submission to the client's sexual fantasy in any way the client wished.
- 6) Encounter (open invitation): the code 'encounter' referred to descriptions of the escort being accessible to all types of clientele that responded to the advertisement. The types of sexual services offered were made quite clear in the form of an open invitation. In order to make a clear distinction between the codes 'encounter' and 'relationship', the researcher used the code 'encounter' to refer to a sexual encounter that offered nothing beyond it, in terms of a longer-term relationship.
- 7) Relationship (exclusive service): the code 'relationship' was concerned with examining the language that was suggestive of a relationship between the escort and client, over and above a one-off encounter. The 'relationship' code also

denoted descriptions of a personalised or exclusive service as well as indicating preference for dating, becoming a girlfriend or boyfriend, or a long-term type of relationship between escort and client.

- 8) Middle class cultural capital: this code was used in order to provide a basis for studying the common understanding between the escort and their client in terms of their sexual roles and how the language used within the advertisements upheld this in relation to class distinctions. The researcher found it helpful to incorporate Bourdieu's (1984) model of social distinction to help identify escorts' displays of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) proposed that cultural products and practices allowed for the classes to differentiate themselves using classifications that defined taste, in a variety of assorted contexts, such as sports, food, art, politics and so forth. As a result of the stark differences between the advertisements in how each of the escort samples displayed cultural capital, the researcher found it appropriate to merge these codes relating to the measurement of social class.
- 9) Open section: this code of an open category was used for recording use of language that did not fit codes 1-8 above.

The categories of analysis were based on the key theories and concepts discussed within the literature review. Each category of analysis examined the 'middle class' orientated business-related language used in the advertisements, and considered how such language displayed the service provider as a specific sexual object attracting the desired customer whilst also fulfilling the requirements of that customer's expectation of a style and type of service.

2.2.3. Strengths and limitations of discourse analysis

This research only investigated Internet escorts found on the review sites Punternet, Sleepyboys, Menforhire and Firstcallescorts, rather than on the Internet at large, due to the vast number of hits and the time constraints of the research study. Findings of the research were therefore specific to each of the four websites analysed. Before

sampling commenced, the researcher periodically examined the selected websites to review the advertisements and to methodically monitor any variations over time. For verification, the researcher reviewed all posted advertisements, including links to other personal websites if listed, to eliminate foreign telephone numbers and mentions of city, country of birth or upbringing, as this research is limited to the UK. As a result, for all sets of gender samples, the researcher used a rigorous collection process, and discarded any advertisement for which it could not be confirmed that the sex worker was UK-based. Potential selection bias exists whether the researcher adopts stringent or looser collection measures; as a direct result, there was no method to determine which selection bias had a more significant impact on the results.

The limited number of listings (in particular female to female) could also hinder the process of randomly obtaining the data. Whilst maximising the randomness of the sample it was necessary, in some circumstances, to systematically sample some of the selected sites for a second time, in order to achieve maximum validity within the collected data.

The researcher acknowledges that the collected qualitative data can only offer insights into the specific material used, and at no stage makes generalisability claims that only a larger quantitative study could realistically offer (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). The researcher is also aware that the findings of the discourse analysis may be representative of a particular website's style of marketing and not representative of all distinct 'virtual' Internet escort advertisements, in relation to types and styles of services provided. The limitations of the data collection methods, as set out above, mean that while conclusions can be made with regard to female to male, male to male, male to female and female to female escort services, discussion of other sexual services made available via the Internet, such as transsexual services, or any other combination were not within the scope of this research, and therefore are left to future research of a similar nature.

2.2.4. Ethical considerations

Due to the advertisements and their content being freely available in the public domain, this part of the research did not require ethical clearance. The ‘public domain’ was viewed in a number of ways, from strictly private, in some areas, through to sites which were open to anyone with Internet access. Bearing these considerations in mind, the use of online material in this research was legitimate (Soothill and Sanders, 2005; Sharpe and Earle, 2007). Nevertheless, it is still important to consider ethics in relation to others when carrying out Internet-mediated research. As Hewson et al. (2003) have noted Internet-mediated investigations raise a number of specific ethical queries, which can become rather problematic at times. Sharpe and Earle (2002) have also discussed a number of ethical issues in their paper, which arose from their content analysis of escort advertisements. Their study expressed concerns over the content of material produced and extracted being outside of the awareness of the domain owner (Sharpe and Earle, 2002). The performance of any given analysis raised elements of concern when participant consent was not sought, and as such this approach involved an element of deception. As Earle and Sharp (2008) further noted, Internet-mediated research concerns centred on three main issues: firstly, whether or not the material was placed in the public domain by the originator; secondly, whether any deception was required to access the data; and thirdly, whether the use of the material, by social scientists, in any way harms or compromises the originator of the material, or its subject(s) (Earle and Sharp, 2008: 17).

Access to the four advertisement websites was free; however, each of the websites also displayed a disclaimer where the users had to consent to the stipulations of the site, which commonly included a self-declaration that the viewer was over 18 years old. Also, all sites to be analysed displayed various links to other websites, which would primarily redirect users to sales of pornography and sexual products (Sharpe and Earle, 2002; Castle and Lee, 2008). Data protection was not a major consideration within this part of the research, as all four of the selected websites were accessible in the public domain. The advertisements and review postings utilised were felt to display fictional names.

Despite the study not revealing the email addresses or names of the escorts in the analysis of the data, the data findings did reveal the names listed within the review postings. Whilst it was possible that individuals could be identified by these chosen names, the researcher felt that because the individual chose to publish this name in a public forum, they would not be placed at significant risk if published (Earle and Sharp, 2007). No further identifying characteristics were used in the study.

2.3. Qualitative semi-structured interviews

When deciding upon a research approach, one must be clear about the level of detail needed in order to address the research questions, thus enabling a methodology that has the potential to offer the most reliable and valid exploration of the topic, whilst encompassing the flexibility needed to gain the information required (Babbie, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). The researcher was interested in the following questions, which required qualitative methods of enquiry: ‘Did the gender and sexuality of the escort and customer influence the character and subjective meaning of the sexual encounter?’ ‘Do heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian escorts construct time spent in and around the encounter differently?’ ‘Were there differences reflected in methods of screening potential customers, in relation to the gender and sexuality of the customer, or did they impede these known protections as a result of perceiving certain genders and sexualities as a lower risk group?’ and ‘Was the perception of risk influenced or altered by the customer’s gender/or sexuality?’ Such research questions required descriptive analysis in order to collect a detailed understanding of the views of those who operated within the online escort market (Silverman, 2005).

To ensure a method of enquiry that allowed exploration of issues too complex to investigate through quantitative means, qualitative interviews were used which incorporated a semi-structured format and open-ended questions (Banister et al., 1994; Babbie, 2001; Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Interviewees were invited to discuss aspects of self-regulation, their perception of the risks involved in Internet escorting, and how important these may be in relation to the performance of their work. This allowed for examination and explanation of the key risks involved in participation in sex work, and the perception of risk in relation to the gender and sexuality of the client, whilst also facilitating further questions about these and surrounding issues. The semi-

structured interview was ‘a conversation with purpose’ and allowed for greater depth of response than self-administered questionnaires, through exploring participants’ stories and perspectives through rich responses and flexibility, rather than asking unchangeable questions which would limit information (Arksey and Knight, 1999). One of the significant factors in using this semi-structured approach was to allow the interviewee to influence the direction of the questions, allowing the questions to be tailored to the interviewee, rather than being bound by standardisation, irrespective of how the interviewee’s discussion was to be portrayed (Banister et al., 1994).

Not only did this method allow for a more positive experience for the interviewee, it also increased the quality of the data gained, with unanticipated responses that emphasised undocumented perspectives, which in turn offered empowerment to disadvantaged groups by validating and publishing their views (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Thus, in contrast to a structured approach, which asks key questions which are then used to respond to the research questions, the semi-structured approach to questions allowed for negotiation (Banister et al., 1994). Given the general lack of empirical evidence on the sexual behaviour of the female client, it seemed appropriate to try to carry out a more detailed qualitative research project, with a relatively small sample from each of the subgroups who enter into the sexual economic exchange, by carrying out a short semi-structured interview.

2.3.1. Sampling

Several sets of challenges are present when researching prostitution markets. Due to the well documented access issues in researching this population, it was extremely difficult to measure the size and boundaries of the individual markets, resulting in difficulties in collecting a representative sample (Shaver, 2005). The researcher was reluctant to obtain access to participants through the adoption of a snowball sampling method because, as documented previously by Sanders (2006), this method has a tendency to be biased towards more cooperative participants. In addition data from key informants (social services agencies, healthcare workers, and the police) generally reflected upon interactions with clients who were in crisis. Subsequently, the accounts of those who were less reluctant to engage in the research have not previously been taken into account, in particular heterosexual male, gay and lesbian Internet escorts

and their clients, who have rarely been recognised within research and academia. Despite targeted sampling being widely used in researching prostitution populations this can only ever be as productive as the researcher's ability to obtain access to the population. With this in mind, careful consideration was also given to any bias which could be introduced when targeting the population, where the most visible participants tend to be oversampled, and the least visible are underrepresented (Shaver, 2005).

Secondly, hidden populations often take part in stigmatised or illegal behaviour, with concerns over confidentiality and privacy therefore being of paramount importance for such groups (Shaver, 2005). Alternatively, participants may disclose information that they perceive to be what the researcher wants to hear. In either event, the researcher will be recollecting reported differences rather than true differences. As a direct consequence, the data, irrespective of how scrupulously collected, is most often the first aspect of the study to be challenged, particularly when not conforming to society's stereotypes of prostitutes or of prostitution (Sanders, 2006).

In order to overcome such sampling biases, participants who operated solely within the outcall/escort market were recruited and sampled. As previously noted in the literature, these independent escort workers expressed greater job satisfaction, whilst appearing to also exercise more choice when entering the business, and being more in control of their working conditions and emotions (Perkins, 1996; Chapkis, 1997; Weitzer, 2007). The researcher contacted these types of participants via email or telephone, by extracting their contact details from each of the four distinctive websites analysed. In order to ensure the comfort of participants each interviewee was given the choice of whether to participate or not, and if they accepted, they would be interviewed in a public setting of their choice. Such an approach addressed concerns regarding trust, privacy, and confidentiality.

After receiving ethical clearance (see Appendix A) the process of accessing the sample was finalised and resulted in ten participants from each sub-market being contacted through the recruitment process discussed below. The aim was to have a total sample of forty participants. In total, twenty-seven escorts came forward to participate in the research. Unfortunately, due to lack of participants coming forward the researcher was not able to reach his interview target of ten participants for each sample.

The study comprised of semi-structured interviews with the following participants:

- 1) Female online escorts who predominantly advertise to heterosexual male customers (n = 9)
- 2) Male online escorts who predominantly advertise to homosexual or bisexual male clients (n = 9)
- 3) Male online escorts who predominantly advertise to heterosexual female clients (n = 7)
- 4) Female online escorts who predominantly advertise to lesbian and bisexual clients (n = 2)

N.B: As discussed above, due to difficulties in obtaining access to female to female escorts, only two female to female escorts were interviewed within this study.

In the case of non-responses, the researcher picked additional random numbers until the sample was complete, following the above process. Participants were informed that the semi-structured interview would contain a number of questions on sensitive topics and were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. The interview was expected to take, on average, between thirty and forty minutes, as time constraints were expected to be an issue for both parties involved in the interview. This process of interviewing took place at different times of the day, within the various participant groups, across the different suburbs of London, in order to obtain the widest possible sample.

Once the researcher had gained contact with the potential participants full information about the study was given and the researcher then discussed his autobiography (Appendices B, C and D) to aid rapport by highlighting the researcher's previous academic studies, interest in the topic, and the importance of the research area. In addition, a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was provided, allowing the participants to become familiar with the research intentions and what it entailed, highlighting the content that would be explored at each stage. Finally, the participants were introduced to the two Consent Forms (Appendices E and F). If the potential participant was happy after all this information had been exchanged (via telephone, email or post) he/she was then asked about the suitability of times available in order to schedule the interviews.

In addition to the timing of the interview, the interview environment was talked through with each of the participants, enabling them to feel comfortable with the decision. It must be noted here that although the interests of the participants were of great importance, the locations had to fit into ethical guidelines to ensure safety for both parties and confidentiality for the participant. It must also be noted here that the researcher was aware of the potential for individuals not to be happy with recordings at all times, so note taking equipment was used in addition to the MP3 recorder.

It is important to note that the researcher specifically initially targeted Internet escorts who predominantly target a specific gender and sexuality in order to eliminate escorts who may target both genders, therefore adding an increased level of strength to the overall qualitative findings. However, due to difficulties in obtaining access to and recruiting female to female escorts, this distinct market was opened up to female escorts who offered sexual services to both men and woman. In addition, a secondary consideration was to restrict the total number of participants to a number both manageable and appropriate within the scope of a PhD. Each of the escorts interviewed gave consent to having the interviews recorded, allowing for a focus on the interviewee and engagement in eye contact and nonverbal communication during the interview (Blaxter et al., 1996). This meant the researcher had a word for word account of the interview, in turn producing a full transcription, which increases the quality of the analysis (Silverman, 2001). To preserve the representativeness of the sample, and the integrity of the database, interviewees were only interviewed if they were perceived not to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time.

All interviews were recorded, evaluated and transcribed by the researcher, and then analysed thematically in relation to key hypotheses using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 10) program. It was important to note the crucial presence of the evaluation process – as it ensured the quality of the recording, alongside concerns such as distortions, which were noted before embarking on the time consuming process of transcription. Therefore each recorded interview was evaluated to ensure it was clear to the researcher and a full transcription could be made.

Thematic analysis was used, as it presents a coherent way of organising interview data in relation to the overall research questions. The themes were identified and used to

group together both the elements of the research questions and the preoccupations presented by the interviewees (Banister et al., 1994; Noaks and Wincup, 2004). An open coding approach was adopted in order to establish the themes identified within the interviews. From then onwards, axial coding provided an insight into the links, and finally selective coding was used to highlight the key themes for the final analysis. The interpretive and flexible coding practice used reflected the key patterns in the participants' responses, across all four samples, which informed the discussion around how and why the escort markets differ.

In addition, a reflexive analysis was carried out. The reflexive approach provided the opportunity for the researcher to identify the constraints of the analysis throughout its production, reflecting on the potential influences of, for example, the reliability of the transcriptions, interpretation concerns, multiple readings, selection of material, access concerns, exploitation, relationships with participants, preferences of analysis strategies, and interpretive stances (Banister et al., 1994). This was carried out in order to measure the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis, which allowed for clear reflections within the discussion of the findings.

2.3.2. Strengths and limitations of using semi-structured interviews

As stated in the previous section of this chapter, rigorous sampling techniques were combined with a participant-centred approach, built on two sets of strategic comparisons: linked to the gender of the escort and the sexuality of the clientele. The selection criteria for participants were based on the escort's sexuality and the sexual orientation of their sexual services. Although any particular chosen interview technique may not allow for the researcher to fully control social, political, and cultural differences, awareness of them informs interpretation of commonalities and differences. The researcher was aware that in considering risk factors related to the behavioural outcomes of self-regulation the parameters needed to be precise. Thus, such exploration into perceptions of risk and its possible links to the self-regulatory structures employed could be seen as a less valid and reliable format (Case and Haines, 2009).

2.4. Ethical considerations

To enable the above qualitative research procedures to be carried out two ethical procedures had to be taken into account. The first was a requirement for any piece of primary research which involved human participants in the academic domain to adhere to the British Sociological Association's ethical guidelines on research involving human beings. This was followed by submitting an ethics proposal for this study to the Department of Criminology and Sociology at Royal Holloway. This process involved a comprehensively written form setting out the intentions, design, procedures and ethical concerns relating to the collection, analysis and storage of the data (see Appendix A for the full application). Although a time consuming and demanding task, it allowed the researcher to finely tune the development of the research design, and all the relevant documentation, whilst ensuring all elements were ethically sound from the points of view of both supervisors and the British Sociological Association. The process in its entirety took around three months, with the processes leading up to its presentation to the ethics panel being made up of drafting versions of both the ethics form and documentation. The panel itself consisted of multi-disciplinary academics who gave further guidance on the content of the ethics proposal. This forum was not only a good source of direction, but also allowed the researcher to openly discuss his concerns and defend his ethical intentions.

Care was taken to ensure the researcher had followed the ethical protocol of the lone working policy within the research setting, as set out within the Royal Holloway's (University of London) Fieldwork Risk Assessment documentation. In addition to the researcher's skills and experiences within the field and his training, discussions occurred with respect to the levels of risk, and procedures were put in place to ensure safety was paramount at all times, in line with the British Society of Criminology (2011) rules on researcher safety. The researcher followed recommended precautions within the fieldwork: a mobile phone was carried by the researcher at all times; the research was carried out in a safe environment that was not isolated; the researcher was aware of the area in which the research took place and ensured familiarity with access routes to it; an attack alarm was carried at all times; an inexpensive mobile phone pre-programmed with relevant emergency numbers was carried at all times; and

no valuable items were carried or worn throughout the fieldwork. In addition the researcher filled out the fieldwork log for each visit (see Appendix G for template).

Confidentiality and anonymity are of great concern when conducting research with human participants, and care was taken to ensure that all participants were informed of how the data would be anonymised and made confidential (BSC, 2011: 3). Protecting individuals' details was of crucial importance as the informed consent given by the participants was based on the researcher's ability to uphold this agreement. Therefore, to ensure these ethical criteria were adhered to, the following procedures were put into place.

After confirmation, participant contact was made, and each participant was given a unique ID number. This was then used in all documentation relating to that individual, including hard copies, recordings and computer saved files (Aldridge, Medina and Ralphs, 2010). All of this information was then stored on encrypted files on a password protected encrypted drive, and remained at the site of the university to reduce the risk of accidental loss. In addition, a separate password encrypted file linked each participant's unique ID number to a pseudonym, reducing the risk of compromising the analysis by loss of meaning if the links were severed (Aldridge et al., 2010: 8). Through these protections participants' details were not recognisable at any point within the fieldwork, analysis, write up or storage of the data. Hard copies of information relating to each of the participants' unique ID numbers were stored in a secure filing cabinet until the data was fully coded into a password protected file. Once the process of coding was complete, the hard copies were destroyed.

The researcher was also aware of the issues of confidentiality inherent in recording interviews. Therefore voice recordings gathered in the field were heavily secured from the onset, with each recording being linked to a pseudonym (as highlighted above). As soon as the recordings were made, care was taken by the researcher to transfer them into an encrypted file on a portable password protected drive (remaining coded), before travelling with the data. Backups were also made to portable media (USB drives) that had been encrypted and were carried separately in case of loss or theft (Aldridge et al., 2010: 7). Finally, the original recordings were permanently deleted from the device as

soon as the above process had been carried out, so that there was no possible way of them being retrieved (Aldridge et al., 2010: 7).

The final concern was to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to within the writing up and presentation of the research. All quotes that were used have been anonymised so that the participants are not easily recognisable. This was crucial as the researcher gave reassurance that information disclosed would not be linked back to the particular participant (Babbie, 2001).

2.4.1. Data protection

Closely linked to the importance of confidentiality and anonymity is data protection, which is an extremely important ethical concern to address. The entire study had to fit within the Data Protection Act (1998) and follow its eight guiding principles. In order to highlight this in a clear format, the following table was used to present the processes followed to adhere to each principle.

Table 2.1: The guiding principles of the Data Protection Act (1998) and ethical response

Principle	Response
Data must be processed fairly and lawfully.	In order to ensure the data was processed fairly, the researcher used the same thematic analysis with NVivo for each interview. All of the data was processed in line with the eight principles and ethical criteria of confidentiality.
Data must be collected and processed for only one or more specified purposes. In other words, we must not collect data for one reason and then use it for something else.	The data collected was only used as set out within the UREC application and supporting documents. The researcher confirmed that if there were alterations within the research analysis they would

	submit an additional application before carrying out any alterations.
Data we hold must be adequate for its purpose or purposes but not excessive or irrelevant.	The Interview Schedule was produced to ensure that only information necessary for the research was collected.
Data must be accurate and, where necessary, kept up-to-date.	Full transcriptions were made by the researcher to ensure all information was correct, and these were double checked.
We must not keep data for longer than necessary.	The researcher will remain the main custodian of the data generated through the study until his tenure as a PhD student is completed, thereafter the researcher's supervisor will take possession the data for a period of 5 years in line with recommendations.
We must process data in accordance with the rights of the data subject under the Act.	The data processed was done so in accordance with the privacy of the participant and all the governing principles of the Data Protection Act (1998).
Data must be kept securely and we must guard against its accidental loss.	Please see the discussion of confidentiality and anonymity above, showing how all data was kept securely and protected against loss at all times.
We must not transfer personal data outside the European Economic Area unless the country receiving it has an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of data subjects.	None of the personal data was transferred away from the researcher's country of study.

N.B. Information for this table was extracted from the Resource Pack for Social Care, *Research Governance Framework* (2010).

2.5. Conclusion

This qualitative style of research has provided a systematic and comparative approach to the online escort industry, allowing the researcher to identify any core similarities or differences that may exist between each of the distinctive online escort markets. Therefore this research has overcome some of the limitations of previous studies on prostitution, which were commonly divided into separate studies of male and female workers with no comparative examinations at the same level of work (Weitzer, 2005).

The qualitative methodological approaches used to analyse online escort submarkets were seen to be invaluable due to the empirical information they would capture, but also with regards to their theoretical contribution to analysis of the online escort market. Both of the data collection methods used within this study provided an understanding of what services the escort offers to the customer, whilst also examining the escorts' experiences of managing risk before, during and after the client encounter. Both of the methodological approaches used within the research also allowed for testing of the argument posited above regarding the vocational aspects of the online escort market. This research has therefore helped to determine the degree to which a sex worker's gender and the sexuality of their client shaped their experience of their work, and whether the gender and sexual orientation of an escort's services predispose them to risk.

CHAPTER THREE

What's on Sale? A Discourse Analysis of Four Distinctive Online Escort Advertisement Websites

3.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the social class of sex workers presents a fundamental starting point in understanding sex work. As Bernstein (2007) and others have argued, the social class of sex workers and the organisation and structure of the sex worker market are key elements in the construction of the online escort market, not only in the targeting of middle class clients, but also in the implementation of middle class values in its self-regulatory structuring and in the self-preservation of the market (Bernstein, 2007; Ray, 2007; Young, 2008).

In order to explore and research these claims further, the researcher felt that the online escort advertisements posted by sex workers, from each of the four distinctive escort markets, would be useful in providing an insight into how sex workers present themselves as 'middle class' men and women, selling companionship and sexual services to middle class clients. It was how these social class structures were presented within the different escort sector advertisements, to entice a particular type or class of client, which was of interest for this study. An aspect of discourse analysis was to examine the linguistic elements that supported the understanding of Internet escorting as a 'middle class' profession, which catered to 'middle class' and 'higher class' male and female clients. These structures were one of the key interests of this research and the findings are documented in this chapter.

A similar research study was conducted by Stephen (2009), who focused purely on female escort advertisements featured in the Australian Yellow Pages. Stephen (2009) suggested that escort advertisements offered the fulfillment of a fantasy, presented through careful choice of language. In this context the fantasy was set by the client, and it was the escort's role to fulfill it. Similarly, a number of other researchers have examined the language of personal advertisements (e.g. Hall, 1995; Shalom, 1997). Shalom (1997) referred to written personal advertisements in his study, in an attempt

to describe the advertiser and, using a limited amount of words, attract the attention of a particular type of partner. However the particular conditions and language of online escort advertisements, in the targeting of both male and female 'middle class' clients, remains under-investigated. Those studies focusing on the ways in which male and female sex workers advertise on the Internet have been constrained to contextual analysis, and as such rarely make comparisons between online escort markets in relation to the escort's gender and the sexual orientation of their services (cf. Sharpe and Earl, 2005; Castle and Lee, 2008; Agresti, 2009). To date, this research is the first of its kind to focus on all four of the distinctive online escort markets in order to identify the main similarities (if any) and differences in the ways in which male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escorts advertise themselves.

The analysis involved a careful examination of ten advertisements for each distinctive escort sample, noting the terms, descriptions and figures of speech and pictures used to refer to the sexual orientation, types and styles of services available. Central to the analysis was an examination of the basis of a shared understanding by the escort and the client of their individual roles, and how the language used within the advertisements sustains this. The second aim of the research was to draw out the differences and/or similarities between the sectors and how each of the markets compared with each of the others.

Separate databases were kept for the links extracted from Punternet, Sleepyboys, Menforhire, and Firstcallescorts, and any broken, expired, or otherwise unusable links (for example, foreign language or disguised pornographic or webcam links) were disregarded. In the first instance, the advertisements were divided into different markets and analysed to determine the sexual orientation of the service available and their prospective customers. Then the language used in the advertisements was organised under various codes, with the analysis being based on the key theories and concepts discussed within the literature review. Each code of analysis was examined for the 'middle class' orientated business related language used in the advertisements, and how such language portrayed the service provider as a specific sexual object attracting the desired customer, whilst also fulfilling the requirements of that customer's expectation of a style and type of service. For ease of analysis and readability the codes were broken down into subheadings with each subheading

providing an explanation of the code meaning and purpose, followed by analysis of the data relating to each of the different online escort sectors.

3.2. What's on sale?

The first part of the data collection phase of the research was concerned with collecting detailed information with regard to how the language used within the advertisement portrayed the escort as a specific sexual object designed to attract the desired client, whilst also fulfilling the requirements of that client's expectation of a style and type of service.

3.2.1. Romance

The code 'romance' referred to identifying any language within the advertisement that could be defined as romantic, intimate or sensual. Secondly, the code referred to the language used to describe the environment or style of setting in which the sexual encounter was to take place.

Four of the female to male escorts' advertisements made reference to a romantic experience. In all cases those female to male escorts who made reference to romance described the affiliated qualities of the ideal woman and did so in only a few words. Escorts typically presented themselves using the words '*sensual*', '*romantic*' or '*flirtatious*'. As Lakoff (2004: 42) has commented, in order to appeal to and attract the attention of men, a 'woman's language' might need to sound 'frilly' and 'feminine'. This aligned with female to male escorts tailoring the language they used within the advert to conform to masculine notions of femininity. As Hall (1995) noted within her study exploring the verbal techniques used by telephone sex workers, women often fashioned a range of working identities, mimicking various ethnicities and personalities, in order to create a 'fantasy woman' for the benefit of their customers. Again, features of Lakoff's (2004: 42) 'women's language' were noted as a tool for women in creating these fantasised feminine working identities. As Butler (1993) has long argued, gender and sexuality are not only socially, but also discursively, constructed. In this context, gendered interactions could result in an expectation that

same sex and opposite sex partners will regulate their responses in relation to emotional expression, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies (Hall and Briton, 1993).

References to 'romantic' discourses were often far more apparent and developed in the male to female escort advertisements. The offering of romance appeared to be far more prominent, and also appeared to be a central marketing feature employed to attract the female client. The proposal of a romantic experience was typically displayed in a chivalrous heteronormative fashion. One male to female advertisement promised the female client, '*Confident young man with a romantic and passionate side*' with a '*something very special quality*'. In other adverts escorts were flirtatious in their language, for example: '*The words can flow on that page but will be just words, is [sic] better to describe myself whispering into your ear*'. As with the marketing strategies employed by the female escort, male escorts used language defined as intimate and sensual, which played to the fantasy of the perfect 'gentleman'. Such language was suggestive of male escorts tailoring their language, in line with the masculine notion of feminine ideals.

These findings suggest that male to female marketing ploys were founded upon a paternalistic chivalrous belief system, whereby the female client was treated with courtesy and consideration, but her role within the sexual encounter was restricted with regard to the initiation of intimacy (cf. Glick et al., 1997). However, in all of the male to female escorts' advertisements considered within this research, it was made clear by the escorts that they held the belief that their clients sought 'romance', in the style of a chivalrous form of courtship. As Vicki, Abrams and Hutchison (2003: 534) have argued chivalrous behaviour, in terms of courtship, was based on the assumption that men 'essentially' do all the 'work' during courtship, whilst women were expected to adopt a 'passive role'. Therefore, male to female escort advertisements were far more likely to offer the customer a romantic dating experience than were the female to male advertisements. Compared to any of the other escort advertisement samples the male to female escorts were also more likely to make reference to the traditional role of the man in a relationship. The frequency of references to the romantic elements of the service in the male to female escort advertisements asserted a dominant male role within the encounter, a role that was potentially constructed by socially conditioned male practices, such as courtship and chivalry (Click and Friske, 1996). In comparison

to the female to male sample, where language suggested a far more passive and sensual offering, heterosexual male escorts were far more forward in using romantic language and gestures.

In stark contrast, none of the male to male advertisements made reference to romance. One escort described himself as '*very easy to get along with and great company before and after*'. However, he does not imply that there will be any romantic gestures, or make reference to the encounter being romantic in nature or environment. Instead the advertisements were of a more sexually explicit nature, with a greater emphasis on selling the body, and in particular, the size of the penis (see discussion of 'The Body' below). Although it may be important to note that, despite male to male escorts not using language to indicate that they offer romance or a romantic encounter, all of the male to male escort advertisements in the sample stated that the escort would be willing to 'kiss' the client. However, again it should be noted that this aspect of the advertisement information came via an imposed pro forma template that consisted of structured headings, with one of the heading fields asking whether the escort would be willing to 'kiss' the client. Regardless of the limited lists of attributes and services used in the male to male advertisements, compared to the other distinctive escort samples which were more open in nature, distinctions can be drawn to suggest romantic and more intimate services were commonly expected and provided within the online escort market. Also it was interesting to note that several of the male to male advertisements stated that the escort would also provide the 'Boyfriend Experience' (BFE). Escorts stating that they would be willing to provide the client with a 'BFE' were commonly referring to their wiliness to provide their clients with services such as kissing, hugging, caressing and mutual oral sex acts, as required. Again, although not using a romantic discourse, the advert gave a clear sense that the client could expect a greater depth to the sexual encounter, beyond the act of mechanical sex. Regardless of the closed lists of attributes and services used in the male to male advertisements, in comparison to the other distinctive escort samples, which were of a more open description, distinctions can be drawn to some extent, suggesting romantic and more intimate services were also commonly provided within the male to male online escort market.

Similar to their female to male counterparts, over half of the female to female³ escort advertisements featured in the discourse analysis made reference to the offering of romance, with the offer of romance appearing to be a prominent and central marketing feature. A romantic discourse was displayed in a variety of ways, for example; *'...Perfect company for a romantic evening or a luxury weekend away...'* and *'...Alisha is a very open minded, romantic and charming, making her the perfect GFE companion...'*.

What was interesting to note were the similarities in the offering of romance between the male to female and female to female escort markets. Central to both the male to female and the female to female escort markets was the selling of a romantic dating experience that went beyond mechanical sex, but the two markets do differ slightly. The male to female advertisements appeared to advertise a form of courtship, for example, *'I am the perfect gentleman any lady would want to be seen with on my arm'*, normally followed by an indirect statement implying that sex was available, such as, *'I encourage more than a one hour booking, I am a young man who needs to be explored'*. Conversely, female to female advertisements commonly used language referring to the offering of romance, such as *'making her the perfect GFE companion'*. Despite these differences being subtle they raised further interesting questions around female passivity and male dominance and ownership (cf. Sanchez et al., 2006; Sanchez and Kiefer, 2007).

3.2.2. Safety

The safety code referred to information that alluded to the escort's self-preservation, sexual risk management and perception of risk, as well as to escorts honouring their customer's safety or discretion. It was striking to note that only two out of the eleven advertisements analysed within the female to male sample placed any emphasis on safety. This was despite the grave concerns with regard to safety and protection which were later expressed by some of the female escorts who participated in the semi-

³ As discussed earlier in the methodology chapter, all of the female to female escort advertisements were selected from an agency operated website and in all cases the advertisements were written by a third party. In addition, the researcher and his supervisory team felt that despite the advertisements being selected from the 'Genuine Lesbian Escort Services' section of the website it was likely that the selected advertisements were also accessible to male clients.

structured interviews. Moreover only one of the advertisements used language that related to the self-protection methods employed by escorts, which was again a matter discussed in the semi-structured interviews. However, safety concerns were constructed in a number of different ways through the language used within the advertisements, and these were specifically related to the gender and sexual orientation of the escort. The language used included several references to discretion on the part of the female escort, and in relation to the business premises, such as having a discreet in-call service or discreet location.

Concerns over safety, in the form of risk management strategies, began, for a handful of escorts, in the wording of their online escort advertisement. What is also interesting to note is that several female to male and male to male escorts also discussed this issue in the interviews. Unlike other studies, discourse analysis and interviewing methods have allowed for a deeper sociological understanding of the risk management strategies that escorts employ before, during and after the client encounter. It was clear that within most of the advertisements there was a paramount concern about the moral context of the interaction, evidenced by repeated references within the advertisements to the privacy and protection of clients' interests.

Concerns in relation to safety within the female to male advertisement samples involved the escort's self-preservation through limiting the body parts and services offered. Despite none of the escorts explicitly stating that they would not engage in a particular sexual act, it was more than likely that they wouldn't directly advertise the lack of a sexual act but would instead use a disclaimer of some sort. For example, one of the escort's advertisements stated, *'Do not miss out. Most services offered'*. By using the word 'most' the escort discreetly introduces a disclaimer that she has her own sexual boundaries. This invited the client to put forward his sexual desires beforehand, whilst allowing for the escort to refuse or negotiate, such that there was a degree of control on her part. Other concerns around safety related to the escort requiring the client to reveal some sort of identity, be it through email, thus traceable through his computer's IP address, or a telephone number, for example: *'Sorry no appointments will be accepted by text message or withheld number'*. This type of language was only noted in one advert but was commonly discussed by female to male escorts within the semi-structured interviews. In the interviews escorts indicated that

they would not accept withheld numbers for fear of abuse (prank calls), the possibility of clients booking and then not showing up to the appointment, and because they could not use the telephone number as a tool to identify the client if the encounter was of a negative experience (see Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of this). Several of the female to male escorts referred to their client's safety and privacy, for example '*discreet incalls*' or '*secure discreet parking*'. It was apparent that within the advertisements sampled female to male escorts placed equal, if not greater, emphasis on the client's self-protection than on their own.

Similarly to the female to male sample, male to female escorts' advertisements also included references to the privacy of the client. Interestingly, all of the displayed discourses in relation to safety were concerned for the safety and discretion of the female client, not the escort. Male escorts also tended to place a far greater emphasis on being able to look like a genuine male companion, and offered assurances that they would uphold the contract '*I can fit into [sic] environment & situation with extreme ease so be rest assured, your secret is safe*'. Such a discourse suggested that the escort expects to attend a social event with the female customer, before committing himself to any sexual contact. Other references to safety involved offering the assurance that the client would have a '*comfortable, safe, exciting and enjoyable time no matter the occasion*'. Again it would appear that the escort was assuring the client that he would honour the contract throughout the encounter, and it was apparent that there was little regard for the escort's own personal or sexual safety. The language used by male to female escorts regarding safety was more suggestive of a socially- and culturally-constructed chivalric code upheld by male escorts, where it was presumed that the female client was far more vulnerable than the male escort, and would be nervous about seeking their services. Again, male to female escorts arguably displayed a degree of benevolent sexism in their assumption that it was their duty to protect and look after their female companion during the encounter (c.f. Glick et al., 2000).

References by male to male escorts to safety also placed an emphasis on the client's safety. However what is unique to this sample is that several references to safety were made in relation to sexual safety, informing potential clients that the escort only engaged in safe sex. Only three out of ten of the male to male advertisements made any reference to safety concerns regarding the encounter, and only two of the

advertisements made reference to the use of condoms: *'I only ever play safe, no exceptions to the rules'* and *'...Safe only please. I don't do bareback – safe sex only'*. What was striking to note was that only in the male to male advertisements did any of the escorts use language to refer to safe sex during the encounter. These statements alone appear to tap into the discourse surrounding gay sex and HIV status, and were suggestive of deterring potential clients from requesting bareback sex, whilst reinforcing a professional code of conduct. Previous academic research had identified male escorts as a group at risk of HIV infection (Williams et al., 2003), however such studies have frequently been criticised on the grounds of data measurement and failure to specify the market type (Parsons et al., 2004). Similar studies focusing on the prevalence of HIV transmission between gay sex workers and clients have contradicted previous findings and concluded that, in fact, most gay sex workers have used sexual protection, particularly when soliciting via the Internet (Minichiello et al., 2000). This research seemed to confirm this idea; certainly, the male to male escort advertisements were the only ones that mentioned the use of condoms and sexual health.

On the other hand, given the strong feelings around safe sex expressed by male to male escorts in the semi-structured interviews, it was surprising that only two advertisements made reference to this. It could be that safe sex was so standardised in the gay escort market that it did not need to be mentioned. In addition, the lack of safety concerns regarding the practicing of safe sex in each of the other distinctive escort advertisements may be due to safer sex practices being standard practice within each of the markets, so that there was less demand by clients for unsafe sex, or escorts perceived there to be less of a risk.

Interestingly, only one of the male to male escorts made reference to the offering of a discreet service to clients: *'Hi there, I am offering you discreet [sic] and very good service you can ever imagine'*. This was perhaps surprising when considering that within the semi-structured interviews most of the male to male escorts described their clients as middle aged married men. Again, escorts may not have felt that they had to elaborate on the offering of a discreet service as this may just have been another integral part of seeking sexual services from escorts via the Internet. The male to female escorts again significantly differed from the other samples. Language relating

to safety was identified in most of the escort advertisements and notably such language contained references to a chivalric code, whereby it would appear that most of the male escorts believed themselves to be responsible for their female client's safety. Language displayed with regard to the female client's safety was often based on the assumption that the female client was very vulnerable and would be nervous about seeking the services of a male escort via the Internet. For example: *'rest assured I will show you a relaxed safe and enjoyable time'*. Language found within male to female advertisements was often written in the style of offering assurance to the female client.

Personal safety concerns would appear to be less of a priority for female to female escorts. Only two out of the ten advertisements analysed within the discourse collection made any reference to safety, and in both of these cases references were in the form of a legal disclaimer. This may be due to the advertisements being written by a third party, the agency, more concerned with the legal aspects of the escort business than with the health and personal safety of the escorts themselves. Agency disclaimers were also of a typical format, for example; *'All our ladies are self-employed and are responsible for paying their own tax and National Insurance'* or *'In no way do they offer illegal or immoral services. Fees are paid for the time and companionship only. If anything else occurs it is a matter of mutual choice between consenting adults'*. The disclaimer that was displayed on each of the different advertisements was arguably a contradiction in terms, as it stated that the escort does not have to have sex with the client, whereas the actual advertisements stated otherwise — for example, that *'she will show all a good time sexually'*. As became apparent within most of the distinctive escorts' advertisements, with the exception of male to male, little concern was shown with regard to the escort's personal safety. Instead, the emphasis was again placed on the client's personal safety, or in the case of the female to female advertisements, the escort agency put their own safety first, regarding the legality of their operations.

Safety concerns were constructed in a number of different ways via the language used within the advertisements and were specifically related to the gender and sexual orientation of the escort. Within the online escort advertisements there appeared to be little reference made to the escort's personal safety, and instead most references to safety related to that of the client, with this being particularly true for the male to female advertisements. What is interesting to note is that in the cases where escorts

used language within their advertisements with regard to their personal safety the advertisements were aimed at male clientele.

3.2.3. *The body*

The code 'the body' refers to the depiction of the escort's physical appearance. Coding around 'the body' was also concerned with how the escort presented the fantasy of their body in relation to the gender and sexuality of their client. In particular it was the use of adjectives and photographic images in the advertisement that promised a type of physique and/or style of escort.

All of the female to male escort advertisements placed an emphasis on selling 'the body' through language and photographic images. The language used in the advertisements presented the female body as a central selling point. The body was either described in the form of 'stats' or in a more descriptive manner. Regardless of the style of writing all of the advertisements placed an emphasis on parts of the body that were culturally constructed as sexually attractive in women, such as legs, breasts or bottom, for example; *'Attractive blond in my mid 40s, leggy 5'8ft tall, toned and tanned size 10/12 body with 36D breasts'*. More elaborate descriptions of the body appeared in several of the advertisements, in which the escort commonly described themselves in the third person: *'stunning escort with perfect long legs and sexy curves'*. Notably, all of the advertisements featured in the female to male escort sample were marketed towards socially and culturally constructed traditionally masculine desires and sexual preferences.



Figure 1.1 – Female to male escort
(<http://www.punternet.com>)

As Wiggins (1968: 83) noted within his study, examining the relationship between individual men’s personalities and preferences for certain female body shapes, men’s “preference for specific body parts was associated with personality and background characteristics”, further noting that men often referred to themselves as ‘breast’, ‘legs’ or ‘bottom’ men. According to the research’s findings, men’s preference for large breasts, large buttocks, and legs was linked with the need for achievement, while those men who favoured women with smaller breasts, buttocks and legs all reported coming from middle to upper-class backgrounds. Despite the online escort industry being a relatively new sex market, Wiggins’ (1968) study offered some understanding of why some of the female escorts in the sample emphasised different body parts through the use of photographs, when appealing to the different types of clients. This is further emphasised by the Figure 1.1 the advertisement.



Figure 1.2 – Female to male escort
(<http://www.punternet.com>)

Female to male escorts were the only escort sample to identify the characteristics of their services by offering up a variety of embodied performances. For example: *‘See me in many of my different outfits, rubber, PVC, naughty nurse, or sexy secretary or just --my sex underwear’*. Many of the female escorts also offered their clients a service in the pretence of role play, from *‘School girl – Nurse – Secretary – slave girl –Prisoner- Head Girl to Naughty Niece and much more’*. Therefore, it appeared that female to male escorts were far more likely to re-style the body according to their client’s desires than any of the other samples within the research.

Unlike the photographs displayed in other types of escorts' advertisements, three of the ten female to male advertisement photographs did not display a clear facial photograph of the escort. Typically the faces of the women were blurred, cropped, or censored in some manner, in what can only be assumed to be an attempt at concealing their identity, suggesting that there was still significant stigma attached to female to male sex work. This is something that was not felt so widely in each of the other distinctive markets in which all of the escorts displayed at least one clear face photograph.

What was also interesting to note about the majority of photographic images displayed within the female to male advertisements was the facial and bodily postures of the women. When viewing these photographs it is useful to reflect on the work of Jon Berger (1972) in his highly influential book and BBC television programme *Ways of Seeing*. Berger (1972) believed a woman's nakedness in art was to be a woman without disguise, a form of non-dress that objectified women according to male-dominated capitalist ways of seeing. To simplify, Berger (1972: 45-7) noted that "according to usage and conventions, which were at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome [...] Men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at". In other words men act and women appear. Berger's (1972) work, in relation to the photographs used in the advertisements that are illustrated here, could arguably help define the role of the female escort within the context of the advertisement, together with how the photograph was displayed. Most of the photographs displayed in the female to male advertisements depicted the female escort in various poses, which were very much suggestive of sexual submissiveness. Female escorts commonly displayed photographs of themselves either caressing their breasts or bending over. This could be interpreted as her being ready and waiting for the arrival of her client. As Smith (1991: 34) has suggested, "the nude in the art is totally submissive, she awaits the man who will possess her and every line of the pose tells us she will not resist him". Furthermore Messaris (1997: 45) has noted that historically, "direct views into the camera have tended to be the exception rather than the rule in some ads aimed at men".



Figure 1.3 – Male to female escort
(www.gentlemen4hire.com)

The gaze of males, in images and art aimed at women, often displayed the model as looking upwards, being somewhat suggestive of the male's spirituality (Dyer, 1982). The model's face and body may be the subject for his audience to view, but his gaze was very much suggestive that he had his mind fixed on higher things. It was this upwards-striving gaze what was assumed to captivate the audience (Dyer, 1982). In this context, the male model felt bound to avoid the 'femininity' of being portrayed as a passive object, by displaying an active gaze. As displayed in Figure 1.3 all of the male to female escort advertisements displayed at least one photograph of the male escort's face and exposed torso. What was also quite notable was that the photographs appeared to display the escort with an active gaze in a direct stance toward the camera.

Males have also appeared as nude subjects in art, but to a much lesser extent than females. In fact, as witnessed in European art over the last six centuries, total male nudity, in comparison to full female nudity, still remains a taboo. This may help to explain why none of the photographs of the male to female escorts showed any full nudity.

What was interesting to note was the stark contrast between how male to female and male to male escorts presented themselves through the use of visual images. In all cases the male to male escort showed pornographic images of an erect penis, as well as other male body parts, within their advertisements. Nudity, and in some cases pornographic images, were also a common occurrence within the female to male advertisements. In six cases, the female to male escorts displayed their breasts, vagina or bottom, and within those cases, two of the advertisements displayed pornographic images, with one example being two women engaging in oral sex. These findings would appear to suggest that when advertising to the male client, escorts were far more willing, or expected, to objectify their bodies in order to appeal to masculine desires.

Male to female escorts' advertisements, like those of their female to male counterparts, also advertised the body as a central selling point; however the body was represented in terms of a style, and not as a sexual commodity. Descriptions of the body were all given in a more vivid manner, and not in the form of 'stats', as noted within the female to male and male to male advertisements. Unlike their female to male counterparts, none of the male to female advertisers made reference to their specific body parts. Instead reference was made to the escort's presentation, height, build, or, commonly, their personal fitness: *'I really enjoy sport and keeping fit which means gym training, cycling, kickboxing and gymnastics'*. Most of the escorts clearly indicated that they had *'impeccable presentation'* [sic], with some even boasting *'a variety of outfits to suit all occasions whether indoors or outdoors'* thus reinforcing the idea of the escort living what Bourdieu (1991) describes as the expressive lifestyle.

All of the male escorts also described their body within their prose, and unlike the other escort advertisement sample groups, did not discuss the body in a sexual manner. Instead reference was made to the smartness of dress, personal fitness, or, commonly, the height of the escort. More often than not male escorts used sexual innuendo within the advertisements instead of specifically referring to their sexual body parts. For example: *'I am a hot, ripped athletic, masculine and horny with a lot of stamina'* and *'So if your desire is for a handsome sexy man call me'*. What is also interesting to note is that none of the male to female escorts displayed any images of male genitalia, although in most of the advertisements they did display their torso alongside a head shot. This may be because male escorts wished to present themselves as linguistically competent gentlemen, or wished to distance themselves from any suggestion of the escort being a commodity for hire. Instead what they wanted to advertise was a full descriptive account of their character and the potential dating experience.

Emphasis on the male escort's height was a feature of all of the advertisements (e.g. *'height: 1.78'* and *'5ft8 ex-soldier'*), which could have been specifically aimed at women who favour taller men, and would fit into the stereotype of the tall, dark and handsome stranger. A number of studies have previously highlighted height as a particular characteristic valued in both men and women. One such study, conducted by Courtiol, Raymond and Ferdy (2010), concluded that women preferred taller men and, conversely, men preferred women shorter than themselves, which could explain

why escorts, in the female to male advertisements, rarely revealed details of their height. It would appear that women placed, or the male escorts felt that women placed, less importance on specific parts of the male body and more on their height and/or presentation in general.

Like their female to male, male to female and female to female escort counterparts, the body was a central selling point within all of the male to male advertisements analysed. This is perhaps unsurprising as the male to male advertisement host website provided a structured template for the advertisements, which included the heading 'stats'. This therefore encouraged escorts to reveal details of their height, build, and weight, and also included the size of their penis. Typically most of the male to male escorts described their physique in the form of 'stats', but some chose to give far more elaborate descriptions in addition. For example: '*...I GO TO THE GYM REGULAR AND IN [sic] GREAT SHAPE...*' or '*...my name is Dani 20 years old, Spanish Guy Male with brown eyes and black hair...*'. It was notable that male to male escorts emphasised the most detail within their advertisements by far with regard to their sexual organs. This can only suggest that gay escorts feel that the size and length of their penis is paramount when it comes to attracting male clients. These findings are very much reflective of Bordo's (1999) study where it was noted that stereotypically in Westernised cultures the shape and size of a man's penis is linked to cultural notions of masculinity.

Interesting comparisons were also drawn between the ways in which female to male and male to male escorts defined their sexual role within the advertisement. In both the male to female and male to male samples escorts stated their willingness to adopt either a dominant or a passive approach within the sexual encounter. In the case of the female to male escort the escort may have stated she offered BDSM services. In the case of the male escort he may also have stated that he is a top only, indicating that the escort would adopt a dominant role within the encounter. It would appear that when advertising to the male client the role of the escort was central in the marketing.

It was also interesting to note that all but one of the female to female advertisements featured within this study placed an emphasis on selling the body. As witnessed in the other distinctive escort advertisements, the body seemed to be a central selling point

within the female to female advertisements, with all being described within a feminine norm. The body was either described in the form of 'stats' or in a more descriptive sexual manner. For example, in the form of 'stats': *Age 20, Height 5.5, Stats: 34B, Dress 8, Hair Brunette, Eye colour Brown* or in a more descriptive fashion, '*... She has a real zest for life; keeping fit, ensuring her sexy body is always in shape*' and '*Alisha has a very fit, toned body and looks very hot with her cheeky smile...*'. Most of the female to female escort advertisements gave a detailed description of the body according to the pro forma of the agency through which they were advertising. Like their male to female counterparts, descriptions and photographs of the body were often more sophisticated, and only one of the advertisements displayed a semi-nude photograph. More often than not, female escorts were described using language in the form of sexual innuendo, instead of referring to sexual body parts (e.g. '*she will leave you feeling hot underneath the collar*'). Like their male to female counterparts, this may have been because female escorts wished to present themselves as linguistically competent.

Interestingly, escorts who advertised for male clients used gendered euphemisms when describing their sexual organs within their advertisements, whereas female to male escorts used a feminine form of language when making reference to body parts. For example, escorts often used language such as '*busty*' or '*perky*' when describing their breasts. This style of language is suggestive of female to male escorts tailoring their language to align with masculine notions of the ideal of femininity. Male to male escorts, on the other hand, used more sexually direct language, for example, '*big stiff cock*' or '*tight ass for you*'. Female to male and male to male escorts' descriptions of the body were very much worded using gendered feminine or masculine forms of language, in relation to male heterosexual or homosexual sexual desire

Escorts placed a focus on the power of their language when referring to parts of the body, in the face of compulsory gender and sexual normativities. Arguably, escorts in this study capitalised on men's preferences for certain body parts. Therefore, the findings of this research are very much in line with Wiggins' (1968: 83) study, which made the point that most men held a certain "preference for specific body parts" and that this "is associated with personality and background characteristics", further noting that most men tend to refer to themselves as breast, legs or bottom men. In this context

female to male escorts play into the dominant male cultural division of bodies into categories, as well as the ways in which gender is conceptualised within the context of sexuality (Zimman, 2014).

3.2.4. Sophistication

The code ‘sophistication’ encompassed escorts’ references to having good etiquette, being well-mannered, of a particular social class, and respectful, trustworthy, and intelligent, or to the provision of a sophisticated service. Also included under this code were escorts’ requests for a middle or upper class customer.

References to sophistication were made in half of the female to male advertisements sampled. Those that did place an emphasis on being sophisticated commonly described themselves as ‘*elegant*’ or a ‘*lady*’. Zimmerman has suggested that being ‘ladylike’ meant that a woman was “subject to assessment, in terms of normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for her sex, she was therefore essentially feminine” (1987: 139-140). The language used by the escorts who described themselves as being essentially feminine, or a ‘sophisticated lady’ could have been a deliberate marketing ploy to attract a specific type of customer.

By the escort suggesting that she behaved in a certain manner and upheld a degree of social etiquette, she was indirectly implying that any potential customer should treat her in a respectful way, and as a result this appealed directly to a specific type of clientele, presumably one that would keep her safe. Several other escorts requested a type of customer which the escort would ‘honour’ with her services within their advertisements. For example: ‘*Intelligence and personable, I always enjoy the company of a refined, cultured gentleman. In return I offer a very caring and romantic real girlfriend experience*’. In this context it would appear that the female escort was offering a direct exchange in relation to perceived social class. Language related to the code ‘sophisticated’ was, at times, seen to contradict the language related to the escort’s body, with the escort describing herself in terms of her body being a sexual commodity, or describing herself as a sophisticated companion, as discussed earlier under the code ‘body’.

Like their female counterparts most of the male to female advertisers made reference to the sophistication of the escort. Similar to their female counterparts, sophistication was, at times, presented in the form of Victorian quasi-respectability. Many of the advertisements made reference to the escort being a ‘gentleman’ or their role as a gentleman in the encounter. For example *‘I am a down to earth English gentleman’ to ‘and by the way I was brought up to be the perfect gentleman (and I guess it’s perhaps a sad sign of the times that some people don’t appreciate that quality in a guy!)’*. Such a comment arguably plays into nationalism and stereotypical imagery. In this respect the escort was selling himself as an ‘old romantic’ whose services abided by chivalrous codes of conduct. In this context the escort put forward the offer of companionship before any sexual activity, which perhaps could have put some female clients at ease, if they were seeking companionship rather than sex.

Male to female escorts all used the term ‘gentleman’ within the advertisements at some point, with the presumption that the reader had a shared cultural perception of what a ‘gentleman’ was. According to Milkie (1994) the term ‘gentleman’ typically portrayed a person as being a male who worked in a role usually occupied by intelligent upper middle class men. Within the context of these advertisements the term ‘gentleman’ was suggestive of the ‘good guy’, separating himself from the ‘bad guy’. In this respect, by the escort presenting himself as gentlemen, he is suggesting to his customers that he is a man that they can trust; a civilised man who will honour the contract and behave in a certain manner. This was suggestive of a chivalric code of conduct between the escort and female client, and intimately tied up with class.

What was striking to note was that none of the male to male escorts made reference to the code ‘sophistication’. Instead the central theme of the male to male advertisements would appear to be the selling of the self and the body. The sample of male to male escort advertisements were far more concerned with, or expected to objectify, the body rather than providing any character references, particularly in relation to social class. Like their male to male counterparts, none of the female to female advertisements considered within the discourse analysis made reference to the escort’s sophistication or being sophisticated. This included language that made reference to the female escort being a ‘lady’, as witnessed in the female to male escort sample. This may have been to avoid any reference to a chivalrous code, as witnessed with the female to male and

male to female escort advertisements, due to the female to female escorts perhaps being concerned about gender equality.

3.2.5. *Submissiveness*

The code ‘submissiveness’ denoted descriptions of the escort’s versatility, or lack of dominance, in their role during the sexual encounter, with the escort placing an emphasis on sexually pleasing the client, through the escort submitting him or herself to the client’s sexual fantasy.

Six out of ten of the female to male escort advertisements referred to the submissiveness of the female escort in relation to the role they played during the encounter. As discussed earlier in this chapter under the code ‘the body’, the female to male escort sample displayed their bodies, and the characteristics of their services, in a variety of ways. This was more often indirect in nature; however, in two of the advertisements escorts directly advertised their submissiveness through statements such as ‘*I love nothing more than to hand over full and complete control to my Masters for them to deal with as they see fit*’. Although it was clear that this escort was catering for clients who wished to fulfil their fantasies of dominance, such an invitation could be perceived as limitless by the client, and therefore could potentially increase the risk of harm to the escort.

At times far more subtle language was used by female to male escorts within their advertisements when describing their sexual role within the encounter. However, even though most of the references to submissiveness were suggestive of the escort’s willingness to please the customer — such as, ‘*I am eager to go that extra mile to ensure your [sic] time together is memorable for both of us*’ — they also often included a disclaimer that allowed the escort to maintain control. For example, escorts indicated, as mentioned previously, ‘*Most services offered*’. At other times the balance between submissiveness and control was more implicit. Take one escort’s statement: ‘*I have a very sexual and naughty side which I would love to explore with all you willing Gentleman out there – turn your fantasies into realities*’. In this particular example, although it appeared that the escort was willing to perform most sexual acts, she had

included a disclaimer by using the word 'gentleman'. This suggested that the escort was expecting a respectful client who would not put her at risk.

The language displayed within the female to male advertisements was an attempt to appeal to clients who wished to adopt a versatile or dominant approach within the sexual encounter. This reinforced the fulfilment of the male client's fantasy and the perception of the ideal relationship with a woman. The examples of language used above, in this chapter, would suggest that many of the female escorts were willing to objectify themselves according to the desires of the client, whilst also reinforcing the traditional gender roles of femininity and masculinity. Kiefer and Sanchez (2007) argued within their paper, which examined the concept of 'Men's Sex-Dominance Inhibition', that men have been socialised to be the initiators of sexual activity. The study concluded that this perception of 'gender-based roles' was evident in popular media. In several previous studies conducted by Sanchez et al. (2006) the researchers concluded that the female participants in the study tended to unconsciously associate their role of sexual passivity with passivity-related words, and that appears to be what this research has demonstrated in the quotes above. The female to male escort's use of language, in most advertisements, was suggestive of a willingness to subject herself to the desires of her client.

In contrast, only two of the male to female escorts' advertisements were noted as referring to the male escort's submissive role in the encounter, although in both cases references were subtle. For example: *'I love to party and I love woman that make me laugh, or can teach me something'*. In this particular example the escort was informing the potential client that he was willing to be the less dominant party in the encounter if that was what his client desired. Another reference to submissiveness was: *'Your wish is my command,'* which could suggest that the escort was willing to let the female client lead the sexual encounter. However, the majority of the male escorts adopted a more leading approach within the advertisements. Take, by way of example, one escort's suggestion that *'Maybe you just want to relax and let me do the work'*. In other advertisements male to female escorts were far more suggestive in their sexual offerings. For example: *'masculine and horny with a lot of stamina and fun. I am gentle but can be rough when the occasion requires it'*. What is important to note is that despite the style and type of language used to refer to the male to female escort's role

within the client encounter, the language within the advertisements was very much suggestive of the escort's willingness to please the female client. Although this appeared to be submissive in nature, it is more likely that the male escort was trying to emphasise that the female client's sexual gratification was central within the encounter, thus avoiding the image of the sexually dominating promiscuous male who is out to fulfil his own personal sexual desires.

The data has also highlighted some interesting differences between the female to male and male to female sub-samples. Nearly all of the advertisements in the female to male sample stressed the escort's passivity and submissive role during the sexual encounter, whereas the male to female escorts' advertisements rarely portrayed the male as submissive. However, it was also interesting to note that in several of the male to female advertisements, male escorts unknowingly, or deliberately, failed to define their role within the encounter. For example: *'maybe you have something to show me that I've never seen before, I'd like to see it. However, maybe you just want to relax and let me do all the work, if that is the case I totally understand'*. In this particular example, through a careful choice of language, the male escort stated that he was willing to take more of a submissive role within the encounter, but also carefully suggested that he would be willing to engage in a more dominant role and to lead the sexual encounter.

As a result of the standardised template of the advertisements, male to male escorts who used the advertisement host website were asked to define their sexual role in the encounter. Nine of the escorts either stated they were 'passive', 'bottom' or 'versatile', under the heading 'Role'. This is common terminology used within the gay community to indicate if someone is a receiver or a giver of penetrative sex, or willing to engage in both roles, a term commonly referred to as 'flipping'. Seven of the escorts stated they would be willing to give and receive penetrative sex, therefore appealing to a wider category of clientele. Some of the escorts also chose to divulge more detailed information about their 'sexual role'. For example; *'Intelligent, well-educated, energetic and outgoing London motor biker lad providing a relaxed passive service'*. The sexual role and whether the male escort was submissive was obviously a crucial part of the disclosure in order to attract the right type of client, and again such a 'role' disclosure by the escort was crucial information that the client would require to make

an informed decision when choosing an escort. Arguably, within the context of the male to male advertisements, the language referring to submissiveness had a narrow meaning and was related specifically to one's role in the sexual encounter, and thereby less attached to fantasy.

Surprisingly, none of the female to female advertisements analysed made reference to the escort's submissiveness or submissive role within the encounter. Again this may be suggestive of the power and gender equality between two females in a sexual encounter. It is also useful to note here that none of the female to female escorts advertised that they would take a dominant role within the sexual encounter. This was unlike the domination which was commonly associated with the giver of penetrative sex, particularly amongst heterosexual sexual partners, as the power dynamics between female to female sexual partners rests upon reversibility and versatility (Hinders, 1996: 97).

3.2.6. Encounter (open invitation)

The code 'encounter' referred to descriptions of the escort being accessible to all types of clientele responding to the advertisement. In order to make a clear distinction between the codes 'encounter' and 'relationship', the code 'encounter' included a sexual encounter that offered nothing beyond it, in terms of a longer-term relationship. In contrast, the code 'relationship' (see below) was concerned with examining any language that was suggestive of a relationship between the escort and client over and above a one-off encounter. The 'relationship' code also denoted descriptions of a personalised or exclusive service, as well as indicating preference for a dating, girlfriend/boyfriend or long-term type of relationship between escort and client.

Most of the female to male escorts made reference to an encounter. Some did so indirectly and implied their sexual offers such as, '*Hot and sexy – let me satisfy your needs and wishes*'. Other references involved more direct, sexual language such as, '*Cum as many times as you like, within your booking time*'. However all the language noted relayed the same message, which was that the escort was offering her body and her services as a sexual commodity in exchange for monetary gain. Advertisements at times went further by claiming to offer reduced or competitive rates — '*Special*

punternet Rates, 30mins=£70, 1 hr = £120'. The escort stating she was also available for 30 minutes further suggested that the offer was of an impersonal service, which arguably presented the escort as a sexual commodity at the disposal of her client.

Other advertisements within the female to male escort sample also clearly set time limits on the availability for their services. For example; *'I am available Monday to Friday 11am-6pm for discreet in call services'*. This language suggests that the escort was limiting access to the self for some reason. Interestingly, this was also noted in the interviews with escorts, where a number reported that they also set client contact time constraints as a method of self-preservation. The escort relaying in her advert when she was not available suggested that outside of the set time restrictions she was not willing to be a sexual commodity. Time constraints, as stated above and within some of the female to male advertisements, stand in stark contrast to the suggestion in other advertisements that the client could buy a relationship that would continue to exist beyond the specific encounter. The language used in some of the escort advertisements, which was short and to the point, implied an impersonal approach which related specifically to the requirements of particular male customers' fantasies. This impersonal approach was also suggestive of the escort being willing to attract as many clients as possible in return for a higher turnover of clientele, and therefore greater financial gain.

In stark contrast, most of the male to female escorts did not make any reference to the sexual encounter as such, with the exception of listing their availability and the gender of their clientele (*'This service is available for females only'*). None of the male to female escorts explicitly stated that they would provide the client with a sexual service; instead the offer of sex was implied to the customer by the advert being placed on a male escorts' advertisement website and through the use of sexual innuendos. For example; *'Your wish is my command'*, or *'Relax and let me give you some pleasure'*. Language displayed within the advertisements was very much suggestive of the escort being willing to offer sexual services if requested.

However, male to male escorts were far more likely than any of the other online escort sample groups to solely refer to the encounter, and offer nothing beyond it in terms of a relationship. This could be clearly ascertained through the language used by male to

male escorts such as, '*...I AM VERY HANDSOME INTELLIGENT WITH A GENUINE BIG AND THICK COCK FOR YOUR PLEASURE*', '*I [sic] ready to give you pleasure*' or '*horny and eager to please*'. Male to male advertisements were also far more explicit in directly stating that they would engage in sexual activities with the client, than any of the other online escort sample groups. For example, from '*Sexually I'm a top with mountains of stamina*' to comments such as '*HOT BIG DICKED ESCORT OFFERING NAKED OIL MASSAGE ORAL FINISH TO FULL ON HOT FUCKS*'. Like most of their female to male escort counterparts, male to male escorts, in most cases, explicitly stated that they were willing to engage in sexual services with any potential male client. It could be concluded, therefore, that the two escort groups (female to male and male to male) felt that when advertising towards male clients they needed to be, or felt like they should be, more explicit in nature, or perhaps that male clients would expect the sex worker to be more sexually forward.

All of the female to female advertisements made reference to the encounter in a variety of ways, commonly in the form of what type and style of service was offered and what the client could expect. However, all of the advertisements, at times, went further to suggest a relationship between the escort and the client that went beyond sex. For example: '*Maria will undoubtedly show you a good time and probably a trick or two!*' and comments such as '*Chloe offers essential GFE but sometimes she often enjoys the wilder side. She truly is your dream woman!!! This flame red haired beauty is sure to keep you entertained for hours*'. However, the female to female escort neither fitted solely into the code 'encounter' or 'relationship'. Instead most of the advertisements overlapped between the two codes.

3.2.7. Relationship (exclusive service)

The code 'relationship' was concerned with examining language that was suggestive of a relationship between the escort and client over and above a one-off encounter. The 'relationship' code also included descriptions of a personalised or exclusive service, as well as indicating preference for a dating, girlfriend/boyfriend or long-term type of relationship between escort and client.

Most of the advertisements featured in the female to male escort sample contained language relating to the code 'relationship'. The related language often occurred in the context of the escort's presumed role in fulfilling male fantasy, by offering the provision of a package that was tailored to the client. For example: *'Whatever tickles your fantasy I would be happy to arrange an evening tailored especially to your taste'*. Such language was suggestive of the escort offering the client a one-way relationship where the client's needs overcame those of the escort. In this context the client was the central concern in the building of a relationship between the escort and client. The language used by the escort demonstrated that she was more than willing to tailor a package of service to meet her client's sexual fantasy, therefore investing time before the encounter to gain an understanding of the client and his sexual fantasies, in the hope that it would lead to a relationship of repeated custom. Also under the code 'relationship' escorts, in some cases, offered assurances to their clients that they would deliver a high standard of personalised service, which they suggested would leave the client wanting more. This encouraged the development of a relationship and repeat custom, something that escorts participating in the semi-structured interviews felt was very important, not only in creating a steady income, but because the escort would know that the regular client offered the security that a first time client could not; *'I cater for all services and I am eager to go that extra mile to ensure your [sic] time together is memorable for both of us...leaving you wanting more'*. It is clear from the language used by the escort, in this last comment, that she is willing to provide an intimate relationship based on sex. It was also apparent, in some of the language used by escorts, that the client was directly offered a sexual service, but in addition intimacy was provided as part of the package — in this respect female to male escorts often marketed their services in terms of both a one-off encounter and a more lasting relationship, albeit a relationship based primarily on sex.

The language used under the code 'relationship' often demonstrated how the female to male escort indirectly allowed the client to uphold a degree of ownership over her during the encounter, *'I will be your charming companion for any occasion'* or *'I will be your someone who will ensure a pleasurable and relaxing time together'*. In this context the language used allowed the escort to present herself as the client's property, rather than an equal companion, reinforcing the male client's dominance, as discussed

earlier under the code 'submissiveness' (see Sanchez et al., 2006 for further discussion).

Over half of the female to male advertisements claimed to offer the 'girlfriend experience' in a way that defined the type and style of service. A study of a number of female escorts found that the 'girlfriend experience' provided by the escort was the 'ideal service' that men sought from escort services advertised on the Internet (Holt and Blevins, 2007). The term 'girlfriend experience', also abbreviated in some cases as 'GFE', offered the client a sensual service, and one that distanced itself from just mechanical sex (Sanders, 2004). For example; '*If you are looking for a Real Girlfriend Experience and a lot more*' or '*GFE available*'.

Like their female counterparts, most of the male to female escort advertisements contained language relating to the code 'relationship', which in male to female advertisements involved placing importance on ensuring the female client has a '*safe, relaxing and enjoyable time*'. The language used in phrases such as '*I would like to show how special you are*' and '*I love to make a fuss of those I am with and make sure they are enjoying themselves*', demonstrated that the male escort was willing to provide a relationship based on romance rather than sex. Male escorts also often provided a guarantee of a service that, like the female to male advertisements, was designed to develop an ongoing relationship: '*I promise to always deliver services at a high standard with optimum satisfaction leaving my clients yearning for more*'. In most cases, language noted around 'relationship' and the offering of an exclusive service was aimed towards providing the female client with a satisfaction guarantee that would help develop a relationship over time, and, like with their female to male escort counterparts, in the hope of developing repeat custom.

Half of the male to male advertisements analysed within this research also made reference to what was perceived to be the offering of a personalised relationship by the escort, both within and beyond the encounter. Those advertisements that did make use of language related to the creation of a sustained relationship between the escort and client did so in a manner that suggested the encounter would be exclusive and personalised to the desires of the client, or as one advert put it, '*Call me to chat about what you would like to do when we meet, I will ensure the rest*'. Thus the client was

invited to discuss his fantasy, and it became the escort's obligation to fulfil it. Although what was striking was that only one of the male to male escorts stated that he would be willing to offer companionship outside of the sexual encounter: '*...I.m [sic] happy to offer companionship as well as something intimate [sic], Im friendly and discretion is assured...*'

Like their male to female counterparts, all of the female to female advertisements included the offer of a relationship, something that went beyond a one-off sexual encounter, varying from the offering of an intimate relationship to companionship. One escort, for example, was described thus: '*...Her clientele are all in love with her... She is certainly not short of marriage proposals*'. Others were described as good companions: '*...Perfect company for a romantic evening or a luxury weekend away...*' or '*.... the perfect lady to have a relaxing date with.....*' The offering of romance, or a romantic experience, was a central selling point within the female to female advertisements, similar to the male to female advertisements. This suggests that escorts who advertised looking for female clients believed that they valued romance in some form, far more so than male clients.

3.3. Traditional ideas about middle classes

In order to provide a basis for studying common understandings between the escort and their client, in terms of their individual roles and how the language used within the advertisements sustained this in relation to class distinctions, the researcher found it helpful to incorporate Bourdieu's (1984) model of social distinction to help identify escorts' displays of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) proposed that cultural products and practices allowed for those from different social classes to differentiate themselves using the classifications that defined taste, in a variety of contexts, such as sports, food, art and politics and so forth. As a result of the stark differences between the advertisements in terms of how each of the escort sample groups displayed their cultural capital, the researcher found it appropriate to merge the codes relating to the measurement of social class.

In order to test the claims of Bernstein (2007) and others, who have argued that the social class and organisation of sex workers are key elements in the construction of

the online escort market (Bernstein, 2007; Ray, 2007; Young, 2008), Bourdieu's (1984) model of social distinction has proven a useful tool in the measurement of the 'high-brow cultural activities' that male and female escorts may refer to within their advertisements. In a pilot study conducted by the researcher and his supervisory team on a number of online escort advertisements, numerous themes began to emerge which could arguably be perceived as middle class leisure pursuits, according to Bourdieu's (1984) model of social distinction. Each category of analysis examined the 'middle class'-related language used in the advertisements and how such language portrayed the escort as a specific sexual object aiming to attract the desired customer, whilst still fulfilling the requirements of that customer's expectation of a style and type of service.

Therefore, the decision was made to categorise the language as relating to the following codes: the code 'educated' denoted the collection of discourse surrounding the escort being educated, or included the type of education the escort had received. The code 'travelled' denoted the escort as having some travel knowledge or experience, a desire to travel, or availability to accompany potential clients on a holiday or an overseas business trip. The code 'food and drink' denoted the escort's knowledge of food and drink, enjoyment of particular food and drink, preference for, or a desire to, dine out, or the suggestion of the escort and client dining out together. The code 'culture' denoted descriptions of the escort as being cultured or having an interest in cultural events. The code 'hobbies and leisure pursuits' refers to descriptions of the escort's preferred hobbies and leisure pursuits, their desire to try new hobbies and/or leisure pursuits, or a suggestion of an activity that the escort and client might engage in during the encounter, other than sexual. Finally the code 'professional format' refers to escorts either having a link to their personal website or having reviews in the form of clients' references.

Language relating to the escorts' education, or level of education, was only noted in three of the female to male escort advertisements, and was delivered in the form of a brief disclosure. For example, '*open and educated mind*', or, as in this reference to the escort's type of charisma, '*Elegant and educated yet down to earth lady*'. Only one of the female escort advertisements specifically gave details of her level of education '*I arrived in London to study at university and at my free time I can see you at my comfortable apartment*'. The language used by female to male escorts, in reference to

their 'education', appeared to have been used as a means of self-reference, or to perhaps enhance their charisma and therefore make them more appealing towards middle to higher class clientele. However, those that did not provide a self-reference to being educated, or in receipt of an education, may not have considered it important or pertinent to the service being provided.

Like their female to male counterparts, male to female escorts also made reference to their education in only a handful of cases. However in all the cases where education was mentioned, male escorts were far more descriptive in the language they used to describe the type and level of education received. For example: *'Well educated with good conversational skills making me ideally suited for those seeking an elegant and intelligent companion'* and *'My name is Matthew, a 34 year old public school boy and a degree educated guy who works in the media'*. Again, the language used with respect to their education, in all cases, was provided as evidence of character. Despite the lack of references to the escort being 'educated' in most of the male to female advertisements, other terms were used by these escorts to express their character as being that of the 'gentleman'. As previously discussed, language related to the use of the term 'gentleman' suggested that the escort upheld a certain degree of education, and thereby gave a sense of his being civilised and interested in the person or mind of the client.

Education was only mentioned within two of the male to male advertisements, and in both cases only fleetingly: *'Intelligent, well-educated, energetic and outgoing'* and *'Well travelled, articulate, educated and always discreet'*. Also, what was apparent was that reference to the escort being 'educated' was put forward in the context of providing a rounded view of the escort's character, rather than specifically providing any details as to the escort's level of education. Again, like their escort counterparts in the other groups, and in particular their female to male escort counterparts, male to male escorts may not have considered it important or pertinent to the service being provided. Similar to their female to male and male to male counterparts, only two references were made in two of the advertisements with respect to the escort herself being educated or having received an education, and these were set within a brief context, and in both cases were part of a sexual innuendo: *'...Educated, cultured and with a great sense of fun...'* and *'Maria is..... University educated and highly cultured*

making for fascinating and delightful company both in and out of the boudoir'. Here the escort's education was again set in a context which was not to be taken too seriously by the client.

In the female to male escort sample, unlike the other online escort advertisement samples, none of the escorts gave any specific mention of being well travelled or having a desire to travel. Only one of the female to female escort advertisements made reference to travel, albeit fleetingly. Unlike their female counterparts, the majority of male to female escort advertisements made reference to their travel experience or passion for travel. Similar to the data collected under the code 'educated', references to travel were made with reference to the escort being of a particular character. For example: *'Well travelled & very knowledgeable on most subjects with excellent tastes, manners and presentation'*. At times the male to female escorts brought together their experience of travel and education to boast that they spoke a variety of languages: *'Speaking four languages and with a vast abroad experience I'm sure you will like me'*. References to travel, by the male to female escorts, could also have been a ploy to inform clients that they were willing to be a travel companion, therefore a tactical marketing strategy.

Due to the pro forma template within all of the male to male escort advertisements, all male to male escorts were asked, under a subheading, to identify their 'dream holiday'. Answers given tended to fall into these two categories *'The company is more important than the location'* to *'Anywhere hot with a beach very close'*. However, it was not felt by the researcher that this alone expressed that the escort was well travelled, or even had a desire to travel, due to the escorts being obliged to list something under the set pro-forma heading. It might rather be the case that the male escorts felt obliged to give at least some answer. As a result, language relating to the escort's experience of travel or desire to travel was only noted if it was stated outside of the prompted forma heading 'My dream holiday would be'. Only three of the male to male escorts made an unprompted reference to travel and, similar to the code 'education', it was only mentioned fleetingly. For example, from *'Well travelled...'*, *'I enjoy... holidays'*, to one of the escorts expressing a desire to travel *'NOTE: if you out of London don't [sic] hesitate to contact [sic] with me as I would like to travel around the UK (condition [sic] apply)'*.

Again, it was the male to female escorts who made the most references to ‘food and drink’. Male escorts referred to ‘food and drink’ in a variety of ways, from their *‘love of fine dining and red wine’* to dining out being one of their favourite hobbies: *‘At risk of sounding clichéd, my hobbies and interests include travel and adventure, going to the theatre and cinema, wining and dining...’*. The fact that most of the male to female escorts expressed a liking for ‘dining out’ suggested that this was an activity they wished to engage in with the client, fitting in with the male’s chivalrous role of wining and dining the female as a means of romance, whilst also presenting himself in the image of the ideal companion for a dinner date. Only one reference was made to enjoyment or preference for ‘food and drink’ in all of the male to male, female to male, and female to female advertisements. The lack of reference within the advertisements to the code ‘food and drink’, with the exception of male to female escorts, suggests that escorts placed little value on themselves as being a non-sexual companion, although, arguably, it may be more the case that clients viewed the escort as a sexual commodity, so escorts focused more heavily on the body as a central selling point, rather than their enjoyment or likes and dislikes in relation to food.

Additionally, male to female escorts were the only group to use any language that related to the code ‘culture’, including the escort saying he was cultured such as; *‘I am a down to earth English gentleman who believes in old-fashioned values’*, or enjoying culture *‘I like to live a healthy lifestyle, enjoys the arts & theatre, fine wines & the outdoors’* or a desire for or enjoyment in attending cultural events: *‘I enjoy cultural events’*. The language displayed in the male escorts’ advertisements was, at times, suggestive that the male escorts placed far more emphasis on ‘culture’ than any of the other escort samples, especially as, unlike any of the other types of escort advertisements, they were the only sample to include such language. Perhaps this is in the hope of sounding superior, and therefore being the ‘gentlemen’ in whose company female clients would feel safe.

None of the female to male escorts’ advertisements sampled made any reference to the code ‘hobbies and leisure pursuits’, and only one reference to hobbies was made within one of each of the male to male and female to female advertisements, whereas the researcher noted that seven of the male to female escort advertisements made reference

to the code 'hobbies and leisure pursuits'. There were assorted references in the male to female advertisements to a range of leisure pursuits, such as '*Adventurous person likes good life, cinema, pubs, clubs, restaurants, good listener up for most things in reasonable circumstances*' and references to keeping fit, such as '*I enjoy keeping fit*'. The language used once again reinforces the perception of the escort having a fit physique and being traditionally masculine. The female to male escorts provided far fewer details about their preferred leisure pursuits and hobbies. Arguably this could very much suggest that female escorts felt it irrelevant, to the point that their male clients would find this information intimidating and not relevant to their sexual fantasy.

It would appear that female to male escorts were far more likely to present themselves as a 'blank canvas' for their client's fantasy to be played out on. The language of sexual relations has uncovered the acceptance of dominance, and the necessity for women to regulate their responses in line with male requirements (Hall, 1995). It was apparent from the data collected that the heterosexual male escort sample was far more likely to present a discourse of cultural and social capital. Participation in 'highbrow' cultural activities included attending highbrow cultural events such as the theatre, ballet or a museum. Heterosexual male escorts were also far more likely to demonstrate their economic and cultural capital than any other group analysed, in the areas of education, travel, food and drink, and culture. Their mention of travel may lead to the assumption that the escort held some cultural knowledge, skills and experiences which differed from those who had not extensively travelled. The language used within some of the heterosexual male escorts' advertisements could be seen as related to what Bourdieu (1991) regarded as communication of the expressive lifestyle, whereby the male escort used language, within his advertisements, in a style of self-presentation, suggestive of social positioning.

Nine of the female to male escort advertisements studied made reference to the code 'professional conduct'. However, it is important to note that, in all nine cases, this was because the escort had provided a link to her personal webpage that detailed her professional role. Only the female to male category displayed links to the escorts' personal work websites. This may have been due to the advertisement host allowing

escorts to include links in the advertisements, or because female sex workers' services are in greater demand, thus warranting the setting up of a private work website.

Only one of the male to male advertisements contained any reference to professionalism. The researcher felt that the link to another profile page which was included showed the escort further marketing their services. For example, with *'earchbearfrost' on RECON*, the reference to the RECON profile would allow potential customers, if they held a free or full RECON account membership, to instantly chat to the escort, and to view further information displayed, such as the escort's online pictures and videos. Six of the male to female escorts' advertisements made some reference to professionalism under the code 'professional conduct'. However, none of the male to female escorts' advertisements contained links to an independent webpage. The language used normally included descriptions of the escort offering a guarantee of service, or honouring the contract, for example; *'I am full of enthusiasm for my work'* or the escort providing assurance of their role, as in *'I promise to always deliver services at a high standard'*. The researcher also felt that other language that demonstrated professionalism was indicated through the escorts' statements about only providing services to female clients: *'This service is available for females only. Please mention gentleman for hire when making contact. Min 3hr booking'*

3.4. Conclusion

The findings of this research will greatly contribute to the gradual, but ever growing body of literature on technology and sex work, through investigating how escorts advertise their sexual services to clients via the Internet. Moreover, it is the first research study of its kind to draw comparisons between how heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian escorts sell sex on the Internet to a specific group of clientele. One of the main aims of this research was to evaluate Bernstein's (2007) and others' argument that the social class and organisation of sex workers is a key element in the construction of the online escort market, not only in the targeting of middle class clients, but also in the implementation of middle class values in its self-regulatory structuring and self-preservation (Bernstein, 2007; Ray, 2007; Young, 2009).

The codes for the research were developed with the support of the researcher's supervisory team. This proved a useful way to provide a structured analysis, as well as observing differences in the ways that each of the distinctive advertisement samples sold sex. The findings of this particular research have been surprising in the sense that the detection of a middle class service, albeit with the exception of the male to female advertisement sample, was sparse, and at times untraceable in most of the advertisements. Instead the central theme throughout all of the advertisements was the selling of the escort's body.

As discussed in the second half of this chapter, the female to male escorts and male to male escorts provided far fewer details about their education, travel, food and drink, and preferred leisure pursuits and hobbies, which suggests that both markets felt it irrelevant, to the point that their male clients would find this information intimidating and not relevant to their sexual fantasy. It would also appear that female to male escorts were far more likely to present themselves as a 'blank canvas' for their client's fantasy to be played out on. It is apparent that the advertisements featured in this research were bounded by the traditional perception that men want sex and women want romance. As witnessed in this chapter, there were fundamental differences in the ways in which each of the distinctive markets advertised the offering of romance and intimacy. It could be concluded that the male to female escorts, and to a lesser extent the female to female market, were far more forward in advertising a romantic dating experience. The findings of this research also support traditional heteronormative theories which have portrayed men as the initiators of sexual activity and women as more interested in courtship (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003).

As Ortiz-Torres et al. (2003) have discussed, men tend to desire sexual intimacy earlier in the courtship than women. For women, sexual intimacy tends to be fabricated in the context of love and romance. Furthermore, as Hynie et al. (1998) have documented in their study, men found fun, pleasure and physical attraction to be motives for sex, while women reported love, commitment and emotional intimacy as their motives for having sex. However, it is important to note that these claims are culturally constructed norms. Men and women want these things at least partly because they are socialised into a particular view of the 'ideal' and 'usual' sexual relationship.

All of the markets analysed offered intimacy to the client to some degree. The findings of this study suggest that when advertising to their female clients male escorts felt that the female client desired intimacy before sex. As Giddens argues, society has seen a “revolution in female autonomy”, such that women are finding sexual pleasure in ways which are not dictated by men. This and ‘the flourishing of homosexuality’ (1992: 28) are seen as manifestations of ‘plastic sexuality’. In ‘confluent love’ sexuality and intimacy were tied together ‘as never before’ (1992: 84). Therefore, the importance placed on the provision of intimacy for the female client suggests that a more fluid relationship between heterosexual couples has evolved through the transformation of intimacy (Giddens, 1992).

Within all of the advertisements featured in this research the body was a central selling point. When looking back at the arguments and discussions relating to Hakim’s (2010) work on ‘bodily capital’ in the literature review, such a perspective can be useful in analysis of the findings of this research. As Hakim (2010: 499) has stated “erotic capital is a somewhat different fourth asset, previously overlooked, but just as important”. Hakim (2010) maintained that ‘erotic capital’ was comparable to human capital, with both requiring a basic level of talent and ability. Bernstein (2007) had previously referred to this type of worker as the ‘middle class’ sex worker, who was willing to capitalise on their sexual experimentation. ‘Erotic capital’ and its components, according to Hakim (2010), could therefore be examined like any other elusive elements of social structures, cultures and social interaction, and could also, therefore, prove a useful asset to those who entered prostitution, and were willing to exploit their ‘erotic capital’. Escorts’ advertisements, in this research, all emphasised their ‘bodily capital’ and bodily parts in some manner which they perceived the client would find attractive. As discussed earlier in this chapter, men in particular had a tendency to favour specific body parts due to learnt cultural prescriptions. In western nations, this has commonly been divided into those who prioritise breasts, bums, or legs. In addition, as discussed earlier in this chapter, women were far more likely to re-style the body for the customer’s desires than any other of the escort samples. In this context, female escorts were more prepared to conform to the customer’s sexual desires through objectifying their bodies, whereas the other samples, and in particular the male to female escorts, emphasised the selling of one body and one character, theirs.

Interestingly, male to female advertisements were the only ones not to describe or refer to parts of the body in a sexual context, and like their female to female counterparts descriptions were more than often written in a sophisticated manner. More often than not female escorts were described using language in the form of sexual innuendos, instead of referring to their sexual body parts. Like their male to female counterparts, this may have been because female escorts wished to present themselves as linguistically competent; instead what they wanted to advertise was a full descriptive account of their character and dating experience.

Directness in relation to the offering of sexual services amongst the female to male and male to male escort samples was often of a similar nature, albeit at times male to male escorts were more explicit. It could be argued that the two escort groups (female to male and male to male) felt that when advertising for the male client they needed to be, or felt like they should be, more explicit in nature, or perhaps that male clients would expect the sex worker to be more sexually forward. Men were expected to actively initiate sexual activity, while women, on the other hand, were expected to delay sexual activity until a level of emotional familiarity had been founded. As Reiss (1967) previously documented, casual sexual acquaintances, having sex with multiple partners, and sexual experimentation have been far more socially acceptable for men than for women.

This research has also identified how language was used by each of the genders, with language and photographs being used to reinforce the dynamics of male and female power and relationships. The findings have highlighted that escorts uphold the socially constructed view that the language used should conform to traditionally assigned roles. What was striking was that there was no evidence to suggest otherwise, and that male and female escorts were not attempting to challenge cultural prescriptions of gendered sexual roles of dominance and sexual objectification. The traditional sexual division of labor was ever more emphasised by the language used by escorts in order to present the 'ideal woman' or 'ideal man' image. In fact, arguably, most of the language used by both males and females expressed an absence of dual ownership of the experienced fantasy.

CHAPTER FOUR

How has the Internet Impacted on Escorting?

4.1 Introduction

The findings discussed in Chapter Three identified how the selling and packaging of ‘intimacy’ and the body was a central theme within the advertisements, across all of the distinctive markets, particularly when marketing to the female client. Advertising services via the Internet has evidently provided male and female escorts with a platform through which to offer clients a ‘touching and meaningful’ sexual encounter, a service which goes beyond a universally-orientated, quick service transaction (Bernstein, 2007). Yet very little is known with regard to how the commodification of intimate relations is understood and experienced by those escorts involved in such relationships. To reflect the fact that the number of male and female escorts using the Internet to sell ‘intimate’ and ‘specialised’ sexual services is ever increasing, a growing but still limited body of research has examined the views and experiences of escorts who have operated via the Internet (Chaney and Dew, 2003; Sharp and Earle, 2005; Kendall, 2009; Milford and Weitzer, 2012). However, to date these studies have excluded the lived experiences of heterosexual male, gay and lesbian online escorts. As discussed in Chapter Two, it would appear that academics have remained fearful when it comes to identifying and investigating the different forms of both male and female heterosexual, and gay and lesbian sex markets, due to an apprehension that their research will be labelled as exceptional or publicly irrelevant (Morrison and Whitehead, 2007). In order to fill the gap in the literature this chapter analyses the data collected in the qualitative semi-structured interviews⁴ with twenty-seven heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian escorts who advertise their services on the Internet, in order to investigate how the Internet impacts on their lived experiences of escorting.

The semi-structured interviews focused on how the commodification of intimate sexual engagement was understood and experienced by those involved, and how

⁴ For the purposes of data presentation, and in order to protect the identities of those interviewed, escorts were labelled according to the numerical order in which they were interviewed. Please refer to Appendix H for details of escorts’ genders, sexualities, and other key demographics.

developments in online media and communication have amplified the availability of, and access to, 'intimate' and 'specialised' escort services, both online and offline. Additionally the extent to which escort services are increasingly divided along class-structured gender lines, thus catering to different clients' sexualities and specific sexual desires, is considered further (Bernstein, 2007; Stephens, 2009), adding to the already rich data presented in Chapter Three.

The findings in this chapter explore the reported experiences of online escorts who provide clients with sexual services via the Internet. Findings reveal that escort experiences ranged from the offering of 'counterfeit sexual intimacy', in the form of a one-off sexual encounter to, at times, the development of an 'authentic emotional bond' between the escort and the client (Sanders, 2005: 333). This will lead on to discussion of how many of the escorts, in this research, struggled with the unanticipated demands of an evolving romantic relationship via the Internet. This, according to some of the escorts sampled, could at times result in tensions between the instrumental and expressive dimensions, and this chapter has therefore also examined how escorts utilised the Internet as a virtual space for the purposes of advertising and communicating with clients who otherwise might not have sought sex workers through traditional methods such as street prostitution.

4.2. Attitudes towards online escorting as work

Participants were invited to independently express their attitudes towards online escorting. While they gave varying responses there were a number of similarities across the different markets. Most of the escorts interviewed expressed positive attitudes about the benefits that came with selling sex via the Internet, such as financial rewards, travel and even, at times, gifts from clients. These findings were identified consistently across all four of the escort markets. As one female to male escorts explain:

Where else could I make this sort of money...I been places that otherwise I would have never have got to, like Thailand and even New York on a business trip with one of my regular clients.

(Female to male: 9)

One area where differences were expressed was in the time the escort spent with their client, and therefore the type of relationship they sought. As identified in Chapter Three, escorts, through their advertisements, made it very clear whether they were targeting clients who favoured an impersonal one-off encounter or a more intimate relationship with the escort. This was also something expressed by escorts within the interviews. Several female to male and male to male escorts expressed that they preferred to limit the time they spent with clients by only offering shorter encounters. These escorts' accounts were very much suggestive of a wish to maintain the boundary between sex and a more intimate relationship.

I know friends of mine do dinner and longer sessions like overnights and they say the money is real good. But I don't want to end up with someone for that long. I'd rather see a couple of guys a day. I prefer shorter sessions. That way I get to do the things that I need to do.

(Female to male: 6)

One escort went so far as to explain that she is only willing to work within a set time frame in order to balance competing commitments such as other work and family life. As she explains:

I only take bookings during the day. To me it's like a 9 to 5 job and I never work outside office hours. I have my family and kids to think about as well.

(Female to male: 7)

In contrast, several escorts from each of the markets expressed that they were more than happy to spend longer periods of time with clients, in order to maximise their financial gain. As one participant states:

I have a lot of clients who take me away with them either on business or just for pleasure. It's nice, as I really enjoy travelling. And of course it's better when you get paid for it. Obviously it depends who you're travelling with and that's what you got to

consider. I wouldn't just go off for a week with any client. But with a few of my regular clients, it's something that I really enjoy now.

(Female to male: 10)

However, it should be noted that of those escorts who expressed their enjoyment of or willingness to accompany clients abroad, most only did so on the basis of a calculated risk assessment based on trusting past relationships and a bond with the client. Others opted out completely, choosing to place far tighter time constraints on the encounter. In this context escorts differentiated contact time with clients as either the relationship they offered to the client or solely wishing to offer functional sex. The findings have shown that escorts hold different views with regard to limiting themselves, and therefore also the boundaries of separation between their work and the 'real self' (also see the discussion of emotional risks in Chapter Five).

Some of the escorts within the study also discussed the roles of different online advertising websites in attracting clients more interested in a quick service transaction, and this was also reflected in the choice of advertisement website used by the escort. As one escort explains:

On Punternet you're kind of restricted on what you can charge. You can only get away with charging around £150 for an hour. The types of men who use it are really only interested in a quick session... Other sites like Sirens attract a different type of client. The ones with lots of money. The men who use those type of sites are after something different. They want much longer sessions and mostly want the girl to stay overnight...

(Female to male: 5)

Notably, escorts also expressed how different websites attracted different types of clientele, which in turn allows the escort to charge higher fees. Escorts were therefore attracted to different websites depending on their attitudes towards selling sex, in terms of the time they wished to spend with the client and the amount of emotional labour they wished to invest in the sexual transaction. These findings also suggest that, depending on which websites they advertised on, some of the escorts felt there was a degree of class stratification within the online escort market.

As voiced by the majority of escorts within this research, positive attitudes were generally expressed by escorts towards escorting as a profession, but at the same time many viewed escorting as a form of temporary work between periods of mainstream employment. Despite many escorts across the samples enjoying the financial benefits and working conditions associated with independent escorting, many did not desire to continue in the escort business over a long period of time. As one escort explained:

To me it's not like work, it's not like an office job. It's casual, until something better comes along. I don't view this as work: if I start to view it as a job then it changes everything. I'd start to become too serious about it. Nah I don't want that. This is only been a small part of my life, it's not all of me.

(Female to male: 2)

In this context the escort appeared to reject identification of escorting as their profession, by refusing to see escorting as a legitimate type of employment, and instead referring to it as something casual. Several escorts across the different distinctive markets groups made similar points, often regarding escorting as a short fix until they could find an alternative mode of employment. Male to female escorts expressed similar views to their female to male counterparts, particularly in their attitudes towards escorting being their main source of employment. Male escorts often referred to escorting as part-time, and in several cases as a 'hobby'. Male to female escorts were far more likely than their male to male escort peers to indicate that escorting was only a part-time vocation to them. This is perhaps a reflection of the demand for their services, as on average male to female escorts disclosed they see only one to two clients per week:

Escorting only takes up a little part of my life. I am an educated guy and work in the media. I have to balance escort work around my career as well as my other hobbies. To me escorting is more of a fun time: call it a hobby if you like. It's something on the side to me

(Male to female: 5)

Like some of their female counterparts, male to female escorts also reported using escorting to supplement their incomes and expressed that they only work within a set timeframe in order to balance other commitments such as work or family life. Most escorts expressed that one of the benefits of escorting was that they could balance it with their personal and family lives. As one male to female escort expressed:

To me it's a bit of fun whilst I earn some extra cash. I've always enjoyed the company of women and always been a bit of a flirt come to think of it.

(Male to female: 3)

In this context it would appear that many of the male to female escorts interviewed within this study were just playing with the idea that escorting was an extension of their sexual identity.

Like their female to male and male to female counterparts, several of the male to male escorts expressed how they perceived escorting or working in other sectors of the sex industry to be a temporary or casual form of employment, until they sought more traditional job roles. As one male escort explains:

I'd rather earn as much as I can, while I can, then I can stop it. Don't get me wrong I enjoy what I do, well a lot of the time. But there has to come a point when I have to stop. I need to get real. Yeah it's good money [escorting], but it's all cash. And cash doesn't get you credit. I guess I'm reaching that point now in my life where I just want to settle down. Chill out. I need a quiet life away from London. There comes a time when you just have to hang up the hat. It's becoming a lot more tiring than it used to be.

(Male to male: 7)

Female to female escorts also spoke about their perception of selling sex. Both expressed that they viewed escorting as a temporary form of employment. As one female to female escort explained:

I need to find something better, something with a bit more security. I'm getting a bit sick of it now [escorting], but it's not just that. My kids are getting older, and they're at home a lot more. It's just getting harder to explain why I'm not around the house a lot more in the evenings... It's starting to cause a few more problems than it did when they were younger...Not only that to be honest, the excitement and the buzz of it has just gone. Things are starting to change... It's more competitive now as there are so many new girls coming onto the scene. And it's just getting harder to compete. It's time to move on.

(Female to female: 1)

Although the quotes above suggest that many escorts consider their work to be casual, in general the male to male escort sample also expressed positive attitudes to escorting. Just over half of all the male to male escorts interviewed expressed some degree of enjoyment of their work. As one male escort reported:

You grab sleep when you can. But that's why I love [escorting] doing this in some ways. It can be fun, and I do like a lot of my clients. The way I look at it is that if I wasn't doing this I'd still be going around London partying and fucking a load of guys. The only thing different with this is that I'm doing it with a bunch of 40 and 50 year old... And the money, that's the reason I do it. That's what I go out and get.

(Male to male: 6)

Despite the majority of male to male escorts who participated in the study expressing that they generally enjoyed escorting, many also expressed negatives associated with this type of work. Several male escorts stated that they had previously felt objectified by a particular client, or that at times they also found escorting to be emotionally and physically tiring:

On my shit days I hate escorting. Basically I'm a paid fuck.... And I accept that.... I'm a paid fuck, and that's what it comes down to isn't it? Let's be honest. But days like that I just remind myself about the money I get from doing this. It's hard, as in some ways I hate this part of my life. Like in terms of it really messing up my relationship with my boyfriend and having to keep it a secret from my family, but at the same time

I know it gives me the freedom to live a decent life outside of it. Does that make sense? With this [escorting], I could see one client in a night and still earn more than an average day's work. So it gives me money and a lot of free time to do other stuff that I want.

(Male to male: 1)

Despite being a considerably smaller sub-sample, female to female escorts were unique in their expressed attitudes towards selling sex to female clients. Both of the escorts interviewed explained that they preferred female clients to male ones:

I just feel more comfortable with female clients. Well, more than I do with male ones. Women are just easier than men: I guess that's why this works so well.

(Female to female: 1)

A similar sentiment was expressed by the second female to female interviewee:

I always look forward to seeing some of my female clients. I guess I just find them more relaxing, everything is a lot slower... maybe it sounds a bit silly, but there is more of a connection between two women. It's mutual. They want to equally learn, and that's something I really enjoy, is teaching them. There is just less pressure involved with them.

(Female to female: 2)

The above quotations would appear to suggest that both of the female escorts find that when working with female clients they are not as emotionally tiring as male clients, and this might be because they have adopted a different working attitude and approach towards their female clients. This signifies differences in terms of the gender dynamics and interaction between both parties.

To conclude, the findings suggest that attitudes towards selling sex via the Internet varied depending on the gender and sexuality of the escort and client. Overall the findings emphasise that although some viewed escorting as a profession, what they said about it suggested that they considered it to be a casual form of employment,

which may or may not be viewed as a casual *professional* form of employment. What is clear from the accounts of those escorts interviewed is that for most their main motivation to continue in the escort business is the financial reward. In addition escorts expressed several other benefits, such as choosing working hours, travelling to different countries and attracting a 'preferred type of clientele'. What is also interesting to note are the similarities between participants in enforcing time constraints on the contact they might have with clients, either by limiting the booking times, only engaging in escorting as a form of part-time work, or viewing it as a temporary form of employment. But what they did all agree on was that for the most part they enjoyed the work. These findings lead us into the next section of this chapter, where we explore the experiences of online escorts who offer their clients a relationship that goes beyond the sexual encounter, particularly in the provision of 'intimacy', a service which was commonly associated with the online escort industry and expected by the customer (Sanders, 2008; Weitzer, 2012).

4.3. Attitudes to what's on sale

As highlighted within the findings of the previous chapter, most of the escort advertisements analysed offered the client a type of relationship that often went beyond a mechanical sexual encounter. Previous researchers have also referred to the provision of sexual services via the Internet as resembling a quasi-dating relationship between the parties involved (Bernstein, 2007; Constable, 2009; Weitzer, 2012). As Giddens (1992: 2) argued, "intimacy is a function of a pure relationship whose participants are equal and engaged in interpersonal sharing. The pure relationship rests on a foundation of plastic sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction". This style of relationship, between the sex worker and client, was what Bernstein (2007: 103) referred to as 'bounded authenticity': an "authentic emotional and physical connection" between the escort and client. Bernstein (2007: 6) also argued that this model of sexuality differed from traditional models of marital and long-term relationships, and was defined by "physical sensation and from emotionally bounded erotic exchanges", resulting in a move to a recreational "model of sexual intimacy". The escort-client relationship resembles the epitome of this relationship exchange. However, Bernstein's model provides very little in the form of an explanation of how escorts felt about selling intimate sexual services, or about their lived experiences. Therefore, participants in

this study were invited to talk about their attitudes towards selling intimate services via the Internet.

The nature of questions asked in the interviews meant that, at times, participants independently expressed their attitudes about what was on sale to the customer. Escorts held varying attitudes towards the selling of the ‘girlfriend’ or ‘boyfriend’ experience, which commonly referred to the provision of intimate services which went beyond ‘mechanical sex’ (Sanders, 2007). Several escorts expressed views such as this one:

I know some girls don't like to kiss or have anything done to them. Well what I mean... like give their clients um... the 'girlfriend experience', that's what they're all starting to call it now. But clients just expect it now, and for the price they pay, it's just part of it. Don't get me wrong I don't enjoy it and at times it feels like they're sucking the life out of you if they're bad at it [kissing], but you just learn to accept it.

(Female to male: 1)

What was interesting to note from the quotation above, as well as other similar comments expressed within the female to male sample, was that many female escorts used objectifying language to describe their bodies in order to fulfil their client's desires during the sexual encounter. Despite the escort in the quotation above stating that she did not enjoy the contact, she still put her body forward in the form of a sexual commodity which was available and at the disposal of her client. Similar findings were also highlighted in Chapter Three, where it was apparent that some of the language used in the adverts directly offered a sexual service, but in addition intimacy was part of the package — in this respect female to male escorts often marketed their services as both a one-off encounter and a more lasting relationship, albeit a relationship based primarily on intimate sexual services rather than companionship.

As mentioned, the packaging and selling of intimacy and the body within the sexual encounter is what most of the escorts in the study believed made the escort market unique, in comparison to the more traditional sex markets. Several escorts in the study elaborated on this point:

Being intimate with clients is a big part of this job. I know a lot of girls don't like doing it. But if they don't like it that much they shouldn't be doing this job. Clients use escorts for one simple reason, they want sex with some sort of connection. They pay me to make them feel special and that's what this job is about. You need to be able to offer that. They want to feel wanted by you; otherwise they might as well just fuck their hand.

(Female to male: 4)

Male to female escorts also expressed attitudes about the types of services they provided, stating that the selling of the intimate relationship, albeit within set time constraints, was also expected by the female client. Although significant differences were noted in terms of what male escorts believed their female clients expected from the encounter, male escorts were more likely to express the belief that most of their clients prioritised their company over sex. Attitudes by male escorts towards selling their services were often also expressed in a chivalrous manner by male escorts, which could, at times, easily be mistaken for a male friend explaining the process of an 'ideal date'. As one male escort pointed out:

To put it simply they just want some male company. It's not all about sex to them. Most of the time you will meet her in a bar or a restaurant, where we would share a couple of glasses of wine and then I would take her back to her place. In fact it can be fairly enjoyable... Romantic in fact... yeah I kind of enjoy it I have to say... Once you get back, I start to help her relax. More wine normally helps (laughs). I help them relax, by having a few drinks together ... I'm always the one who will make the first move. The rest is obvious. After a bit of flirting then I would normally make a move. That's what she would expect... to me it's sort of a game. You got to judge and time it right to go through the different levels. As long as you take it slowly.

(Male to female: 3)

Female to male and male to male escorts were the only two samples to make reference to an offering of intimacy in the context of the 'girlfriend or boyfriend experience', where the term the 'girlfriend experience' was suggestive of offering a client a meaningful relationship that went beyond sex, and often involved cuddling, kissing,

and emotionally caring for the client during the encounter. In the other markets escorts were more likely to say that they offered ‘intimate’ or ‘companionship’ services. As noted above, none of the male to female escorts in this study used the terminology ‘the boyfriend experience’, instead often referring to themselves as fulfilling the role of ‘companion’ or ‘company’. This may be due to male escorts rejecting the notion that they were a sexual commodity for hire, instead favoring the word ‘companion’ as this echoes their view of themselves as mature company and being of an equal status to their clients.

Contrary to the findings from interviews with the female to male participants, several of the male to female escorts used language that suggested the female client was instead the ‘object’. As in the quotation above, the male escort stated that he was duty-bound to ‘return them to their hotel’: in this context the male escort referred to the female client as an object of responsibility, one whose interests must be safeguarded by him. Other escorts expressed similar ideas:

A lot of what I offer is companionship and I make that clear in my advert, so I don't scare them off. To me it's just like going on a first date. A lot of the clients I see are just after some company, well a date I suppose would be what we'd call it. They just want someone to take them out, and pay them some attention. It's not all about sex. Sometimes it's more about the simple things. You know, like showing her a little bit of affection. Small things, like holding her hand or giving them a kiss in public. They just want to feel special.

(Male to female: 7)

In this particular quote the male escort appears to describe his role within the encounter as that of a companion or chaperone. These findings offer a clear parallel to the findings of Chapter Three, which identified how the majority of adverts posted by male sex workers and aimed at female clients contained discourses relating to the safety and discretion of the female client rather than the escort. It was apparent that those discourses coded under ‘safety’ showed little regard for the escort’s personal or sexual safety. The language used by male to female escorts regarding safety was therefore suggestive of a chivalric code, whereby it would appear that most of the male escorts perceived the female client as vulnerable and likely nervous about seeking the services

of a male escort via the Internet. Therefore the emphasis of the male escort, offering the female client assurance that she would be safe, exercised the male escort's dominant role in the encounter, and as such, he also took on the role of her protector.

Male to male escorts also expressed their attitudes towards what was on sale to the customer, and towards the types of services that clients who use online escorts would expect. Like their female to male counterparts, several male to male escorts used language which suggested that they saw their body as a sexual commodity. As one male escort reported:

Don't get me wrong, a lot of guys want straight sex, well the much older ones [clients]. But more and more of the clients on the Internet request the kinkier stuff like bondage, or role play. I'm not sure if most of them actually want to do this stuff or just get a buzz from asking me! The thing is, it's hard to tell who is serious now and who is not. It's crazy we live in such a porn culture now. And that is what clients expect escorts do. Well not all clients but... they think we're here to be fucked like that. I've done some pretty sleazy stuff which is kind of...well degrading. But if I turn it down, I just know someone else [escort] will accept the booking.

(Male to male: 5)

As expressed in the quotation above, many of the male escorts interviewed made reference to the Internet as a place where limitless sexual acts could be requested by the customer, many of which escorts were willing to provide in exchange for an increased fee. At times male to male escorts spoke graphically about the types of sexual request their clients sought, which included requests from 'fisting' to 'watersports', whereby the client or the escort would urinate over the other party.

Female to female escorts were less explicit in their attitudes towards what's on sale, and rather more respectful in the manner in which they described the sexual encounter, compared to the other escort samples. Like their male to female escort counterparts, female to female escorts often described their encounters with their female clients in terms of the provision of company and courtship:

If it's a female client then we would normally always meet somewhere first. Most of my female clients like to meet at a nice bar, or restaurant first. I always try and encourage this as I know what it is like being a woman. And you always hear these bad stories that happen to women who go on these Internet dates. It just helps put them at ease... Also it allows us a bit of time to get to know each other and maybe to flirt a bit, so we can get a feel for each other... Um, with women [female clients] it's hard to judge what experience they have had with a women. So I try to be direct about it, so that I can get a feel for what she wants. Then normally I would make the suggestion to go back to their hotel room to have a drink in the room, you can't be so direct to woman, they like it to be subtle, although I have had a few where that is not the case at all... Most of the time I would make the first move, by leaning in for a kiss or by being tactile, and then it goes on from there, without going into details.

(Female to female: 1)

Like their male to female escort counterparts, both of the female to female escorts used assertive language to suggest that they initiated the sexual encounter through the provision of subtle 'intimacy'. What was striking to note about these findings was how those escorts interviewed who provided sexual services to female clients perceived the female client to be the sexually submissive partner in the encounter. Aligning with the findings relating to the male to female escorts, both of the female to female escorts expressed how the encounter with the client often mirrored that of a dating experience. In this context it appeared that the female escorts believed their female clients valued the dating experience as equally as important as the sexual encounter. The findings also suggest that both the male to female and female to female escort samples believed that, as the escort, they were the party that should initiate the sexual advance, typically perceiving the action as putting the female client at ease.

The descriptions given by the escorts, across all four of the examined markets, highlighted how the Internet played a crucial role in giving escorts the platform to sell such intimate services. Online escorts who sold sexual services had developed into a growing band of sex workers who were willing to offer more than a quick service transaction, instead incorporating an exchange of intimacy that had come to redefine traditional models of sexuality (Bernstein, 2007). As Weitzer (2012: 449) summed it

up, the provision of sex and intimacy was “like any other commercially packaged leisure activity”, one that was readily available for a price. The findings also demonstrate that the provision of intimacy by the sex worker could be genuine, but that it occurred in the context of time constraints, and was purchased rather than freely given.

The next part of this chapter further explores how the Internet has created a neutral space where sexual exchanges take place between the escort and the client. It then identifies how the virtual communication between an escort and his or her client has developed and changed to redefine the context of the escort industry, in turn redefining sexual labour itself.

4.4. Online escorting as an industry

The focus of previous research on escorting has been somewhat limited, as it has traditionally focused on female to male and male to male escorts in relation to advertising. Therefore, this section of the chapter explores how each of the distinctive online escort groups used the Internet as a virtual space to communicate with clients in order to arrange the sexual encounter, thus moving beyond previous work. At some point during the interviews each of the escorts discussed the increased benefits of advertising via Internet services, however due to the fact that all but five of the escorts who participated in this research had only ever advertised via the Internet little comparison could be made to more traditional forms of advertisement. However, for the five escorts who had previously advertised through small ads the transition to online marketing was subtle. All of the escorts interviewed made reference to the role of the Internet in facilitating their advertising, allowing them to set up adverts or independent websites at a low cost, and allowing for the inclusion of photographs and information about their rates and availability. As one female escort explained:

I think as long as you know a bit about computers it's relatively easy for anyone to set themselves up. I set my own advert up and it only took me a few hours. A lot of the sites have it all there for you, I mean like the template. After that it's pretty simple, all you got to do is list your prices and upload a few photos.

(Female to male: 5)

Escorts also talked about how they were able to upload a large number of visual pictures, and in some cases videos. As several participants expressed:

I think I pay around £6 a month or something silly like that. It's worth every penny if you ask me. It's the only way I ever advertise now. I used to pay my local newspaper over £300 a month only to be allowed to put down a few words and my mobile number.

(Female to male: 1)

Escorts also discussed the impact of the Internet on the escort market, with one escort going so far as to suggest that the Internet had restructured the escort industry:

The Internet, well it's created this hasn't it? I mean this market, what I do. You could say it's revolutionised it...I suppose the Internet is the reason why I'm escorting, and here today speaking to you. It's not like I ever would have walked into a brothel, and been like "Hey, do you have any jobs going!?"

(Female to male: 7)

Escorts across all the samples expressed similar sentiments about how the Internet's impact on escorting was the main motivational factor that had attracted them to entering the escorting business. As such it was a change of profession driven by technology. As noted, five of the escorts who participated in the interviews reported to have worked in other sectors of the sex industry, which they claimed influenced their decision to begin escorting. As one of these individuals stated:

I started off doing the odd webcam show which a friend of mine got me into, and then he got asked to do escorting and now that's all he does now, and once again I followed...

(Male to male: 8)

In the above quotation, the escort stated that his decision to work in the sex industry was influenced by a male friend, and this had allowed for an ease of transition. Other escorts also stated that the transition from working in other markets of the sex industry

was relatively simple due to already having an insight into the expectations of customers who sought adult erotic services. As one female escort explained:

I've worked in a few pole dancing clubs, and used to do a bit of stripping privately in and around London... I've also tried my hand at cam4, so to me, the move to escorting, well it was kind of obvious. At the end of the day we all know what blokes really want.

(Female to male: 3)

Key themes were identified across all of the distinctive escort samples in relation to the benefits of advertising online, such as it being more cost effective, professional in presentation and targeting a wider client base, coupled with a lessening of the risk of exposure, which will be examined further in the next chapter. Most of the escorts interviewed acknowledged the Internet's role in targeting clients in order to make them aware of their services through websites and communications (such as blogs and discussion forums), thereby targeting directly those clients they could serve best and most profitably. Most of the escorts interviewed also discussed the Internet's role in attracting the 'preferred client' (discussed in more detail later in this chapter). As one escort elaborates:

It was such a surprise at first. I mean, to see how many actual websites for escorts are out there. But you need to be honest with yourself about what sites you can use. I mean take sirens for example, that site attracts the very best, beautiful, absolutely stunning girls... The girls on there price up from £300 per hour, but like I said they are young and beautiful so they can charge that. Although, I wonder how much the agency takes of that, as I can imagine it would be a lot.

(Female to male: 2)

As in the quote above, many of the escorts made reference to the role of online escort agencies and third party managers, in relation to targeting the 'preferred client', despite all of the escorts, at the time of the interviews, being independent. Some of the escorts interviewed described their previous dissatisfaction when working with third-party management, expressing concerns about the fees charged by the agency and also the agency's role in the vetting process of clients. As one escort reported:

They took nearly as much as me for nothing. Literally, all they would do is call you up and give you an address. They said they took a percentage for the advertising and vetting. Well they claimed they vetted the guy, or he was a regular service user but how would I know they did and what do they mean vetted? You were given a brief but you never knew what you were walking into so to speak.

(Female to male: 4)

Several escorts went further to suggest that, at times, the agencies they had previously worked for had knowingly put the escort in deliberate danger, despite warnings about the client from previous escorts. As one male escort explained:

Now I work independently. That means I'm in control of my bookings and I get to speak to the clients before, you can tell a lot by chatting to someone if they're alright...I've always been good at that. In literally seconds I can suss someone out... before when I was with the agency, there was a few clients through who would be nasty to the younger lads and threaten to complain about them if they didn't do what they wanted, or try it on. Like saying shit like "the guy on the phone said you do it, and that it's included"... basically trying to get us to do things that we weren't comfortable with. It wasn't on. I had this one guy once, all the other guys had warned me about him but I didn't know that I was off to meet him. Anyway it was pretty bad... I don't really want to talk about it. But when I went back to the agency they couldn't really give a shit. They said they would take him off their books, but I know they didn't as I heard about another lad who went to see him... they wouldn't ever refuse a client [the agency] despite what we reported back to them, they would just send the next new guy. They just didn't give a shit basically.

(Male to male: 5)

Male to female escorts also expressed their dissatisfaction with agencies they had previously worked for. Two of these escorts stated the importance of avoiding bogus agencies, who would ask male escorts for a joining fee, with the promise of female clients. As one male escort noted:

There is an abundance of websites now that claim an over demand of female clients, all asking for ridiculous joining fees. I fell for it once (laughs), silly as it seems kind of obvious now. They're just after your money...with no intention in ever getting you clients.

(Male to female: 4)

It is perhaps understandable that nine of the escorts interviewed began their careers as escorts working for an agency but then soon opted to work independently online. As one escort put it:

There are other reasons of course why I advertise independently now. I suppose you could even call it freelancing. Now I get to pick and choose rates for services, and what hours I work. Everything I take now [payment] is mine.

(Female to male: 10)

For those men and women who possessed technological skills and had gained experience from previously working for an escort agency, the transition to work independently had been easy. The escorts interviewed seemed all too aware that the Internet provided them with the opportunity to work independently, without third party management, to advertise their business services effectively away from the attention of law enforcement, and to target their specialised sexual services to their preferred client, whilst maximising profits. All of the escorts interviewed expressed a belief that the Internet has had a positive effect on their business, in terms of facilitating independence and increasing profitability:

By doing this online it reaches the right people I guess, I mean you direct what you offer to the right type of guy instead of putting up a random advert in the back of a paper or something...

(Female to male: 1)

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the Internet has allowed both male and female online escorts to advertise to female clients who otherwise would not have patronised sex workers on the street or in indoor establishments. As one escort put it:

I'm guessing that not many of my clients would ever pick up those types of magazines or cards. They're not very discreet are they? I can't see any of the women I visit flicking through the back pages of The Yellow Pages, or something similar. Women are just not like that.

(Male to female: 1)

Similarly, one of the female to female escorts noted how advertising via the Internet was the only way to advertise to and attract female clients:

For women it's a lot harder. It's not like they could ever walk into a brothel or something like that. Well I certainly wouldn't. In fact what they don't know, well I'm guessing, I'm sure that most escorts would prefer women clients. I make it clear in my advert that I do [accept female clients], I'm getting more and more email from woman [female clients] asking about what I offer. But let's be honest, most of my clients are still men. It's just still, well... It's not normal for women is it? Not that I'm saying it shouldn't be...

(Female to female: 1)

Female to female escorts also stated that the Internet provided them with a platform to market their services and to communicate with potential female clients. Many of the male to female escorts said they believed that the ever-increasing demand for their services resulted from the contractual exchange aspect of the encounter being entirely virtual, a method of solicitation perceived preferably by female clients. As one male escort argued:

It's the only way to advertise. I mean to let women know I'm out there and this is what I do. It's how I do businesses. Everything is arranged by email. I find that once the date arrangements have been made and the money side of it has been sorted out the client is more relaxed about it all, rather than negotiating it face to face... I'm guessing most women would prefer it this way. Less seedy I guess.

(Male to female: 4)

In this context, the prearrangements of the sexual exchange occurred in a neutral virtual environment, where discussions about the location and environment for the encounter would take place, the client would put forward their sexual fantasy and desires, risk assessments could be calculated by both parties, and negotiations of payment could occur. To put it simply the product was advertised and then reviewed by the seller, who may decide to make a purchase. It was then the seller's responsibility to deliver the product at their discretion. In this respect, it was no different from any other business transaction where various online marketing tools and websites are used to promote services. As one participant pointed out:

I'm just like any other business woman who uses the Internet to market my services. What I do is no different in that respect. I think that by you [researcher] asking these questions you're wanting to overly complicate it, something that is relatively simple. I'm just simply advertising a service on the Internet, what happens to be sex.

(Female to male: 2)

However, whilst other businesses strived to reach the widest possible online audience, escorts must be discreet when offering their services, whilst also attempting to reach the maximum number of potential clients. Escorts also, at times, expressed that they perceived advertising online to be less publicly visible than more traditional forms of advertising, such as printed publications in magazines or telephone directories. Escorts also felt that by posting an advert on the Internet a potential client would have to directly search for that particular site or page, thus reducing public visibility. As one escort reported:

This way what I do is out of sight and mind to anyone who doesn't want my services, but at the same time I'm readily available to those who might want my services. It's just better for everyone this way. I don't want my face in the back of magazine, who would?

(Female to male: 4)

Several other escorts also spoke about the sense of privacy that the Internet offered, not only with regard to their own concerns, but also for their customers. Many

described the Internet in terms of a private arena where they could communicate with clients in order to arrange a sexual transaction. Some escorts felt that the type of clientele they attracted, or wished to attract, would not risk seeking the services of a sex worker via more traditional forms of sexual advertising, such as print. Despite no interview question directly addressing escorts' fears of being publicly exposed, reference was made by several participants to fear of exposure:

The Internet is just more discreet I think. Anyone can pick up a magazine and flick through it. With the Internet guys have to go online and deliberately look for it (escort services). I wouldn't like the idea of just anyone seeing my advert.

(Female to male: 6)

All of the findings above suggest that escorts favour the Internet in terms of its provision of a neutral space for their solicitation. The findings demonstrate that many of the escorts interviewed believe the Internet plays a vital role in the marketing of their services, and in attracting the 'preferred client'. The next section of this chapter explores further how the Internet has impacted on escorts' communication with their clients, which is necessary in order to sustain an escort-client relationship.

4.5. Virtual communication

Escorts expressed other perceived communication benefits provided by the Internet in a variety of ways, from it being a means of solicitation, to providing a 'fixed contract' for the encounter. A number of escorts reported that they felt discussion via email prior to the encounter provided the escort and the client with shared expectations:

By chatting with the client online, you can arrange it all down to the very last detail. And that's what a lot of clients like, you kind of get, well... what I mean is it provides a fixed contract for the meet, like in the sense what's going to happen. I'm very clear to customers before we meet what I expect, and what they can expect from me... best to get that sort of talk out the way before the meet...

(Female to Male: 5)

Here, the communication between an escort and client allowed the client the opportunity to explore his sexual desires without the revelation of his identity, and without an encounter actually taking place, thus reducing feelings of rejection by the sex worker. More traditional forms of solicitation, for specific sexual acts, would have been far more difficult and troublesome if seeking the services of a street or indoor sex worker (Ashford, 2008). Ashford (2008: 42) has referred to the selection of an escort via his or her webpage, based on the services provided, as the ‘McDonaldization thesis’ at work, with clients of sex workers seeking sexual acts as one might consult a menu, due to many escorts listing the types of sexual services they offer. In this respect, the Internet has allowed clients a far greater ease of access to sex workers who are willing to perform specific sexual acts. As one escort put it:

It’s made my working life a hell of a lot easier. I’m not really into anything that kinky, that’s why I ask them for a brief description of what they want. Otherwise clients will just show up and throw something on you. It’s best to be upfront about what I do and what they want, it saves a lot of hassle along the way.

(Male to Male: 2)

In this sense escorts felt that communicating electronically or via the telephone with the client before the encounter provided the client with a ‘virtual contract’ covering what the escort deemed acceptable behavior, which the client was obliged to honour (this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Some of the escorts even expressed their preference for communicating with clients beforehand via email exchange, as this meant they didn’t have to “jump into character”, unlike receiving a telephone call from a client. As one female escort stated:

I prefer to chat with any client through email at first. I always have. I find it easier to respond to emails than being called up every minute and asked the same questions. Also if they call you, you have to just jump into character, and that’s hard, when you’re in the middle of doing the housework.

(Male to Female: 3)

Escorts also expressed a number of other benefits associated with communication via the Internet, disclosing how emails, phone calls and text messages were often used as modes of courtship, with contact maintained between each visit.

I often email my clients and send them my new pictures, or just a hello message to let them know I'm still here... it's important to drum up repeat business. A lot of my clients prefer me to email them, especially the married ones. I suppose by doing that, they think that you're still thinking about them.

(Female to male: 4)

The findings discussed suggest that many escorts who participated in the research perceived the Internet as providing a neutral space for selling sex, unlike previous advertisement methods, such as placing cards in public telephone boxes, or advertising in their local newspaper. This form of 'cyber-exchange' could also be seen to empower sex workers through enforcing acceptable boundaries and limits of sexual behaviour, which in turn regulated the sexual marketplace (Hughes, 2002). What was also interesting to note was that most of the escorts interviewed felt that the Internet was crucial in attracting more desirable clients who would pay higher fees. This will be explored further in the next, and final, section of this chapter.

4.6. Social status

During the interviews a number of escorts discussed the role of the Internet in communicating and attracting a particular type of client, one who was normally perceived to be middle to upper class. Escorts who participated in the research also expressed that not only did they perceive advertising online to be a more discreet method of solicitation for both parties, but they utilised the Internet to target and attract a preferred type of customer. As one male escort reported:

My clients tend to be older men. They are the ones with the most money. And the fact that the older ones are pretty respectful in general. Normally they're quite educated to, well I mean in the sense they have good jobs... A lot of them are in London on business, so they're mostly hotel visits.

(Male to male: 2)

The preference for a particular type of customer was also highlighted in the findings of Chapter Three, where it was noted that certain types of language were used within adverts as a marketing ploy to attract a specific type of customer. The type of clientele that online advertising was perceived to attract appeared to be one of the main motivational factors for both male and female clients to operate via the Internet.

Despite only a small number of the escorts who participated in the research reporting having worked in a different sex market, or having advertised via more traditional methods, they all noted differences in the clientele attracted, with most, after a short period of time, giving up on traditional forms of advertising. One escort reported a similar transition from brothel work to self-employment:

You certainly notice a difference in the guys you see from that of the sauna. Since I advertised independently I can pick and choose how many guys I want to see and what type of guys I want to see. In a sauna you couldn't just refuse clients, or you'd be soon kicked out.

(Female to male: 2)

Across the sample, escorts favoured clients who they perceived to be educated, professional and wealthy. Escorts commonly noted that their services were convenient to clients who may be on business or visiting the city, and that they targeted their services to fit into the client's professional or working lifestyle. In this context, escorts were more than willing to market themselves as a convenient commodity to this particular type of clientele, who may not have the time to seek traditional forms of sexual relationships. The escorts' willingness to attract 'middle class' clients marries up with the findings presented in the discourse analysis in Chapter Three. As was noted, escorts adopted a style of 'middle class'-related language in order to advertise their services as a specific sexual object, in order to attract the desired 'middle class' customer, whilst also fulfilling the requirements of that customer's expectation of a style and type of service.

Escorts also often referred to what they believed attracted clients to seek the services of online escorts, and how they differentiated themselves from other sex workers who worked outside the escort market. As the following escorts explained:

I know that this is going to sound pretty pretentious, and I'm sure that you have worked this out. But I'm going to be pretty direct, my clients pay for me, the way I act and look... but as they say in this world you pay for what you get. The prices I charge are a reflection of me, and they're more than willing to pay for me. And that includes a lot of the small things, like what I wear and my apartment. This is precisely why guys use escorts, for these very reasons.

(Female to male: 7)

They [female client] expect a gentleman, a well-educated guy, not some lad turning up in a baseball cap and Adidas tracksuit bottoms.

(Male to female: 4)

In this way, escorts identified those personal qualities which they felt attracted their 'preferred client'. What was interesting to note was that some of these perceived qualities related to some of the key themes identified within the discourse analysis findings, such as body, sophistication and education. As above, some of the escorts cited these qualities as criteria for the prices they charged and for the services they offered. As discussed in Chapter Two, the accounts given by escorts within this study could arguably relate to Hakim's (2010) theory of 'erotic capital'. In the context of this study escorts were all too aware that they were able to exploit their 'erotic' and 'bodily capital' through online targeted advertising in order to attract new 'preferred' clients, in order to maximise financial profit.

As Bernstein (2007: 480) has noted, the Internet has allowed escorts to advertise via specialist websites, which has allowed them to target their advertisements towards clients who "harbour an interest in their specific physical characteristics" or social or educational background. Ashford (2008) also noted that the Internet has allowed clients to seek out the services of a sex worker from the comfort of their computer screen. The findings of this chapter have therefore provided an insight into the extent to which online commerce has shifted the boundaries of social space for each of the

distinctive escort markets. As Bernstein (2007) put it, the relationship between the white middle class privileged men and women who choose to engage in sex work has led to an economic restructuring of the sex market.

4.7. Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter have provided an insight into the lived experiences of men and women who sell sexual services via the Internet within the UK. As a result, this research has contributed a wealth of additional information to the existing limited body of literature focused on sex work and technology. For the first time an understanding of the lived experiences of selling sex via the Internet for male and female heterosexual and gay and lesbian escorts has been explored, and valuable information gained.

Most of the escorts who participated in the research stated that the Internet had played a central role in their commodification. As discussed, most of the escorts stated that they engaged in this type of emotional labour in response to the client's expectations. However, some of the escorts interviewed pointed to the escalating tensions and challenges involved in expanding the relationship offered to include multiple dimensions of intimacy. As a result, the offering of a relationship which went beyond the sexual encounter could potentially blur the boundaries between the escorts selling a sexual service and those who offered something which potentially mirrored an ordinary relationship. These findings raise the question: do clients who become emotionally involved with sex workers recognise that the escort may be offering 'counterfeit intimacy' (Boles and Garbin, 1974, cited in Sanders, 2005: 333)

Most of the escorts from each of the distinctive markets also identified how the anonymity, convenience, and discretion provided by the Internet attracted a particular type of clientele, and allowed male and female sex workers a platform through which to advertise their sexual services to female clients. However, there is still relatively little known with regard to how most escorts combat the risk of personal violence during the encounter, what types of practical safety precautions they employ before and during appointments, or how they manage the emotional labour involved in interactions with clients. The next chapter explores the findings in relation to

perceptions of risk within each of the distinct markets, and the risk management strategies each group employed to maintain their safety.

CHAPTER FIVE

Risk and Escorting Via the Internet

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored how the commodification and selling of intimate relations within the escort-client relationship was understood and experienced by the escorts involved. The findings emphasise how many of the escorts interviewed as part of the research saw the Internet as having played a central role in the commodification of their services, and in shaping the boundaries of their sexual labour. The findings of the previous chapter also highlighted that escorts favoured the anonymity, convenience, and discretion provided by the Internet, and its role in attracting a particular type of clientele. However, there is still relatively little known about how both male and female heterosexual and gay and lesbian escorts conceptualised and managed risks both before and during appointments. This chapter draws on the findings from the research to illustrate how escorts accounted for their experiences of violence and the meanings these experiences held for them.

As discussed in the literature review, over the last two decades there has been increasing interest in violence against sex workers (Høigard, 1992; Barnard, 1993; Whittaker and Hart, 1996; Church et al., 2001; Hart and Barnard, 2003; Kinnell 2006). Empirical evidence suggests that sex workers are routinely at risk of client violence (c.f. Barnard, 1993; Whittaker and Hart, 1996; Church et al., 2001; Hart and Barnard 2003; Kinell, 2006). However, as previously discussed, studies about the link between victimisation and sex work have focused predominantly on female sex workers. This suggests that women involved in the sex industry are vulnerable to attack and physical assaults, with the focus being on clients, partners and pimps in particular. This research focus has left us with a distorted view of prostitution markets, one that rarely acknowledges the market type in which the sexual exchange occurs, or the potential for men and women to be selling their services to both genders. Therefore, this chapter focuses on an aspect which had received little or no research attention in the research to date on sex work – the ways in which male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian

escorts who operate via the Internet conceptualised and managed the risks associated with selling sex.

One of the aims of the qualitative semi-structured interviews was to examine the accounts of escorts who operate via the Internet, an area which has also so far been largely ignored in studies on commercial sex. In focusing on men's and women's own accounts of work-related risks, risky behaviour and coping strategies, this research investigated online escorts' reflexive understandings of sex work, and the occupational risks associated with advertising and selling sexual services via the Internet. The research emphasises the gender and sexual orientation of the encounter in order to understand the ways in which men and women involved in sex work conceptualise, manage and respond to risk. This chapter also involves exploration and discussion of the interviewees' views of risk at work, which they raised during the semi-structured interviews. In considering the findings the meanings and contexts of violence are explored, as these were crucial in understanding the various occupational risks that online escorts may face in the course of their work.

5.2. Categorising types of risk

The sociology of risk is largely concerned with how society manufactures risk. Social structures impact risk, and it is seen as the responsibility of individuals to negotiate and respond to this (Beck, 1999). Therefore, the focus of this research is how online escorts socially construct the risk posed by their clients, and the ways in which this could lead to risk management strategies being employed, as a reflection of the escorts' priorities. This chapter considers how online escorts calculate the objective possibility of risk, as well as their ability to manage these risks, and begins by examining the personal risks identified by the online escorts who took part in this research. Interviewees were asked whether they felt they were at any risk in performing their role as an escort, and this was kept as an open question, although interviewees were prompted if necessary. The first half of this chapter outlines the escorts' responses to this question, and thereby gives priority to their perception of the risks involved in online escorting. The second half of the chapter examines the strategies for risk avoidance or minimisation identified by the interviewees.

What was particularly notable here was that the Internet had opened up new means for escorts to vet clients, to a certain extent, in order to reduce risk, whilst at the same time creating new problems of personal security. The chapter concludes with a consideration of these issues.

5.2.1. Robbery

Although only one of the female to male escorts reported having been robbed by a client, most of the escorts still perceived themselves to be potential victims of such a crime. Several of the female to male escorts stated that being robbed was their main concern. As one female escort commented:

I heard only the other week of a sauna in Hammersmith that was turned over [robbed], but then again a sauna is always going to be a target. But it does make you stop and think... Yeah so the thought that I might be robbed is always going to be at the back of your mind especially since I'm working alone most of the time...

(Female to male: 1)

In the quotation above the escort heard, via social media, of a sauna which had recently been robbed. For some of the female to male escorts the fear of violence, whether physical or sexual, was heightened by stories heard through word of mouth or read via the Internet on websites such as saafe.com or 'UglyMug scheme'. These particular websites allowed sex workers to post warnings about dangerous clients, increasing reporting, detection and conviction of crimes which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Most of the escorts perceived the risk of robbery as being partly inherent to the sexual transaction, as they predominantly worked alone, with strangers, and were likely to keep a certain amount of money on their person or premises.

I suppose there is a risk... Yes... I've heard of a few other guys [escorts] who were robbed. That's why I'm more careful about seeing new clients. I don't just turn up for a booking. There is stuff I need to check out first.

(Male to male: 4)

Like most of the escorts, the individual quoted above attributed his experiences to his working environment (always working alone and seeing mostly strangers). Several other escorts, including a female to female participant, also identified that robbery was an ever-present risk in escorting. However, this was expressed in a general sense, and did not specifically relate to her female clients. What was interesting to note was that none of the male to female escorts who participated in the research mentioned robbery as a risk they perceive to be associated with escorting. This raised several interesting questions, such as whether escorts perceive female clients as being incapable of robbery, and if so what factors may influence this rationale? This is explored further in the following sections.

5.2.2. Client violence

In the following analysis sections the findings from the study are explored to illustrate how escort workers accounted for their perceptions and experiences of violence, as well as the meanings these held for them. Physical assault was uncommon amongst participants, with only four of the twenty-seven escorts reporting that they had experienced violence. A number of studies have claimed that clients “are responsible for most of the violence against prostitutes” (Hoigard and Finstad, 1992: 57). However, interestingly, most of the escorts who participated in this research reported that they did not see their clients as violent or dangerous (see Chapter Two). Instead, many escorts questioned the motives for a client wanting to harm them. Escorts argued that they perceive the risks posed by clients who use online escorts to be far less than those who frequent street prostitutes. It is also important to note that most escorts expressed, to some degree, that they would have no problem reporting a violent client, either via third party support groups or websites or directly to law enforcement officials. This perhaps was suggestive of a positive relationship between escorts and law enforcement officials. As one male to male escort explained:

I don't see them as dangerous. It's just not in their nature. I mean, why would want to hurt me, well I don't want to think about it... That's where the mistake lies. I think. I mean with the general public. Everyone heard about those women getting murdered in Ipswich and then think that every sex worker will be murdered... I can't see any of my clients acting violent. They'd have too much to lose as well.

(Male to male: 2)

As evidenced in the quotation above escorts did not perceive themselves to be at risk of violence. The findings herein suggest that sex workers who operate within the online escort market have a different type of 'trusting' relationship with their client from sex workers working on the streets (Church et al., 2001; Weitzer, 2005, 2009). Although many of the escorts who participated acknowledged the existence of dangerous clients, many believed that attracting 'middle class' clientele via the Internet drastically reduced the chances of violence occurring within the encounter (see Chapter Four).

The perception that middle class men were least likely to be violent, as Cheung (2012) argued, may stem from popular discourses and correlations between class and violence, where there is an assumption that working class men are far more likely to commit violent acts than professionals. In a study of violence against caring professionals in the UK (including police officers, medical staff and social workers) who frequently interacted with members of the public within their work environment Waddington et al. (2006) concluded that physical assault was uncommon amongst these professionals. Similar findings surfaced in the accounts of the escorts who participated within this research. The majority of interviewees were aware of the physical risks of violence associated with escorting, but perceived these to be minimal as a result of the safeguards they employed to counteract them.

Although most participants did not perceive themselves as vulnerable to (physical) violence at the hands of their clients, rumours of violent incidents their colleagues had endured or attacks they read about on Internet escort forums often served as a reminder of their vulnerability. Working alone made some escorts, particularly women, feel far more aware of their vulnerability, which resulted in most of the escorts implementing

a number of stringent safeguards. This is discussed in more detail in the second half of this chapter. For example one female escort explained:

I guess I've been fairly lucky so far... I've heard about a lot of nasty stories that other girls [escorts] have gone through. It's a reminder never to let your guard down, even if the client is a regular. That way you're better off if you trust none of them. The other day I read about a girl [escort] who turned up for a booking at some private house and the bastards raped her. It was a group of Asian men. They were all waiting for her. But apparently she knew one the guys, he was one of her regulars. Well that's what it said... Everyone told her to report it to the police. But I'm not sure if she did or not.

(Female to male: 8)

Interestingly, despite none of the escorts within the research stating that they had been physically assaulted by a client, with the exception of the escort who had previously been robbed, several escorts went on to later express how they had had what they described as near misses with clients. As one female escort explained:

I'm fine with most of my clients. I feel safe doing this. I'm ok with it. But, there was this one time when this guy got rough with me. He was quite a big guy all hung up about being gay. I knew that something wasn't right, as he kept on saying weird shit like "I shouldn't be doing this". Anyway when I got there he was already out of it... drunk...he was really strange, one minute he was all over me and the next he would just push me away. I thought it was some sort of game at first, but then he started to get rough. At one point he pushed me really hard in my stomach and I went flying into the bed. I was properly winded for a minute. I was like "hey buddy calm down". He then walked over to the other side of the room crying, and I mean blubbering like a baby. That's when I thought "get the fuck out of here". I grabbed my jacket and made my exit. That one bad experience, it was enough. That made me see every client differently.

(Male to male: 1)

Escorts often spoke of the importance of reacting quickly if they perceived a client to be getting agitated or aggressive. One female escort recalled a specific encounter where her quick reaction helped her to regain control over an encounter:

One man pinned me down once and not in a nice way. He had a certain look in his eyes that really scared me. I kept on saying "let me go", but he didn't, so I screamed... he was like "you're being over sensitive. I've paid for this". I told him "you paid for what we agreed and that didn't include anything about being rough"... You could tell in the way that he looked at me that he knew he upset me. He could see it in my face...but for that split second I freaked, this panic just came over me. The thing is he was a new client, so I didn't know what he was like.

(Female to male: 10)

In this instance, the escort expressed her emotions and her dislike of being treated in such a rough manner by the client. As she stated, she shamed the client, which resulted in him feeling guilty for his actions. However, not all reported instances of violence could be resolved, as one male to male escort reported:

This one client kept on asking me to do anal. I told him I only top and that we should stick to what we agreed. He then started to get pushy with me, grabbing my wrists and trying to push me down to the bed. I kept on saying no and that I don't bottom for anyone. Anyway a few minutes of this I just told him to fuck off and that nothing was going to happen. Luckily I still had my shirt on and just picked up my jeans and walked out. It was in a hotel so I knew once I was in the corridor I was safe...

(Male to male: 2)

In the quotation above, the escort retreated from the client due to fears for his safety. He also expressed that he knew if he could escape in the hotel public corridor he was safe, as it was unlikely that the client would apprehend him in a public space. In this particular case the escort perceived that meeting a client in a public environment, such as a hotel, was a means of risk prevention, as the escort knew that help was available if needed. Several other escorts expressed a similar view.

Several of the escorts within the study also independently spoke about different ways to minimise risks during the client encounter. Six escorts altogether, from both the female to male and male to male escort sample, stressed the importance of not being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, even if their client was. Escorts felt that being under the influence of alcohol or drugs before or during the encounter would put them at considerably more risk. As one male escort participant explained:

I don't drink or take anything before I meet any of my clients, and if we're out and the client is drinking I only drink in moderation. One or two... I know some other blokes [escorts] that do. But I don't! I need to have a clear head about me on a date. Anyhow, you can't tell how the guy [client] is going to be if he gets wasted. That's the thing, you know, alcohol and drugs, well it makes people become unpredictable.

(Male to male: 8)

As is clear in this quotation, and in similar comments from other escorts, many perceived that being under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the client encounter would place them at considerable risk.

What was interesting to note was how the attitudes of those in the male to female escort sample differed significantly from their female to male counterparts, with regard to conceptualising the risk of violence that their clients could potentially pose. It was this sample of escorts who were the least likely to state that they considered themselves at risk of physical assault or robbery. As one male to female escort participant noted:

...Yeah I'm careful when I meet clients... in the sense that I have to tread sensitively. But at the same time I don't think that I'm putting myself in any risk.

(Male to female: 7)

Although none of the male to female group who participated in the research specifically made reference to violence associated with their work as an escort, it is important to consider the reasons for male escorts feeling that the risk of violence was

minimal. Several male escorts suggested that their gender and physical strength would counteract that of most of their female clients. As one male to female escort expressed:

Of course you have to be fairly sensible doing this... like where you will meet? And who will be there? ... But I'm telling you, in all the years I've been escorting nothing's ever gone wrong. Most of my clients are women. They don't have a dangerous bone in them... In fact I'd say the whole thing's more risky for them. I'm the guy going to meet a lone woman surely, right?

(Male to female: 4)

What was interesting to note was that similar findings were also identified in Chapter Three, where it was documented that several of the male to female escort advertisements placed little concern on the worker's personal safety, but instead focused on that of their clients. Male escorts within the research appeared to assume that their gender and physical size in relation to their female clients would allow them to take physical control of the encounter and defend themselves should a problem arise. Although none of the male to female escorts reported being the victim, or expressed being concerned about being the victim, of a physical assault from a female client, two male escorts did report having previously been harassed or verbally abused by a female client, which will be returned to in the section on 'verbal abuse' below.

Most participants were only aware of other sex workers who had been attacked, via the Internet or through word of mouth, but these stories tended to be identified as exceptional cases. What is important to note is that for all of the escorts within the research client violence was not a common occurrence, but an exceptional experience. However, as noted, the ways in which violence was acted out against them and legitimated varied significantly.

What was also interesting to note was that female to male and male to male escorts were the only two samples to report experiences of violence, and to express grave concerns, at times, over their physical safety. Although the interviewees did not perceive themselves to be at risk of violence, this may be to do with the fact that they took a lot of precautionary measures to protect themselves against such risks, as will

be discussed in more detail under the subheading 'clients' strategies for dealing with risks' later in this chapter.

5.2.3. Unwanted sexual acts

As documented in Chapter Four, escorts reported that communicating electronically or via telephone with their clients before the encounter provided the client with a 'virtual contract' in relation to what the escort deemed to be acceptable behaviour, which the client was obliged to honour during the encounter. Escorts reported that, although this happened rarely, some clients would break the sexual contract and attempt to perform sexual acts outside of the 'scripted routine' (this is returned to below). Also, several escorts reported that some of their clients tried to take advantage by refusing to pay for sexual acts that were not previously negotiated, or attempting to control the sexual transaction. This was perceived to be a risk, as losing control of the management of the client encounter significantly increased the escort's vulnerability. As one male to male escort reported:

Most of my clients have been ok. I've had a few... like this guy who wanted oral and a hand job only. So I took the money and I got on with it. Then ten minutes in he said he wanted full sex. I told him the price and he wouldn't accept it. He started coming out with stuff like "I've already paid enough". I said to him that we're not going to do anal then. He started getting all funny about it... We carried on and then within a few minutes he kept on trying to try and touch my arse. So I stopped again, and told him he would need to pay the extra. Again he got funny and said no. In the end we finished with what we agreed.

(Male to male: 8)

In this particular account although the escort was willing to perform anal sex, with the service being outside of the original service agreement, control was maintained through the escort renegotiating the service agreement prior to the additional sexual act. Most of the escorts expressed how they usually negotiate sexual services, and the fee, before the sexual transaction. However, as in the quotation above, the negotiation could be flexible during the encounter, as long as payment was agreed and taken before the sexual act was performed. If the escort had let the client perform the sexual act that

had not been agreed upon in this particular instance it would have been a violation of his rights, as he would have been coerced into performing a sexual service which he did not originally consent to.

Several other escorts expressed something of a similar nature, reporting that they limited access to certain body parts or refused to perform certain sexual acts and that if a client breached this condition and attempted to perform an un-negotiated act it was seen as a serious violation of the contract. As one female escort reported:

A few months ago I had this one client who kept trying to go down on me [perform oral sex on the escort]. I told him at the start that I don't receive oral. I just don't like it from clients. Anyway, half way into it he stopped and got up and went to the end of the bed. He then reached across and started to go down on me. I shouted "stop, what are you doing?" He was like, "I want to give you some pleasure, I don't see what the problem is". I was like "the problem is that I told you I don't do it and you're doing it". I could tell he wasn't happy, but neither was I.

(Female to male: 5)

Several of the escorts reported encounters with clients who had broken the service agreement with the escort, with one serious case involving the client attempting to perform unprotected anal sex with the escort. As one male to male participant reported:

Several guys have tried it...to fuck me without a condom. Obviously I have never let them. They try it, and then come out with shit like "it's slipped off" [the condom]. So I said "here put this on". As if I was really gonna let him ram me, you know, bareback. I knew what he was trying to do. He said "do you want me to go?" ... But I said "no, stay, you put it back on now"... he said "but I can't cum if I'm wearing a condom". I said "well you couldn't cum in my ass anyway so keep it on".

(Male to male: 4)

Although the escort quoted above continued with the encounter his refusal to allow the client to perform unsafe sex reinforced the boundaries within that sexual encounter and allowed the escort to maintain control, whilst expressing his dissatisfaction at the

client's intention. If the escort had not intervened with respect to the client's actions it would have been perceived that he had lost control of the encounter, and he would have exposed himself to sexual health risks.

Escorts also spoke about requests for specific styles of sexual services, where it was predominantly the client who took control of the sexual encounter. For example, several female to male escorts reported an increase in demand for what is known as the 'porno service'. It was reported by the escorts that the 'porno service' was a style of 'hardcore' sexual service, one which mirrors that of a pornographic scene involving a man (or several men) and a woman. It was often stated by female participants that they did not enjoy performing this service, as often they felt it to be overly rough, and it was perceived as degrading by the escort. As one female participant reported:

I'm getting more emails from clients asking if I offer a porno service. I don't like doing it. Some men can start to get a bit rough, and its hard work, I mean draining... It's like, well, it's exactly in the name. Basically it's like a porno. But I don't allow them to film. I've heard about some girls that have, but I don't know if that's true. How do you know what they would do with it, and what if they posted it online? So no, I won't let them film it despite the money. To me it's not worth the risk, you know, and what worries me is more and more girls are advertising that they offer it, why? To me it's dangerous. Too many men are watching porn if you ask me. It's worrying.

(Female to male: 8)

In the quotation above, the escort expressed how she perceived there was a link between her male customers' expectations of the encounter and their consumption of porn films. Several escorts also noted that there had been an increase in clients requesting sexual services that mirrored a 'hardcore porn' movie, which more often than not presented the female adult porn actress as a sexual commodity subject to aggressive penetrative sex by one or more male adult porn actors. Another escort reported:

Some guys are way too rough. I hate it when they think they can grab the back of your head when you're giving oral. They don't realise that you're nearly choking. They see

girls giving deep throat in porn and they want it done to them. It's aggressive. But it's like they get off on it, seeing you 'gag' on their cock. It's wrong!

(Female to male: 7)

Many escorts expressed the importance of applying boundaries that would protect them from clients who may become sexually aggressive, in order to reduce the potential risk of the situation getting out of control. Many escorts went further by expressing their disapproval of the provision of this type of sexual service, with many feeling that by agreeing to such sexual behaviour escorts placed themselves at considerable risk, allowing the client to take a sexually aggressive, dominant role in the sexual encounter, and thus losing their ability to maintain their dignity (See 'maintaining dignity' below). The ability to manage the client encounter was paramount in terms of risk prevention, as Hart and Barnard (2003) have suggested, and the confidence displayed by sex workers when dealing with clients was an important strategy employed by women in order to achieve control over the sexual encounter. In order to secure the power of control over the encounter escorts had to actively display confidence and react assertively to their clients' wrong doings throughout the encounter.

There were noticeable differences between the escort samples, with none of the male to female or female to female escorts making any reference during the semi-structured interviews to unwanted sexual acts. Instead this group of escorts described the sexual encounter in terms of selling time, and viewed it as organic in nature. These differences suggest that when selling sex to male clients, male and female escorts favour selling sex based on the performance of sexual acts, rather than providing the client with an unscripted sexual encounter. This further suggests that escorts strongly felt the need to manage and set clear sexual boundaries in the presence of their male customers. However, caution must be taken in comparing male and female escorts who sell sexual services to male clients and those who sell to females. It is important to remember that both male and female escorts who advertise to female clients reported less demand for their services in comparison to male and female escorts providing services to male clients. This resulted in fundamental differences in how escorts sold their sexual services to clients of a female gender, in terms of risk management. The findings

suggest that female clients expect an organic sexual performance, and one that is not fixed in relation to the pricing of specific sexual acts and body contact.

5.2.4. Sexual health related risks

It soon became apparent whilst conducting the semi-structured interviews that the risks associated with selling sex via the Internet went beyond physical risk. Sexual risks associated with the transmission of STIs and HIV also posed a significant threat to escorts, not only in terms of health but also in relation to the reputation of their business; however, as expressed by most escorts, these risks were easily manageable. It is a common misconception that sex workers are casual agents in the spreading of venereal diseases in western societies (Cheung, 2012). The spread of sexual disease in sex work was considered a major health problem as it was thought likely to affect the health of the public community (Cheung, 2012). Despite these moral discourses the link between sex work and HIV/AIDS has become increasingly challenged by sociological research (see for example McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Ward and Day, 2004).

The aim of this section of the chapter is to explore escorts' experiences of managing sexual health related risks, as well as their understanding of this type of occupational risk. The main focus is on escorts' accounts of themselves and their risk-taking (or risk-avoiding) behaviours in (potentially) risky situations. When participants were invited to discuss the sexual risks they believed to be present in their line of work many differentiated sexual diseases into two categories; less serious sexual infections and AIDS/HIV, which in turn influenced their willingness to perform certain unprotected sexual acts. The responses given by participants were therefore categorised under the following key themes:

5.2.5. 'Bareback' requests from clients

As discussed in Chapter Three, there was very little mention of sexual safety within the discourse analysis of the online escort advertisements, with the exception of several of the male to male advertisements. Despite participants in the study not being asked directly if they had ever engaged in unprotected sex with their clients the subject was

raised independently by several of the escorts. Participants raised this topic most frequently when discussing the boundaries and limitations of the sexual services they were willing to provide to their clients. The request for 'bareback' services was a concern frequently raised by escorts who provided sexual services to male clients, and was often used specifically to describe the provision of unprotected penetrative sex by clients.

Despite participants not being directly asked if they had ever engaged in unprotected sex, an act commonly referred to as 'barebacking', the subject was independently raised by several of the escorts. Participants raised this topic most frequently when they were discussing the boundaries and limitations of the sexual services they were willing to provide to their clients. The request for bareback services was a concern frequently raised by escorts providing sexual services to male clients. As one male participant stated:

Some guys are really direct and straight out with it, "do you fuck without a condom?" I'm stunned when they ask me... they must be mad. They can see that in my face that I'm not impressed... In the past I've even had a few guys offered me extra [money]. This one client even offered me £800 to top him bareback. Tempting as it was, I just couldn't.... I'd be worried later.

(Male to male: 4)

Several of the female to male and male to male escorts reported receiving frequent requests from clients enquiring about whether they were willing to engage in unprotected penetration. Of these escorts all stated that they refused such requests, and several went even further to suggest that they rejected the client entirely based on such a request. In the majority of cases escorts reported that requests for unsafe sex were normally made prior to the scheduled encounter.

Several other escorts, including two from the female to male sample, also expressed how clients had offered extra financial rewards in return for 'bareback' sexual services. Despite frequent requests by clients to engage in unprotected sex, all of the escorts who reported to have been asked stated that they would not accommodate such a request, and several went even further to state that they rejected the client based on

such a request. In the majority of cases escorts reported that requests for unsafe sex were normally made prior to the scheduling encounter. As one female to male escort reported:

When I turn on my computer and start checking my emails I normally come across the same questions, like how much are my rates, where am I based and a lot of the time they're asking will I have to wear a condom? I'm not saying that every client asks, but a lot of them do. I'm not shocked in the slightest anymore. Now I just delete the message. I can't even be bothered to explain the reasons why I don't, what's the point if anyone's that stupid not to understand why, then there no point even discussing it.

(Female to male: 5)

For other participants, the request for 'barebacking' from the clients occurred during the sexual encounter. In some cases the escort reported that clients used a number of different non-verbal methods in attempting to facilitate unprotected penetrative sex during the encounter. As one female escort explained:

Some guys try and trick you. I've had it all done to me. Like if they're on top of you, they start kissing you to try and distract you. And the next thing you know they start rubbing it on you [penis], and are starting to push it in. It doesn't shock me anymore. Unless I bring it up most of guys would never think about using one [condom].

(Female to male: 9)

As in the quotations above, it was the escorts themselves who were usually the ones to initiate the use of sexual protection during the encounter, either verbally or by physically applying the condom themselves. Several other escorts, from each of the escort markets, expressed similar views. In this context it became the escort's responsibility to maintain safe sexual practices.

Male to male escorts were far more likely to express their disapproval with regard to escorts they believed to have engaged in unsafe sex with clients, in particular with their

attitudes in not taking HIV infection seriously and failing in their duty of refusing to engage in unprotected sex. As one male to male escort stated:

Some guys attitudes to unprotected sex just scare me. It's like they don't care, or just think they're invincible to it. HIV I mean. It doesn't work like that. I know loads of younger guys who'd let their clients fuck them bareback. And when I say to them "what are you thinking?" they're like "it's ok". What the hell! I know that you're not going to die if you catch it. But who wants to be sick for the rest of their lives? Why would they risk it?

(Male to male: 2)

As in the quotation above, and in similar statements from other escorts, condoms were at the forefront of escorts' minds when it came to protecting their personal health. In these accounts both men and women took an active role in order to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections. For several escorts the managing of sexual health risks had already begun within their advertisement. Some participants explained how they informed clients, via their online chats or within their online advertisement, that under no circumstances would they participate in unsafe penetrative sex. Similar language was also noted with several of the male to male escort advertisements, whereby the escort informed potential clients that they only engaged in safe sex. As one male to male escort explained:

To me it's not an issue and won't be. It's all there in black and white, 'no bareback'. This way it saves them the trouble of asking. And if that puts them off then so be it. It's something that I would never compromise on.

(Male to male: 9)

In this context escorts utilised the Internet as a medium of communication to emphasise that they only engaged in safe sexual practices. Despite frequent requests by clients to engage in unprotected penetrative sex, and an overall increase in bareback requests being reported in other similar studies on gay and bisexual men (Suarez and Miller, 2001; Halkitis et al., 2003), none of the female to male or male to male participants in the research reported having engaged in unprotected penetrative sex. However, despite not specifically being asked if they had ever engaged in unprotected

sex, several male to female escorts said that they had engaged in unprotected penetrative sex with one or more of their clients. One of the male to female escorts who reported having engaged in unprotected sex with female clients surprisingly justified his actions on the basis that the female client was not likely to have engaged in penetrative sex with a sexual partner other than himself. How the male escort could be so sure is beyond the scope of this research, such that no further probing questions were asked by the researcher. In the accounts of these men a 'trust relationship' existed between the escort and their regular client, and this underlined their reasoning for engaging in unprotected sex. The accounts given by these male escorts demonstrated the nature of the relationship established between escorts and their clients, and the fact that unprotected sex would be practiced (Cheung, 2012). Care should be taken at this point not to presume that male heterosexual escorts were more likely to engage in unprotected sex with their clients, due to the fact that none of the escorts who participated in this research were asked directly if they had ever engaged in unprotected sex with clients. Instead they were just asked in a general sense to explain the sexual risks that they associate with their work.

What is interesting to note is that it was only female to male and male to male escorts who reported receiving requests for 'bareback' sexual services. This raises important questions about why this might be the case. It may be useful at this point to consider the sexual role of each of the parties involved. With female to male escorts, and in some circumstances male to male escorts, taking a submissive role in the sexual encounter some clients may have considered that the use of the condom would reduce their own sexual sensitivity. A number of studies have previously documented negative beliefs about condoms or their usage as being significantly linked with lower levels of condom usage in various populations. These studies have concluded that as a result of condoms solely being worn by the male party, men were more likely to experience the associated physical discomforts, such as erection problems and loss of sensation, such that it was the men who would be more likely to display negative attitudes towards condom usage (Crosby et al., 2003; Mizuno, 2009).

Despite such attitudes from clients towards condoms many of the escorts, across all of the distinctive sectors, reported that the use of condoms was an 'industry standard' in order to reduce the risk of STIs. As one male to male participant reported:

I always have safe sex. And if the client mentioned something about unsafe sex to me it's just such a turn off – "it's not going to happen" I say. If they want to play unsafe, then it makes you wonder who else has he been unsafe with? I always assume that every one of my clients has HIV. That's the best way to think about it. Although with most of my clients it's ok. They never ask. They know what I do and what I don't do. To me there is no excuse for them to ask.

(Male to male: 8)

Male to male escorts were far more likely to express their disapproval with regard to escorts they believed to have engaged in unsafe sex with clients. They were particularly unhappy with the attitudes of other escorts who do not take the risk of sexually transmitted infections seriously, and this was often framed as the escort having failed in his duty, in the sense of not viewing condom usage as a fixed standardised industry practice.

It was therefore not perhaps surprising to hear that the vast majority of escorts within this research only participated in protected penetrative sex with their clients. This was possibly because of the increased awareness of the dangers of unsafe sexual practices since the mid-1980s, and the link between STIs and unprotected sex, which has been widely documented and advertised to both the sex work and general populations. This has altered men's and women's conceptualisations of unprotected sex. In their accounts men and women stressed their awareness of sexual diseases, and in particular HIV, which was also reflected in their pre-emptive sexual health management. While most of the escorts in this research participated in safe sex with their clients, the ever-increasing demands from clients for escorts to engage in unsafe sexual practices may eventually constitute a barrier to doing so.

The consistent use of condoms and fixed price codes within the online escort market were positive examples of social norms existing within this particular market type. Sex workers regarded the differentiation of sex within their private life from that with clients to revolve around the symbolic use of the condom as a psychological barrier, and not only as a preventative measure to protect their sexual health. The use of a condom during sex with clients acted as a barrier to emotional attachment (Plumridge,

1997; Sanders, 2002). The offering of sexual services without a condom within the escort market may have benefited the individual financially; however, not practicing safe sex would have made business difficult for other workers at the lower end of the market, because clients would expect all women to sacrifice condom usage (O'Neill and Barbarent, 2000).

5.2.6. Unprotected oral sex

Safer sexual practices were not just limited to using a condom during penetrative sex. Many escorts also discussed the risks associated with unprotected oral sex, which, according to many, was a practice expected by most clients. In their accounts, most of the escorts demonstrated their awareness of the sexual risks of unprotected sex with their clients. However, what might be surprising to hear was that many of the escorts reported not using protection when engaging in oral sex with their clients. Although many escorts stated that, at times, they felt uncomfortable providing such a service, they also noted that such a service was expected by their clients. As one male escort stated:

I don't really like to do oral without a condom I hate having any fluids in my mouth. But if they insist on it, I will, but apart from that I try and avoid it when I can.

(Male to male: 5)

In the quotation above, the escort states that despite not liking to perform oral sex without a condom, he normally acceded to clients' demands. As a result, he surrendered an aspect of control over the sexual encounter to his client. Despite escorts seemingly being aware of the risks associated with performing or receiving unprotected oral sex, the risk of catching an STI was understood as an occupational hazard. None of the female to male escorts interviewed reported practicing safe oral sex. Instead, several explained that they perceived the risk to be small, and two went further to explain that sexual infections that could be transmitted via oral sex were treatable with the aid of the GUM services found within their local community. As one escort expressed:

Obviously giving oral is a risk. I know that. But really it's not a huge risk. You need to be a bit real about it. It's unlikely that you're going to catch something serious. I get checked out every couple of months so I don't need to worry. I know that I'm alright. I ain't got nothing like that... and I haven't ever so far. So that goes to show doesn't it? I think most of it's over the top! I mean come on what guy would be happy to get a blowjob with a condom?

(Female to male: 4)

Interestingly none of the male to female or female to female escorts raised any concerns relating to oral sex. Both of the female to female escorts spoke about sexual health risks associated with escorting, but when asked how this specifically related to their female clients neither considered there to be a risk. This was perhaps quite surprising when considering that several preventative precautions could be used, such as latex barriers, which greatly reduce transmission of STIs when performing the act of cunnilingus. A recent survey completed by Stonewell reported that over half of lesbian and bisexual women screened for sexually transmitted infections tested positive, and of those women who tested positive one in four had only had sexual relations with a female partner in the last five years (NHS Choices, 2014).

The findings of the research also revealed that it was common practice for most escorts to engage in unprotected oral sex with their clients, whether it be providing or receiving the act of fellatio, cunnilingus or anilingus. Escorts reported that such services were commonly expected within the escort market. Many of the escorts were all too aware of the risks associated with performing unprotected oral sex, but they actively chose to balance the risks of contracting STIs such as HIV against monetary gain. Previous studies have suggested that the risks of contracting STIs through oral sex are minimal in comparison to other sexual acts. In their study on primary HIV infections Schacker et al. (1996) noted that four of their forty-six study participants reported having only unprotected oragential contact, including one documented case of infection after performing fellatio. The study concluded that if this was true the only explanation would be that blood stained saliva must have been involved. Similar studies have yielded similar results. One of the largest studies performed to date on oral sex as a potential HIV risk was of 741 homosexual men in The Netherlands, with

this study also suggesting that oragential contact was a risk for HIV acquisition, although the study did note that this result was not statistically significant (van Grievsen et al., 1987).

Despite most of the escorts interviewed stating that they only engaged in safer sex, many were willing to perform or receive unprotected oral sex. Many of the escorts also felt that they had to perform unprotected oral sex due to pressure from clients. This seems contradictory, with many of the escorts having stated that they were not willing to compromise their sexual health in engaging in unprotected penetrative sex but actually doing so. It appears that most escorts made a calculated risk in order to perform unprotected oral sex.

5.2.7. Verbal or electronic abuse

In recent years, as discussed in Chapter Four, there has been an increased trend in sex workers using the Internet to promote their services, which has also, simultaneously, become a platform for clients to share their experiences of buying sex (Weitzer, 2012). Some websites which host advertisements gave clients the option of writing a report on the escort, in which the client evaluated the appearance of the sex worker, and the quality of the service that they provided. This has encouraged a level of trust between escort and client, in providing an opportunity for the client to read feedback given by other clients of the escort, thus allowing them to see if the escort offered a safe quality service. As discussed in Chapter Four, for escorts a high feedback rating was invaluable. However, even one negative report could greatly damage the reputation of an escort. What was interesting to note was that some escorts considered this to be a serious risk to their business. Several escorts expressed how, in the past, clients have left abusive or unjustified negative feedback. As one female escort explained:

I had this one client who was acting all strange and withdrawn for the whole hour. I was trying my hardest to please him but he was just off from the start. Clients like that are hard. I kept on saying to him “are you ok?” and he said yes...anyway he finished off and left. After that I didn’t think anything more of it...maybe he was shy or something. Anyway a few weeks later I was going through my reviews online and I come across this one from the same guy. I knew this as it was posted on the same day

that he came over. It was terrible. He was saying stuff like I was incompetent and he had to do all the work. He even said that I was much fatter than I was in my pictures... I was like what the hell! How could he write that? ... I tried so hard with him... Sometimes you take it to heart. Besides that it creates bad business... I had to email the server a few times, and then I eventually took it down. But it was hassle.

(Female to male: 6)

From the report the client appeared to have had a bad experience within the sexual encounter; however the escort recalls him behaving peacefully during the sexual encounter. He ended up expressing his dissatisfaction with this specific escort by using strong language to attack her within a public online report. The escort, in this instance, found the feedback to be unfair and considered it to be a rather personal attack. In the case of clients posting reports about escorts on the Internet the message is entirely public, and therefore what happened in the commercial transaction is now no longer confidential between the client and the sex worker. This could be seen as an abuse of the 'trust relationship' between escort and client.

Several escorts expressed how being verbally insulted by clients, in person or via Internet reports, was a common experience for them. This often occurred if the client disagreed about the appearance of the escort, the quality of the service, or the financial agreement. As one male escort recalled:

I turned up at times to see clients at their house or at a hotel just to be told I look different from my picture. This one man even said that I was too fat! You know that they're just saying that. They had no intention to pay me for sex. Honestly, just time wasters. It really fucks me off that they think that they can do that. They get off on calling you out. But there's nothing I can do about it. It takes hours out of your evening.

(Male to male: 8)

One male to female escort similarly recalled receiving verbal abuse from a regular female client who became unhappy that she had to pay for his sexual services.

The only problem I've ever had is with this one client. She started to become a regular. I'd been going to visit her at her home a few times.... It was the about the fourth or fifth time I went to see her I think. Really I should have seen it coming really. In between when I'd see her she would text me. Well saying thing like she can't wait to see me again and that she'd had such a nice evening. I'd just go along with it and play back... But anyway, this time she just flipped. Literally went mental, and started saying she wanted her money back. I was like "why?" Trying to calm her down... She started saying crazy stuff like I'm getting as much as she is out of it. And that there was a connection between us. I was like "I'm an escort". Anyway she then started screaming at me when I left the house shouting stuff out to me like I'm a user, a dirty prostitute who probably has AIDS... by this point you could see people starting to come out of their houses probably wondering what the fuck was going on! I just quickly got in my car and drove off. I mean to anyone it would have looked like I was in the wrong.

(Male to female: 4)

In this particular instance the verbal harassment was intended to publicly shame and embarrass the escort. Many escorts also spoke about looming psychological intimidation, either mediated through the Internet or telephone communications such as text messages and voicemails, which often resulted in escorts feeling threatened.

Several escorts also spoke about extreme cases of verbal abuse, and threats of violence or sexual assault via emails or text messages from clients. As one female escort explained:

Last year I kept on getting emails from one guy, well I think it was a guy I don't know to be honest. I didn't know if he was ever my client but somehow he knew a lot about me. I don't mean from my pictures or details of my webpage, but stuff like where I lived and what colour my front door was. He started off sending me emails saying like why I haven't left the flat today or that I forgot to turn my lounge light off last night. At first I just ignored it. Then it got more serious. Emailing me stuff like when he meets me he's going to fuck me like the dirty slut I was , and that somehow I'm going to learn a lesson from it. In some of the emails he even said stuff like he wants to cut me up and make me feel the pain of being a slut...! Well at that point it became too much. In

the end I responded and told him that I had forwarded all of his emails to the police who were investigating. I didn't but I was near to as it scared me. And then thankfully it stopped.

(Female to male: 4)

In this particular case the escort understandably stated that she was 'scared' and felt threatened and intimidated by the abusive email messages she had received. A similar story was recounted by a female to female escort. Several escorts also raised safety concerns about clients or members of the public who may be electronically stalking them. Escorts explained that it was often clients who became fixated on their online persona who would stalk them. As one female escort explained:

Some clients get obsessed with you and bombard you with endless messages about each of your pictures, and loads of shit like how they want to make you happy. I've had a couple like that. The only way to get rid of them is to block them. And even still they managed to come back.

(Female to male: 3)

As highlighted in the findings of this chapter, in the context of commercial sex verbal abuse directed at the sex worker may not always take place during the encounter. Clients may not verbally abuse the sex workers face-to-face, but instead do this by placing messages on the Internet or sending abusive emails or text messages. The findings have also highlighted that although electronic messages were a crucial part of the communication between escorts and their clients, at the same time these forms of communication could be openly abused in order to target escorts with messages of hate and violence.

What has been discussed in the above section has been related to the risks that escorts consider they face in their line of work. However, it is also important to examine the ways in which escorts counteracted such risks via coping mechanisms and client vetting procedures, which are explored in the next section.

5.3. Escorts' strategies for dealing with risks

As discussed in the above section, most of the escorts, throughout the semi-structured interviews, identified with being a person in a greater category of risk. Although escorts within the research understood the associated risks they also spoke an awful lot about the methods they employed to guard against them. This section of the chapter examines some of the methods used by escorts to conceptualise, manage and respond to risk. This will then lead into discussion of comparison between the different groups in order to identify differences related to the gender and sexuality of the customer. In focusing on men's and women's own accounts of work-related risks, risky behaviour and coping strategies, this part of the research study investigates online escorts' reflexive understandings of sex work, and the occupational risk associated with advertising and soliciting via the Internet.

5.3.1. The scripted encounter

Other safeguarding techniques that were employed by escorts included the implementation of a 'scripted routine'. A number of escorts independently expressed the management techniques they employed in order to deal with the client encounter. Throughout the distinctive escort sectors, escorts all abide by a simple formality involving greeting the client on his or her arrival, taking payment for the service, showing the client where to get undressed and where to leave his or her belongings, and then assisting them to shower. Then the sex worker would provide the services accordingly. Such a sexual script was often acted out by sex workers as a mechanism for risk management. As clients became socialised into observing consistent rules their activities were likely to be limited to the 'strictly scripted' routine constructed by sex workers (Cheung, 2011). The accounts given by escorts showed favour for the provision of a 'strictly scripted encounter'. Consequently the expectations and practices of the client were largely shaped by the escort, and in this way it was the worker, rather than the client, who dominated the sexual encounter.

The accounts given by these escorts suggested that they held a sophisticated level of control over the client encounter, with the exception of services and process where the transaction usually had a set procedure. Accounts given by flat-working escorts have

also shown how women enforce a 'strictly scripted' routine (Sanders, 2005: 219) within the transaction. Many of the escorts felt that a 'scripted routine' minimised the potential risks posed by the client. A similar 'sexual script' was abided by online escorts regardless of gender, age or the proportion of their working life spent escorting. Escorts favoured such a 'script' as they were all too aware of the increased vulnerability associated with unscripted encounters, which could lead to being assaulted, verbally abused, or bullied by clients, particularly if they appeared new to escorting, weak, or unable to control the sexual encounter. As one female escort explained:

I always hear stories of clients picking on younger girls. They just haven't got the confidence yet. And if they [client] see that, well they're going to exploit it. You find that, some men who will only use girls if they're a new face. They know that they can get away with a whole lot more that way. Like trying to get freebies or more time. You're less confident when you're just starting out.

(Female to male: 7)

Many of the escorts also saw not being able to manage the client encounter as a sign of weakness, which in turn placed them at considerable risk of being forced into something against their will by clients, such as engaging in unwanted sex acts or receiving less money than was negotiated. Escorts often expressed the importance of maintaining focus and appearing confident, in order to take control of the sexual encounter and to reduce the risk of client violence.

Several of the escorts interviewed discussed methods of management they employed within the client encounter. Methods included the management of time, taking payment and addressing hygiene issues. As one female participant explained:

When I take any booking I try to reasonably explain to them what's going to happen... Otherwise they just think that they're getting an hour's worth of sex, but it doesn't happen like that. Whether it's a one hour appointment or two I have to manage the time. An hour isn't a long time, by the time you invite them up and get them a drink. You then got to talk about what's going to happen... deal with the money... and get them to take a shower... Only then do we get down to business. (Female to male: 4)

The findings of this study reveal that escorts from each of the different sectors often adopted a similar ‘sexual script’, which also addressed the business side of the transaction and issues of client hygiene. As one male to male escort explained:

I’m very upfront as soon as I meet them. Otherwise with some of them as soon as you walk through the door they’re all over you... You have to take their money first and then get them to shower.

(Male to male: 9)

Sex work, in general, carried a low status (Hodgen, 1997), but the hierarchy of market types within the sex industry carried different levels of stigma, with those working in the escort markets generally perceived to be at the top of their game. What was striking to note was that escorts’ accounts of hygiene and responsibility featured heavily within the semi-structured interviews. These accounts may have resisted normative representations of sex workers as ‘dirty’ and ‘irresponsible’ (Simic and Rhodes, 2009: 8), presenting the self as having moral integrity. In this context the escort, despite being paid to provide sexual services, set the boundaries by making the client abide by a set of hygiene conditions before he or she was willing to perform the sexual act, thus enforcing an element of control and conditioning over the encounter.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, under the heading ‘unwanted sex acts’, escorts often spoke of their frustration relating to clients who breached the ‘sexual script’ of the encounter. One female to male escort also commented on how clients often interrupt the sexual encounter by asking for extra services that were not originally agreed to at the beginning of the session. This was not only with regard to maintaining control over the encounter, but also in terms of time management. As one female participant reported:

Often the client will interrupt the session by asking for an extra service or extra time, normally when the session is coming to an end. If I’m ok with it and don’t have a client coming after him then I say “yes, of course” I tell them. But then I say I charge extra for that... As I didn’t originally agree to it. Then you have to stop and take the money up front to make sure you get paid for doing it.

And it happens a lot, most men don't really know how it works if they haven't used an escort before.

(Female to male: 4)

Several other escorts also noted that it was common for clients to interrupt the prearranged encounter by either asking for extra time or sexual services. For these escorts the meaning of time management went beyond maximising their income (Brewis and Linstead, 2000) and involved a carefully scripted sexual performance which had been agreed beforehand by both the escort and the client. The enforcement of such a sexual script allowed the escort to achieve dominance over the encounter through regulating the experience for the client.

The accounts given by most of the escorts within the research suggest that their control over the encounter, although subtle, was effective. With the exception of the order of services provided, the client was given a strict procedure to follow. As Sanders (2005: 161) has noted, when clients purchased the sexual services provided by a sex worker, they were “buying into a set of expectations and practices that are cogent with similar commercial transactions available throughout the regional, local and even international market”.

5.3.2. Emotional management techniques

During the semi-structured interviews some of the escorts independently spoke about how during the client encounter they adopted a different character(s) in order to create a working-identity. Most of the escorts explained that the reasoning for doing so was to separate their personal lives from their working life. Many escorts favoured this method as they perceived that doing this dramatically reduced, or protected them against, some of the emotional risks associated with selling sex. As one female participant expressed:

I'm a different person when I'm on a date [with a client]. When I'm working I give myself a working name. Well there are several that I use. But normally I stick with Chloe, and Chloe is a P.A for a fashion company (laughs). That way I never give anything away about myself. And it happens sometimes, particularly if you're feeling

pretty relaxed with a client you can forget. Forget what you're doing and just come out with stuff. I have silly little stories in my head, like who I'm going to be today. One of my favourites is telling my clients that my parents run several catering companies. That's always a good one to get the conversation started over dinner. And I know enough about food and drink to make me sound convincible. ... I become a different character entirely. To me it becomes a performance.

(Female to male: 2)

Sanders (2005: 332) also noted within her study of female sex workers how sex workers who operated in certain working environments were able to create emotional management strategies, which included a working 'manufactured identity', in order to help manage the client encounter. Several escorts involved in this research also felt that adopting a role of a confident character helped them to manage the client encounter, thus reducing potential risks. As one male to female escort expressed it:

You have to go in confidence, and be able to control what's going on. After all it's the client who is the one going to be nervous. I'm fine, I've been doing this for some time now, but maybe this is their first time.... It's hard to explain... As soon as I walk through the door to meet them I change. Suddenly all the worries of the day, and stresses of life, you know the little things, they all disappear. It's like any job suddenly you snap into work mode. And that's important, I mean in the sense of being able to feel, well change like that. To be confident. As it can be hard. Especially when all eyes are on you...

(Male to female: 1)

Several other escorts, across the samples, expressed similar feelings about the adoption of a working character, believing that this also enabled them to give the impression that they were pleased to be in the company of the client and to be providing them with their services. In order to do so escorts often referred to the sexual encounter, as in the quotation above, as a 'performance' or an 'act'. One of the main purposes of this was to deceive their client about how they really felt, and to insulate themselves emotionally. Of these escorts, two went further, expressing how producing a certain kind of working identity in escorting allowed them to conform to male expectations,

and to conform to what Sanders (2004) has previously referred to as the 'prostitute role'. As one male to male escort reported:

At times this job can be rather unpleasant shall we say. Some clients can literally make me feel physically sick. The hardest thing about this job is to pretend you're attracted to them, and that I enjoy having sex with them. I suppose it's a bit like acting.

(Male to male: 5)

These findings lend support to Sanders' (2005) study, by identifying how female escorts created a separate 'working identity' for the purpose of psychological protection. However, this research has gone further, as it has also identified how heterosexual male, gay and lesbian escorts adopt a similar role, which arguably lends credence to the notion of the 'manufactured identity'. Although these findings were uniquely interesting, they were also perhaps unsurprising. In all walks of life and professions individuals adopt a 'work attitude' and adopt a particular role in order to conform to a degree of standardised professionalism.

The ability to perform the 'prostitute role' was not the only reason for so many escorts claiming to adopt a working identity when in the company of their clients. There were several other reasons expressed by escorts as to why they adopted such an identity. Many felt it was important to reveal as little personal information as possible for fear of clients stalking them or finding out personal information about them or their families. In addition, many escorts expressed that they worked as an escort in secret from particular friends, family members, or partners, and they often feared that openness to some clients would jeopardise this position.

I tell my clients nothing about my personal life. Why should they get to know about me? After all, all I'm doing is providing them with sex. To me, and it always has, well it, pisses me off when they ask me about my life. It was just the other day this one clients who I'd only ever met once before started asking me about my childhood. Literally why? It was like he was hinting that I had a bad period growing up and that was why I was here fucking him. What gives them the right to ask? It's hard to explain, but it's like going to your local supermarket and asking the cashier how many children

they have, and where her mother lives... It's just weird! They think just because they got to fuck me, they're somehow entitled to know this.

(Male to male: 6)

In relation to the adoption of emotional management techniques some escorts went further in informing their clients that they had successful careers outside of their escorting, believing that this would help by putting them on an equal footing with their customer, whilst managing the sexual dynamics between them. As one male participant stated:

At times my life feels double sided. When I'm with my clients I take on a different role. I'm more confident. It just helps me deal with it [escorting], by letting him believe that I also have a good job, gets me more respect.

(Male to male: 6)

In relation to the quotation above, the escort informed the client that he was more than a sexual commodity, and attempted to humanise himself outside of the sexual encounter, albeit by lying. Previous sociological studies have suggested that sex workers commonly experience 'negative feelings' from their clients because of the low status attributed to sex work, rather than the actual act of providing sexual services to clients (Scambler, 2006, 2009; Scambler and Paoli, 2008). As Abel (2011) argued in her paper, sex work is an occupation that is highly stigmatised by society, and as a result the depersonalisation of sex workers may lead to sex workers facing emotional difficulties, as commonly reported throughout the prostitution markets. In order to reduce this risk, sex workers had to separate their working identity from their self, as an effective strategy to manage emotions (Abel, 2011). Through the escort informing the client, as in the above quotation, that he had a successful job outside of escorting, he hoped to put himself on an equal footing with the client in order to gain respect. The varying 'working identity' employed by many of the escorts was used to a degree as a self-preservation tool. The adoption of a 'working identity' not only allowed escorts to separate their work from their private lives, but most importantly, it allowed them to manage the client encounter, thus reducing potential risks considerably. These findings also lend support to Sanders' (2005) study, by identifying how escorts created

a separate 'working identity' for the purpose of psychological protection. However, this study has gone further in identifying how heterosexual male, gay and lesbian escorts also adopt different distancing strategies based on performing, the status of their client, and sexual submission.

What was also interesting to note was that on the opposite end of the spectrum, in relation to providing 'emotional' and 'intimate' sexual services, several escorts expressed how they became overly emotionally involved with their client. As one male to male escort reported:

With some of the guys I see I'm like yes they are hot. Sometimes you can't help but to really enjoy the sex. With some guys, it's hard to explain but there is some kind connection. But then you're like wait they're married... they just paid me for sex. The reality of it can sometimes be harsh.

(Male to male: 4)

What was also interesting about the quotation above was that the escort called a halt to this false fantasising by remembering that most of his clients were married, thus reminding himself that he was a sexual commodity for his client.

Escorts detailed their adoption of a number of different emotional management techniques, including limiting the amount of clients they see over a period of time, or limiting the time that they spend with their clients. It was for these reasons that some escorts considered selling sexual services to be both emotionally and physically draining. As one male participant expressed:

There was this one time... This couple contacted me last minute. They wanted me to travel up by train to Milton Keynes for the evening. I warned them that I was tired. I'd been working all week. But stupidly I went up there. I knew I wouldn't be on top form. They were a little disappointed I got that, they understood that... Anyway what I'm trying to say I guess, is that at times this can be hard. It's not like I fuck and just roll over and go to sleep. I've got to get back myself, get there and getting back. They're the things that take up the most time.

(Male to female: 4)

This particular escort was unable to perform sexually for the clients due to being physically and emotionally drained from the number of clients that he had seen in the previous week. A number of escorts similarly reported that they limit the amount of clients they see per week, in order to not become physically and mentally drained, whilst also ensuring clients' satisfaction. Again, this was something that was reflected in the findings presented in Chapter Four, where some escorts spoke about the importance of limiting client contact.

The findings in this section will greatly contribute to the increasing body of literature documenting the emotional management techniques employed by escorts. In addition, the findings have shown that many escorts prioritise the emotional risks associated with selling sex because the risks associated with health and violence, can be avoided through careful management. Escorts involved in the research also identified some of the emotional consequences of selling sex as being of serious concern, and recognised this as something requiring careful consideration and planning compared with other risks.

5.3.3. Client status

Most of the escorts in the research expressed a belief that by advertising via the Internet they were able to target a 'preferred type of client' (see Chapter Four); a clientele base perceived to be predominately made up of Caucasian, middle class professionals. Interestingly, several of the escorts also believed that attracting middle class professionals via Internet services drastically reduced the chances of violence taking place during the encounter. As one female to male escort explained:

I don't see [clients] as a threat. If they're not happy with the service they will just not come back. They just want to have fun ... some just want to experiment. Why does everyone have this perception that every client of a sex worker wants to kill them? The types of clients I see are the head of a company, or own their own businesses. One is even a local magistrate. I couldn't feel any safer when I'm with them.

(Male to male: 8)

Interestingly, in the latter quotation the escort expressed how the fault lay with the general public's perception that all clients of sex workers had the potential to be dangerous. In support, Sanders (2008) has argued that images of clients produced in popular culture, media representations and academic analysis (Høigard, 1992; Barnard, 1993; Whittaker and Hart, 1996; Church et al., 2001; Hart and Barnard, 2003; Sanders, 2005; Brooks-Gordon, 2006; Kinnell, 2006; Day, 2007) are of violent, dangerous and exploitative people. In contrast, the accounts of the escorts within this research have suggested that most perceived their clients to be 'respectful and polite'.

What was also interesting to note was that the majority of participants in the research formed a link between clients' attitudes and clients' jobs. This may stem from popular discourses and correlations between class and violence, where it is generally assumed that working class men are far more likely to commit violent acts than professionals. In the case of the escort, many men and women perceived their personal class status to be similar to that of their clients. However, in relation to this popular perception, many escorts did not perceive their clients to be non-violent. Yet, as this research has also revealed, this particular stereotypical perception was challenged in the case of the five escorts who reported being physically assaulted by a client. What was also interesting to note was that several escorts held certain racial perceptions of certain groups of clients. Several escorts stated that they would refuse to accept clients on the basis of their race (if known by the escort). As one female to male escort explained:

I try not to take bookings from Asian men if I can help it... They're just too pushy... They've got no respect. Umm it's hard to explain. But there is just something I don't trust about them.

(Female to male: 9)

As documented in several other similar studies sex workers had learnt which clients may not honour the contract, although these perspectives might play into racial stereotypes. As witnessed in the quotation above, sex workers may apply safeguards that discriminate against clients in terms of age, ethnicity, or social class (Sanders, 2005). In the section above, the importance of a client's social safety within the escort-client encounter was explored. As expressed by several of the escorts who participated in this research, and in similar studies, a client's social status not only attracted them

to escorts who offered sexual services via the Internet, but they were also perceived by escorts as a safer type of client (refer to previous chapter).

5.3.4. Maintaining dignity

Although many escorts believed that the Internet attracted a 'preferred client', several expressed that over recent years there had been an increased demand for more specialised services which pushed sexual boundaries. Female to male and male to male escorts were the only two samples to express discontent, with respect to male clients who acted derogatively towards them. Many escorts believed that performing certain specialised sexual acts, such as bondage or breath control, would place them in considerable danger as they would hold limited control over the sexual encounter. In order to combat this many escorts refused to perform certain sexual acts that they felt were derogatory towards them, in order to protect their personal or physical integrity and to maintain client boundaries. Two of the female to male escorts stated how during the encounter the client had to be respectful. If clients became disrespectful the escort would normally address the client in order to maintain personal dignity throughout. As one female escort expressed it:

I tell it straight to some of my clients. If they're like "suck it whore" or speaking to me like shit... I don't let them get away with it. I won't have anyone speak to me like that. I'm pretty sure they wouldn't speak to their girlfriends or wives like that, and I'm certainly not going to accept it.

(Female to male: 8)

Gender differences were apparent when escorts spoke about enforcing mutual respect within the encounter. In this context it could be argued that male sex work is fundamentally less exploitative than female sex work, as interactions between two men or a male escort and their female client make for a certain mutual equality within the sexual encounter. Arguably, this is something that is missing in the interactions between a male client and female seller (Altman, 1999).

Several escorts expressed a refusal to conform to certain sexual roles, or to let clients perform certain sexual acts on them, in order to protect their personal and physical integrity. As one escort stated:

Some of the things I've heard other girls do. Well it's sickening. Really bad... Like letting clients spit or urinate over them... some of them don't have any respect for themselves. Why would you let someone do that? To me it would be too humiliating and dirty...

(Female to male: 3)

Escorts believed that if they allowed clients to sexually dominate the encounter it could lead to them being placed at considerable risk, as the boundaries of mutual respect would become blurred, with the escort being viewed as a submissive sexual commodity. In the latter two quotations the escort either refused to accept clients who desired particular sexual fantasies that they felt were degrading, or showed their disapproval of other escorts who facilitated a particular client's sexual fantasy. These quotations both highlight that escorts were more than willing to refuse specific sexual requests from clients in order to protect their personal and physical integrity, whilst also maintaining their personal sexual boundaries, particularly in terms of cleanliness.

5.3.5. Client vetting

A number of escorts also expressed how communicating with clients via emails or chat rooms allowed them the opportunity to 'vet' the clients. Escorts expressed a number of different methods which they employed in order to reduce the risks associated with online escorting. Escorts within the study employed a number of pragmatic techniques to maintain their safety and minimise the risks both during and before the sexual encounter. This often involved acting on intuition, the use of telephones and email to screen clients, and at times working with a third person. Escorts expressed feeling that this method was most important as it allowed the escort to check the identity of the client and provided the escort with material information about them. Escorts often described how they would scan a client's email address and extract their personal information which they would then input into a search engine to obtain more personal knowledge about the client.

Seven of the escorts who participated in the research expressed a belief that one of the most important features of advertising via the Internet was that it allowed them the ability to vet their clients, in turn reducing the risks associated with online escorting. The importance of escorts being able to vet their clients was also something expressed by escorts in Chapter Four. Escorts within the research reported employing a number of pragmatic techniques to maintain their safety, in order to minimise the risks before and after the sexual encounter. This commonly involved escorts acting on their own intuition and screening clients' use of language during telephone calls and email exchanges.

Several of the escorts within the research discussed using the Internet as a method to screen new clients. Escorts used the Internet in several different ways in order to vet and collect information about new clients, as a means of maintaining safety and keeping a record of the encounter. The opportunity to access and screen clients via the telephone and online was the most discussed safety strategy. Escorts expressed that they felt this method was the most important as it allowed the escort to check the identity of the client, as well as providing them with material information about the client. As one female escort put it:

I feel a lot better about meeting new clients if they called me off a landline. You just know they're going to be genuine.... anyone can get a mobile number. The thing is with mobiles is that most numbers are untraceable.

(Female to male: 5)

In the quotation above, the escort expressed the importance of the telephone, in confirming the identity of the client. Six of the escorts within the research discussed clients' phone numbers in terms of 'landlines' and 'mobiles'. A client with a landline telephone number was perceived as a more genuine customer, as they were not potentially concealing any information about themselves. Several escorts also discussed how they screened the emails of clients to assess whether the client was genuine. As one escort expressed:

You tell a lot about the client in the way he writes. Like if they have any intention to meet me in the first place. I get loads of emails which I reject. You can just tell if they're

getting off in writing to you. If they're behaving badly before you even meet them, it doesn't say a lot about how they will behave face-to-face... so any bad language, and then I just cut them off or delete the email. (Male to male: 4)

Several escorts also discussed how they screened the information provided in a client's email address. As one escort expressed:

Normally you can already tell a lot about the client by the information in their email address. Like if it's from their work email or has a business signature... you can take stuff like that out of most of the emails I get...then do your own research on Google (laughs).

(Male to male: 9)

Several other escorts also expressed how they would 'Google' a client's email address, and the phone numbers, names and businesses that were provided by the client. In cases where this information was not provided the escort might have been able to trace pieces of information through the email address, online nickname or handle. This information could then be used to search and obtain information about the client via message board comments or previous reviews written about escorts, or about the client.

Two of the female to male escorts went further by stating that they only accepted new clients on the recommendation of other sex workers. In these instances the escort would ask the client what escorts they had previously been in contact with, and then would either call or email the escort directly, asking them to provide a reference for the client to assess whether he was honourable and trustworthy.

There were no apparent gender differences in relation to the procedures used by escorts to vet potential clients. This in turn suggests that the vetting of clients is a procedure adhered to by all escorts, regardless of gender or sexuality. Escorts across the samples employed some of the simple vetting procedures discussed in order to gain an insight into the client's identity. Most importantly however, escorts felt that communicating with clients via the Internet left a virtual traceable footprint which could be used to help trace the client if an incident should arise.

5.3.6. Internet forums

Escorts also expressed how they utilised the Internet and Internet message boards that were designed specifically for sex workers, in order to warn them of dangerous clients or scams. Several female to male escorts explained that they frequently used Internet message boards and forums. As discussed in the previous chapter, escorts frequently used such sites to provide information to other sex workers about dangerous or disrespectful clients. These sites were accessible to anyone, but anyone wishing to post to the website must become a registered user of the site. Such sites acted as an internal blacklist for escorts, and often contained warnings or reviews about clients along with email addresses, names or contact details of clients to avoid. The motivation behind such postings was to warn escorts of dangerous clients or scams, whilst offering advice in helping them stay safe and to avoid potential harm. As one female escort explained:

Every so often I check online to see what's going on with other girls. It's good to check out what other girls are saying about certain clients. That way I get to jot down any numbers or email addresses to avoid. It's about looking out for each other. We have to look out for each other, otherwise who will? I've posted a few messages, about avoiding certain clients... It helps save other girls' time.

(Female to male: 4)

The primary aim of 'public bad-date' lists was for escorts to post information about client behaviour, resulting in the client being held accountable (Ray, 2007). This method of exchange about potentially dangerous or disrespectful clients provides a powerful tool for sex workers to communicate with each other and to exchange information. As one female escort further explained:

You have to always trust your intuition. I get this gut feeling about some clients. If I'm ever in doubt, I ask them for more details, and then check them out online. And if they're not willing to tell you about themselves or if no other sex worker can vouch for them as a good client you just don't bother.

(Female to male: 8)

As Sanders (2005) has discussed, the intuition discussed by sex workers was founded on various factors. Sex workers conducted their business relying on previous negative experiences, localised stereotypes of certain groups and ‘street folklore’, to inform them which clients were safe and which were not.

Whilst the Internet provided many safety advantages for escorts, in the context of advertising and vetting potential clients, there was still a need for escorts to assess potential clients carefully, and to follow personal instincts. There were also significant new personal safety risks concerned with the personal information that escorts provided about themselves. If the escort was able to collect, in some cases, such detailed information about the client, then the client or other Internet users were potentially able to collect similar information with regard to escorts’ personal information.

What is interesting to note is that only escorts from the female to male sample reported to have utilised these available Internet sites. This arguably suggests that female escorts have a heightened sense of fear when it comes to risks associated with online escorting and male clients. Interestingly, this heightened sense of fear is reflected in the next section, which discusses security methods employed by escorts.

5.3.7. Security as a means of prevention

Escorts interviewed for this project often spoke about the use of remedial protection when it came to managing risks before and during the client encounter. Although the findings presented in this section fall outside the scope of the project’s Internet focus, they are nevertheless important, as they further highlight how escorts utilise forms of technology other than the Internet in order to keep safe. Some of the escorts’ accounts illustrate the importance of a third person being involved within the encounter. Several of the female to male escorts made reference to drivers, maids or other sex workers being present during the commercial encounter to make sure the escort was not harmed when in the company of the client. As one of the escorts stated:

When I’m doing outcalls a friend’s boyfriend acts as my driver. He does it for her as well and a few other girls. He’s a big guy so I feel a lot better when I’m with him. You

know less nervous about taking new clients on... If I'm not out on time I know he comes knocking unless I call him and say why. I make sure the client knows that someone is waiting for me too.

(Female to male: 4)

In the quotation above the escort felt that informing clients that her driver was waiting for her outside acted as a deterrent. Other escorts noted that they only took bookings with new clients when they had a friend or another escort present. Still others spoke about only accepting in call bookings via the Internet from new clients when someone else was present. As one female escort reported:

I only accept new clients, if I know that the other girl I share the flat with is going to be around. That way I know that someone's got my back if anything goes wrong.

(Female to male: 4)

Other escorts discussed simple methods of protection such as keeping someone informed about their whereabouts and time spent with the client. As one male participant reported:

I always text and call my boyfriend when I get there and get out. That way he can keep track of me and at least he knows where I am if I need him. I do the same for him when he's on an outcall. That way we watch each other's backs.

(Male to male: 4)

In this case mobile communications were vital for informing the escort's partner of his whereabouts. Mobile communications were not the only form of technological security employed by escorts, however, with others speaking about using a range of different security technologies that most of us take for granted in our daily lives. The presence of other security features such as an intercom, security cameras and personal attack alarms all played an important part in deterring risk, whilst giving the escort an added sense of security. As one escort explained:

I feel pretty safe. I know that there are security cameras in the car park. And I've got a camera on the intercom system so I can check them out before I invite them up. They're not going to do anything bad as they know that they're on camera. This is why I chose my flat, for this very reason.

(Female to male: 6)

This escort was heavily reliant on the use of CCTV to deter potentially violent clients. In this context, technology was being used to deter the client from committing harm to the escort. What is interesting to note, in this particular quotation, and other similar comments, is how escorts have come to rely on forms of technology other than the Internet to reduce risk. It would appear that female escorts have come to rely heavily on technology such as intercoms, CCTV and mobile phones in order to reduce harm, particularly when operating alone.

The final deterrent discussed by several escorts was the use of weapons, something that has been widely documented across all sex markets (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996). Escorts reported their willingness to use everyday household items such as kitchen utensils, baseball bats, and lighters, with one escort going further in reporting that she keeps a knife underneath her mattress in order to protect herself from potentially dangerous clients. As one escort reported:

I carry CS gas in my bag and I would use it if I had to. Don't ask me where I got it from. But I know it's there if I need it.

(Female to male: 3)

Despite the escorts within the research perceiving the risk of client violence to be low several escorts discussed how they would use remedial protection if a serious incident occurred with a client. In this context, escorts were faced with a choice between being seriously assaulted or fighting back in order to save their own lives.

Escorts, across the markets, spoke of the simple safeguard measures they employed to protect themselves from potentially dangerous clients. Many escorts spoke about the importance of meeting clients in a public environment, particularly if the client was new to the escort, as they felt it was unlikely clients would become violent or seek to

do them harm in public. Several escorts went further in stressing that they felt more secure meeting a new client in a hotel, due to the establishment's security and safety measures such as CCTV and hotel staff. Therefore, meeting a client in a public environment such as a hotel was generally seen as a means of risk prevention. Other simple safeguarding measures included refusing clients who appeared to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol and the escorts themselves not being under the influence during the client encounter. Escorts felt that being under the influence of alcohol or drugs before or during the encounter, would put them at considerably more risk.

In this section findings have been documented which reveal some of the different security measures utilised by escorts in order to manage risk and to protect against it. Escorts used a number of complex strategies to prevent violence, through the use of remedial protection, which ranged from a number of traditional methods, such as the presence of a third party intervention or the use of weapons, to utilising mobile communications or security system technologies that were widely accessible to all.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter some of the accounts given by online escorts have been explored in relation to how they conceptualise and manage physical, sexual and psychological risks during the course of their work. Accounts given by online escorts within the research suggest that they are all too aware of being in a higher risk category, but that they are also able to limit these risks. The findings have documented some of the methods employed by escorts in guarding against specific risks, although many who participated in this research perceived the risk of violence or robbery to be low. However, there were occasional stories read via the Internet, or heard through a friend of a friend, relating to other sex workers being subject to physical violence. These stories, in some circumstances, served as a stark reminder to escorts that they too were vulnerable to such attacks. Many escorts, particularly within the female to male sample, were aware that the nature of their work and environment provided an increased risk of vulnerability. The findings of this research have echoed previous research on violence against escorts who operate via the Internet. The research has also demonstrated a low prevalence of physical violence against female online escorts.

However, this research went further by additionally examining accounts given by both male and female escorts who offered sexual services to female clients.

The findings of the research have indicated how the gender and sexuality of the escort influenced risk management and safety strategies employed by the online escorts before and during the client encounter. Significant differences have been noted in the ways in which both heterosexual female and male escorts conceptualised the physical and sexual risks posed by their clients. Female to male participants particularly, and also male to male escorts, appeared to have a heightened awareness of risk whilst at work, in comparison to the male to female and female to female escort samples. These findings are significant as they could potentially reflect wider perceptions within society that men are predominately the perpetrators of violence, including sexual or physical assault. What is also interesting to note is how heterosexual male escorts within the research claimed that because of their physical size they felt confident that they could deal with the risks that their clients may pose. On the other hand, female escorts were more likely to report that the risk of physical or sexual assault was an ever-present concern. However, as discussed, both male and female escorts who provided sexual services to male clients were more likely to employ techniques to manage the client encounter, as well as setting clear sexual boundaries.

This chapter also involved analysis of how the different escort samples perceived risk, as well as some of their methods for dealing with risks. This has provided a sociological understanding of how escorts manage physical and psychological risk in an occupational setting. Central themes emerged in the findings which revealed some of the different ways in which escorts had reduced risk both before and during the client encounter.

The findings from this research, however, showed that most online escorts do not have direct experience of physical violence. Consequently, most respondents, particularly both male and female escorts who provided sexual services to female clients, did not view themselves as at risk of violence. To date the body of literature on sex work has identified the extent and nature of sex workers' experience of violence against them. Numerous research studies have claimed that sex workers are at risk of violence, however, there was a lot less discussion about how violence against sex workers is

defined, and little attempt, so far, to investigate how sex workers themselves defined and conceptualised violence against themselves in relation to gender and sexuality. Therefore, one of the conclusions of this chapter is that research on violence should move beyond physical assault and consider other types of violence, as discussed in this chapter.

Other types of violence against escorts should be taken equally as seriously as physical violence, as, judging from the interviewees' responses, escorts frequently experience non-physical violence. In these situations the client did not physically harm the escort but his or her behaviour was seen as a violation by the escort that in some cases might have a damaging effect. It is important to alter the narrow focus of the definition of violence within sex work to one that includes an understanding of escorts who experience non-physical violence, in the hope of widening legal protection and community support. Given that the findings of the study highlight that readings of risk and perceptions of control vary according to the gender and sexual orientation of the sexual encounter, it is best to research these groups of sex workers with population-specific strategies.

Within this chapter significant differences in how the various escort samples conceptualise and manage sexual health risks during the course of their work have been documented. Accounts given by escorts within this research suggest that escorts are all too aware of the HIV-related stigma associated with their working identities. Despite none of the escorts interviewed mentioning that they had ever contracted an STI or were HIV positive, most saw these sexual infections as an occupational hazard of their work.

What is interesting to note in the findings is that most of the escorts strongly advocated only engaging in protective penetrative sex, with the exception of several male to female escorts. However, most of the escorts also noted that they engaged in unprotected oral sex with their clients, despite several stating that they were not happy about performing such an act. Moreover, these escorts claimed that they felt either pressured by the client to do so, or that the performance of unprotected oral sex was an industry standard and a client expectation. In this context, escorts yielded to the demand of the client, and as a result jeopardised their sexual health.

Strategies for practicing safe sex should be further investigated in future research, in particular with regard to other indoor venues of commercial sex (such as indoor saunas and massage parlours) for both male and female sex workers. These strategies could prove useful not only in providing further sociological understanding of the different sex markets, but also in terms of public health promotion, in an effort to educate and support both male and female heterosexual and gay and lesbian sex workers. Existing themes of public health and safer sex education targeting sex workers have traditionally focused efforts on male and female sex workers who operate on the street or in off-street venues. Another important point to consider is the role of clients who seek the services of sex workers willing to engage in unsafe sexual practices. We should not forget to consider that clients, like sex workers, are half of the sexual transaction, and therefore are also responsible for protecting their own health and not knowingly spreading HIV and STIs.

To conclude this chapter, it has been documented herein that escorts create a range of complex risk avoidance strategies in order to reduce the risks associated with selling sexual services. These findings have emphasised the fact that escorts are all too aware of the risks associated with their line of work and have responded appropriately. Although escorts within the research conceptualised the risk of violence to be of greater concern than some of the health risks associated with their work, the findings have highlighted a number of other pitfalls connected to selling sex, which escorts assign to higher risk profiles, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation profile of their service.

CHAPTER SIX

Concluding Discussion

The previous analysis chapter (Chapter Five) explored some of the data collected within semi-structured interviews, which were carried out in order to examine the ways in which heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian escorts conceptualise and manage work-related physical, emotional and sexual risks. The findings provide an understanding of sex work and some of the occupational risks associated with selling sexual services via the Internet. In the previous chapter emphasis was placed upon how escorts utilised the Internet as a method for reducing some of the risks associated with selling sexual services. However, it was also pointed out that the Internet has opened up escorts to a number of significant new risks. This thesis began by identifying a number of key research questions. These questions were concerned with examining the ways in which female to male, male to male, male to female and female to female escorts advertise their sexual services, their experiences of selling sex via the Internet and how they conceptualise and manage the risks associated with doing so. In this chapter I draw together the findings presented in the analytical chapters by returning to the original research questions set out in the Introduction to this thesis. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for policy implementation and for future research on how the online escort market should be examined further in order to provide a clearer understanding of this market within different social contexts.

6.1. Dominant discourses identified in online escort advertisements

One of the first research goals set out in the Introduction to this thesis was to identify the common discourses used in online escort advertisements in relation to the gender, sexuality and social class of both the service provider and the customer. Within this thesis the language used by escorts in their advertisements, and that expressed within the interviews, has been shown to be suggestive of online escorts' services still being very much bounded by the traditional socially and culturally constructed perceptions that men want sex and women want romance. This was particularly notable in the ways in which escorts advertised their services on the Internet. As documented in Chapter Three the findings of the discourse analysis emphasised a number of significant

differences between the ways in which escorts advertise to male clients and to females. In this section of the chapter several of the key themes identified earlier in the thesis are considered in order to provide an overview of the findings.

6.1.1. The sexual role of the body

Within each of the escort advertisement samples the language and imagery used to describe the body was a central selling point. This was notable not only in the discourse analysis of the advertisements but also in the interviews. As discussed in Chapter Three, when advertising to male clients both female to male and male to male escorts were more likely to explicitly advertise their bodies, and often went into detail about, or made reference to the size of, their various body parts in relation to their sexual role. Most of the language used by both female to male and male to male escorts within their advertisements sexually objectified the escort, with explicit descriptions of his or her sexual appearance and personal qualities commonly presented. In this context, what the escort sells are those body parts which they calculatngly choose to objectify. What the escort was offering his or her male clients was a realisation of their fantasy, with respect to behaviour and beauty, of the ideal man or woman. However, what was most notable was that the language used by the escort fostered traditional male and female roles which reinforced unequal power relations. Advertisements that were directed towards female clients, however, were far more likely to sell the body as a subject. What is interesting to note is that the heterosexual male, and to some extent lesbian, escorts commonly presented the body as a subject, with escorts indirectly stating that they were not willing to conform to their female clients' fantasies. They did this by adopting a 'take me or leave me' approach to selling their services.

Also interesting to note from the findings presented in Chapter Three are the substantial differences in how escorts define their sexual role within their advertisements. As highlighted, both male and female escorts who advertised to male clients openly listed, or were suggestive in their language about, their sexual role within the client encounter. This finding suggests that the sexual role of the escorts is integral to their advertising stance when advertising to male escorts, with escorts defining their willingness to adopt a dominant or passive approach within the sexual encounter. What was also unique to the female to male advertisements was the fact

that several escorts emphasised their willingness to re-style the body and sexual role in order to meet their customers' sexual desires. As a result many escorts were willing to offer a variety of sexual roles to their clients, possibly in order to make themselves appeal to a broader group of clientele. Male to male escorts tended to be more specific about their role in the sexual encounter by stating that they were either a 'top', 'versatile' or 'bottom'. As discussed in Chapter Three in 'gay culture', the terminology 'role' indicates whether the male will receive anal sex (be 'passive/bottom'), receive and give anal sex (be 'versatile') or only penetrate during anal sex (be 'top'). Again, this suggests that in advertising to males a description of the escort's sexual role is integral to attracting a particular type of client.

At the opposite end of the spectrum both male and female escorts advertising to female clients did not directly express their sexual role or preference, instead using sexual innuendo within their adverts. Escorts not revealing their preferred sexual role within their advertisements may indicate a wish to display a message of gender neutrality, in the sense of allowing their female client to lead in relation to sexual roles. This arguably moves away from traditional notions of male domination, commonly associated with men being the active party with respect to penetrative sex. In this context, it is argued in this thesis that male to female and female to female escorts were proactive, in the sense that escorts encouraged reversibility and versatility of traditional sexual role (Hinders, 1996: 97).

The research findings herein validate the concept of 'body capital' by illustrating, in line with Hakim's (2010) argument put forward in Chapter One, the different ways in which males and females commodify their own bodies. It was also evident in the discourse findings that escorts within their advertisements emphasised their 'bodily capital' in the context of the sexual roles and body parts which they believed the client would find attractive. Arguably, as noted in Chapters Three and Four, the commercialisation of body parts does not necessarily turn escorts into sexual objects, as many academics have suggested (see Chapter Two). On the basis of the discussion put forward in this thesis, it is argued that the commercialisation of body parts and emotions and the commodification of sex do not specifically mean that male and female sex workers are placed in subservient roles within the sexual encounter. Rather, as demonstrated in the accounts of escorts within this study, escorts often actively

choose to sell access to certain body parts on their own terms and at their own prices. This, in turn, allows the escort to achieve a high level of control over the sexual encounter, as they effectively hold control over their own bodies.

While many critics of prostitution argue that this line of work contributes to turning both male and female escorts into objects, within this study it has been argued that the objectification of the body is a strategy developed by escorts in order to establish a boundary between sex work and their private life (see Chapter Five). As noted with respect to the male and female advertisers who were looking for male clients, escorts frequently used language that objectified various body parts. In this context what the escort then sells is those particular body parts which he or she calculatedly chooses to objectify. As identified above, it is important to note that while escorts who sell sexual services to male clients commonly sell access to certain body parts, those who advertise to female clients are far more likely to sell the body as a subject in its entirety.

6.1.2. The offering of romance

As discussed in Chapter Three, it was interesting to note the significant differences relating to the code 'romance' between each of the advertisement samples. Both male and female escorts advertising to male clients made little reference to 'romance' within the encounter, whereas discourses of 'romance' were far more prominent and often far more elaborate and descriptive in nature within the male to female and female to female advertisements.

Substantial differences were however noted in the ways in which male and female escorts offered romance to the female client. Male escorts were more likely to suggest to their potential female clients that they would offer the provision of romance through a form of romantic courtship, and this was a key theme throughout all of the male to female advertisements. When advertising to female clients male escorts used language defined as 'intimate' and 'sensual' which played into the various dimensions of the masculine and feminine ideals. These findings validate the claims of other scholars, by illustrating the differences in how male and female escorts provide intimacy to heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian clients. The research clearly demonstrates that the gendered sexual role of the male to female escort is one that is

still very much constructed via socially and culturally conditioned perceptions of male and female courtship and chivalry (Hall and Briton, 1993; Click and Friske, 1996; Vicki, Abrams and Hutchison, 2003). Despite these differences being subtle they raised further interesting questions around female passivity and male dominance and ownership (cf. Sanchez et al., 2006; Kiefer and Sanchez, 2007). Female to female escorts equally placed an emphasis on the use of language within their advertisements in relation to offering their clients a romantic service. Female to female escorts commonly used language referring to the offering of romance, in the sense that the escort was willing to conform to her client's expectation of romance. This suggests that escorts advertising for female clients believed that they valued romance in some form, and to a far greater extent than male clients.

The roles assigned to male and female escorts and to their male clients, through the implicit messages embedded in the escort advertisements, conform to the argument as set out by Lakoff (2004). As discussed in Chapter Three, Lakoff (2004) puts forward the argument that women are socialised into using a particular style of language, in which their inferior position is reinforced through reference to such language. It is clear that the language used by escorts within their advertisements continues to uphold the application of traditionally assigned roles. This study supports the findings of Stephens (2009), who noted within her study of female to male advertisements that the escort market does not reflect the changes made in other areas of social and commercial interaction with respect to gender equality between men and women. However, it has further contributed to the literature by also analysing discourses identified in heterosexual, gay and lesbian online advertisements. As a result, we now have a gendered overview of the ways in which male and female escorts advertised according to the sexual desires of their clients, further contributing to debates around sex work and sexual behaviour.

The findings of this study in relation to the escort market and provision of sexual services therefore support traditional heteronormative theories, which have portrayed men socially and culturally as the initiators and women as the boundary-setters of courtship (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). As Oritiz-Torres et al. (2003) have found men tend to desire sexual intimacy earlier in courtship than women, while for women, sexual intimacy tends to be embedded in the context of love and romance.

Furthermore, Hynie et al. (1998) documented in their study that men reported a desire for fun and physical desirability as motives for sex, while female participants were far more likely to express that love, commitment and emotional intimacy were the main motivators for having sexual intercourse.

6.1.3. The offering of a relationship

As discussed in Chapter Three, most of the advertisements analysed made reference to the escort either offering their client a one-off encounter, in the sense of an impersonal service or to the escort's willingness to offer a relationship beyond mechanical sex. The code 'encounter' referred to descriptions of the escort offering an impersonal and easily accessible sexual encounter in the form of an open invitation, whereas the code 'relationship' was concerned with examining language suggestive of the development of a more meaningful relationship between the escort and client, over and above a one-off encounter. What was striking to note is that none of the male to male escorts' advertisements made any reference to offering the client a relationship. Instead, male to male advertisements were centred on the provision of a 'one-off encounter'. This perhaps suggests that male escorts are far more willing to sexually objectify themselves than the other samples, in order to attract as many clients as possible in return for a higher turnover of clientele and therefore greater financial gain. It is important to consider here that male to male escorts were far more sexually overt in their offering of the 'one-off encounter', directly stating that they would engage in sexual activities with the client. Statements like this were also noted within the female to male advertisements. Arguably this would appear to signify that male to male, and in some cases female to male, escorts felt that when advertising to male clients they needed to be, or felt like they should be, more explicit in nature, or perhaps they believed that male clients would expect them to be more sexually forward.

What was most notable in the female to male, and to some extent in the male to male, escort advertisements were references to the escort being either their male client's 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend', or the escort's willingness to provide their client with the 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend' experience. In these instances each term, 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend', was used in a linguistic context suggestive of the escort allowing the client a sense of ownership or right to access, rather than there being equality within the

encounter. For example, *'I will be your naughty girlfriend'* or *'are you looking for a NSA younger boyfriend'*. The term was used in such a way as to emphasise that the escort is there to be accessed and it is his or her role to ensure the client's sexual gratification. Unlike their female to male and male to male counterparts, none of the male to female or female to female escort advertisements used the term 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend' to describe the services available. Instead, when marketing to the female client both male and female escorts were more likely to use the term 'companion' than 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend'. Unlike the term companion, which is gender neutral and suggestive of a relationship that holds a deeper level of seriousness, there is something reminiscent of adolescence in the terms 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend'. It could be argued that the term 'girlfriend', or in the case of the male to male adverts 'boyfriend', refers to a new, 'short term' or 'fun' relationship, in comparison to alternative terms such as companion or partner. Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this study to examine whether female or male escorts deliberately used this term over alternatives such as companion. Interestingly, the terms 'girlfriend' and 'companion' were also referred to within the interviews in relation to the service escorts provide to their clients. This is an important area for future research on escorting.

6.1.4. The middle class escort service

This study has revealed that discourses relating to social class were not an essential theme within the advertisements, but that they provided an important backdrop. Dominant discourses relating to education, travel, food and drink, and preferred leisure pursuits and hobbies were only mentioned in a handful of female to male, male to male and female to female escort advertisements. It may not be surprising to some readers to learn that heterosexual male escorts were far more likely to demonstrate their economic and cultural capital within their advertisements, specifically in the areas of education, travel, food and drink, and culture.

As discussed throughout this thesis some of the main ideas that influenced this piece of research were the arguments put forward by Bernstein (2007) and others who have argued that technological influences, particularly with respect to the Internet, have worked to further widen those class distinctions that were already present between the different sex market sectors (Ray, 2007; Young; 2007; Castle and Lee, 2008; Agresti,

2009). Given the results presented in this study there can be no doubt that the findings have greatly contributed to the academic literature, by including heterosexual male, gay and lesbian sex workers. This study also goes further by emphasising that escorts who sell sexual services to female clients were far more expressive in their social and cultural capital, with regard to the language used to sustain and define the roles of the escort and client within the sexual encounter.

Leading on from this, it can also be argued that when advertising to male clients, both female to male and male to male escorts were far more likely to capitalise on sexual objectification of their body parts. These findings very much suggest that escorts who advertise their sexual services to male clients feel it is irrelevant to include personal information, to the point that their male clients would find this information intimidating and not relevant to their sexual fantasies. The findings of this particular study have been surprising in the sense that the detection of a middle class service, albeit with the exception of the male to female advert sample, was sparse, and even untraceable in many of the adverts; instead the main focus was on selling the body as a sexual fantasy as well as defining the escort's sexual role. The emphasis tended to be on the selling of intimacy and companionship, particularly when marketing to female clients. Escorts often offered their clients a semi-contractually explicit relationship going beyond that of functional sex, and including a contractual pricing structure which the client could potentially develop if they wished. Although it is noted that the provision of an 'intimate' erotic service is not new, attention is drawn here to the impact of the Internet in allowing these escorts a virtual space to advertise their services to the wider population, and in particular to female clients.

6.2. The impact of the Internet on the working lives of escorts

In this section of the chapter one of the original research goals is focused upon, namely examining how the Internet has impacted on escorts' lived experiences within their working lives. As discussed in Chapter Four most of the escorts who participated in the study spoke in detail about how they believe the Internet has impacted on their lived experiences as escorts. Despite not being able to make any significant comparisons between escorts who did not advertise on the Internet and those who did, due to all of the escorts interviewed having entered the profession since Internet

advertising became available, several significant findings arose. Most of the escorts identified the main benefits of online advertising as its cost-effectiveness, its ability to target a wider-ranging client base, and lessening of exposure to risk in comparison to other forms of solicitation methods. In addition, most of the escorts interviewed acknowledged the Internet's role in targeting specific clients in order to make them aware of their products or services, and being able to communicate (such as blogs and discussion forums) directly with those clients whom they can serve best and most profitably.

However, interesting to note was how some escorts reported these benefits as being what initially attracted them to online escorting. This was particularly true for male and female escorts who market their sexual services to female clients. Both male to female and female to female escorts expressed how the Internet provided them with a platform to market their services and to communicate with potential female clients. Several further stated that they believed the ever-increasing demand for their services had resulted from the contractual exchange aspect of the encounter being entirely virtual, a method of solicitation perceived as preferable for female clients.

In many ways these findings are very much reflective of other studies of sex workers who cater for male clients (Chatterjee, 2005; Bernstein, 2007; Ray, 2007; Young, 2009). However, this piece of research contributes further to the literature by also documenting the attraction of online soliciting for heterosexual male and lesbian escorts who target female clients. In this respect it is argued here that the appeal of the Internet is universal in terms of gender and sexuality of both the escort and their clients. In this context the Internet has restructured the escort market in ways that may benefit the sex worker whilst also reflecting the shared values and norms of their clients, particularly when reaching out to the female client.

In line with this research, Bernstein (2007) also highlighted that the role of the Internet is crucial in giving female sex workers a platform from which to sell such intimate services. Her study findings are built upon here as this study has additionally demonstrated the role of the Internet for male to female and female to female escorts. The findings from these two specific samples have also emphasised that male to female and female to female escorts are willing to offer their clients more than a quick service

transaction, instead providing an exchange of intimacy that has come to redefine traditional models of sexuality.

A dominant theme across all of the escort interviews was the role of the Internet in attracting a particular type of client, commonly referred to as the 'preferred client'. Many escorts, in particular those who offered sexual services to female clients, felt that the Internet allowed them to target and attract clients who otherwise would not have patronised sex workers on the street or in indoor establishments. It was the general perception across the escorts interviewed that the Internet attracted clients who were professional, educated and wealthy. The escorts' willingness to attract 'middle class' clients was also reflected in some of the middle class orientated business language used, although in a limited way, within the escort advertisements. As a result of these findings this thesis argues that to some extent the Internet has allowed for the creation of a broader sex industry that caters for the sexual desires of the female client. This in turn has allowed female clients a virtual space where the purchasing of sexual services has become normalised.

Clients of escorts now have a virtual space where they can put forward their sexual fantasies and desires, risk assessments can be carried out by both parties, and payment negotiations take place. A number of escorts also reported that they felt discussion via telephone or email prior to the encounter allowed for the escort and the client to clarify shared expectations of their respective roles within the encounter. These methods of communication also greatly benefit clients of escorts, as they were given the opportunity to put forward their sexual fantasies and expectations without revealing their identity and without an encounter taking place, thus reducing the chance of rejection by the sex worker. Previous forms of solicitation, such as seeking the services of a street or indoor sex worker for specific sexual acts, were far more troublesome for the client (Ashford, 2008). In this respect the Internet has allowed escorts and their clients a virtual space whereby they can push the sexual boundaries and social norms of what is regarded as appropriate sexual behaviour. In many respects the language used by escorts within the interviews in relation to the 'virtual contract' was rather suggestive of an esoteric 'professionalised' form of discourse in itself.

This thesis has explored the complexities of the online commercial escort market in analytical, empirical and normative terms, and as a result its findings are well placed to challenge some of the deep-rooted misconceptions relating to prostitution. Instead, the research findings have theorised the online escort market in terms of a wider discourse on the provision of ‘intimacy’, and central to this has been an emphasis on how understandings, experiences and performances of intimacy are implemented in time and space. This thesis also argues that the use of Internet advertisement sites has further empowered online escorts in creating acceptable boundaries and forming an online escort marketplace (Sharp and Earle, 2002; van Zoonen, 2002; Ashford, 2008; Argesti, 2009). Available literature suggests that the Internet has altered the interpersonal relationships between worker and client, whilst significantly increasing the level of anonymity of the interaction, with respect to the transformation of the information exchange experience available within female and gay online prostitution services, producing an ideal setting where escorts can advertise (Argesti, 2009). Online escorts are able to create characters and personalities designed to attract their preferred clientele, allowing for further control of the sexual encounter (Ashford, 2009).

6.3. Attitudes towards online escorting as a form of work

In a general sense escorts within this study expressed positive attitudes towards escorting and selling sex via the Internet. However, it is important to note that the majority of positive attitudes towards the selling of sex were directly associated with the benefits, such as financial rewards, travel, and even, at times, gifts from clients. These were identified consistently across all four of the escort markets. Therefore, it is evident from the findings that the financial and material benefits associated with selling sex were the motivation for many escorts becoming involved in online escorting. Meanings of sex work for escorts are to some extent still rooted in a patriarchal context. As many anti-sex work feminists have long argued women who provide sexual services to men for financial reward “submit to sexual domination by men and suffer degradation by being treated as sexual commodities” (Shrage, 1989: 37). However the findings presented in Chapter Five have made the case that escorts do not necessarily always adopt such a passive position within the encounter. Instead, as documented, most of the female to male escorts in this study were attracted by the financial incentives involved in selling sexual services.

Escorts also held varying attitudes towards escorting as a form of employment. Overall most of the escorts viewed escorting as a temporary or casual form of employment. However, male to female escorts differed slightly, as several referred to escorting using words such as ‘recreational’, ‘part-time’, and even at times as a ‘hobby’, fitting around other sources of employment. In contrast, female to male escorts referred to escorting as their main source of employment, whilst nearly all still viewed escorting as a temporary form of employment. Arguably, all of the male to female escorts reporting that they had a main source of employment outside of escorting suggests that their involvement in escorting may be reflective of the differences in the socioeconomic outcomes and access to employment available to men and women, with men being more able to access higher paying traditional models of employment, as noted by Farre (2012) within his study.

The findings have also highlighted that although escorts spoke about escorting in a positive way this was mostly only with regard to the financial benefits of escorting and the ability to control working conditions in relation to choosing clients and the time frame within which escorts chose to work, rather than the selling of sex itself. This perhaps suggests that many escorts feel there is still considerable stigma attached to selling sexual services to male clients. Most escorts described their entering into and remaining in escorting in terms of personal choices which were reflective of their current working positions.

6.4. Attitudes towards what is on sale to the client

At times escorts spoke about their attitudes concerning what was on sale to the customer. The escorts sampled held varying attitudes to what was on sale, and this was heavily influenced by the gender of the escort and the sexual orientation of the services they provided. What is interesting to note within the findings relating to the female to male and male to male samples is that many of the escorts used language which rendered their bodies objects for their client’s desire. This was despite the escort stating within the interview that he or she did not enjoy the contact. These findings were highlighted in Chapters Three and Five, where it was apparent that some of the language used in the adverts directly offered a sexual service, but intimacy was also provided as part of the package.

Many escorts viewed selling sexual services as a 'performance' or as 'acting', in order to be able to perform their prostitute role and to display the expected behaviours of a sex worker. The justification for doing so was to create a working identity separate from their personal lives. Many escorts favoured this method, as they perceived this to dramatically reduce and/or protect them against some of the emotional risks associated with selling sex. Escorts also expressed that the adoption of a working identity helped to give the client the impression that the escort was pleased to be in their company and providing them with the service. One of the main purposes of this 'character' change was to deceive their client about how they really felt, and to insulate themselves emotionally. There were several other reasons expressed by escorts for why they adopted a working identity; many felt it was important to reveal as little personal information as possible for fear of clients stalking them or finding out personal information about them or their families. In addition, many escorts expressed that particular friends, family members or partners were not aware of their working lives as escorts, and they feared that openness to clients could jeopardise this position.

Escorts from each of the markets spoke of the importance of acting professionally before, during and after the client encounter. Adopting the role of escort was an important strategy which interviewees used to manage their emotions. Professionalising the body and its working identity was understood as a task escorts had to undertake in the course of their work. In this context, escorts exploited their clients' desires and differences in taste, in which the individual escort represents meaningful barriers to social mobility, mobilised as a form of 'social' or 'erotic' capital (Bourdieu, 2008; Hakim, 2010). However, most of the escorts in this study did not disclose to their relatives or friends that they were involved in escorting. This in itself indicates that even though most of the escorts identified escorting as a form of work it is one which differs from most mainstream forms of employment. In this context escorts have to adopt different strategies to manage the stigma attached to their working identities, in order to separate their work from their private life. Arguably, this research has also demonstrated that emotional division in separating the escort's personal-self from their working identity was one of the most important strategies employed to stay safe during the client encounter.

History has often seen sex workers banding together to resist stigma and oppression (Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009) and online escorting is no exception to these movements. As Bernstein (2008) has noted technological influences, particularly with respect to the Internet, are further widening those class distinctions already present between the different sex market sectors. In her work she has argued that online sex workers are part of a 'new petite bourgeoisie', embracing a sense of social distinction through the adoption of 'reconversion strategies', in which cultural capital is employed to professionalise marginal space in the labour market.

In Chapter Five reference was made to Giddens' (1992) perspective on intimacy. Giddens (1992: 2) argued in his work that, "intimacy is a function of a 'pure relationship' whose participants are equal and engaged in interpersonal sharing. The pure relationship rests on a foundation of 'plastic sexuality', freed from the needs of reproduction". This style of relationship between the sex worker and client was what Bernstein (2007: 103) referred to as 'bounded authenticity', or an "authentic emotional and physical connection" between escort and client. However this study went further by examining the provision of intimacy offered by escorts who cater for female clients.

This research built upon Bernstein's (2007) notion of 'bounded authenticity' and in its findings emphasised significant differences in the ways in which each of the distinctive escort markets offer their clients a sense of 'bounded authenticity' within the sexual encounter. As identified in Chapter Five male to female and female to female escorts were more likely to express a belief that most of their clients rated their company more highly than sex. Attitudes of male to female escorts towards selling sexual services were often expressed in a chivalrous manner, based on the assertion that female clients desired a form of sexual courtship from the male escort. Male to male escorts were far more likely to offer and describe their sexual role within the encounter in an objectified manner which could be seen as an exploitative sexual imitation of an intimate relationship.

The female to male and male to male escorts also spoke graphically of the types of sexual requests their clients made. Escorts who targeted male clients were far more likely to express that they had previously felt sexually exploited by their clients, in relation to which they spoke extensively about the importance of maintaining their

personal dignity, with respect to refusing to perform specific sexual acts. Despite the majority of male to male escorts who participated in the study expressing that they generally enjoyed escorting, many also discussed the negatives associated with this type of work. Also, several of the female to male and male to male escorts expressed feelings of being objectified by a particular client, or stated that at times they also found escorting to be emotionally and physically tiring, something that was not expressed by any of the escorts in the male to female and female to female sample.

Despite many escorts noting within the interviews the unpleasant side of selling sexual services, it must also be noted that several escorts stated that they enjoyed having sex with their clients (see Chapter Five). Giddens' concept of 'plastic sexuality' (1992), as discussed in Chapter Five, may offer some explanation for this phenomenon. Giddens defines 'plastic sexuality' as "decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction [...] it frees sexuality from the rule of phallus, from the overweening importance of male sexual experience" (1992: 28). In this context the term 'plastic sexuality' allows for unconventional sexualities to emerge which are disentangled from the needs of reproduction. To summarise, the emergence of 'plastic sexuality' has impacted on the ways in which sexuality is perceived in society, which subsequently structures the ways in which men and women, including sex workers, conceptualise their own sexualities.

These research findings have contributed to the limited amount of academic research which has investigated the impact of the Internet on the working conditions and lived experiences of escorts, particularly in relation to the gender and sexual orientation of the escort-client encounter, within the context of the UK. Furthermore, the findings of the research have greatly contributed to the limited body of literature on technology and sex workers who solicit and engage with clients via the Internet, which is now increasingly based along class-structured gender lines, and which caters for different clients' sexualities and specific sexual desires. What is also clear from interviews with the escorts is that many of the sex workers feel that the Internet has played a central role in the commodification of sexual services. The escorts who featured in this research represent a growing group who are willing to engage in this type of emotional labour, in response to meeting their clients' expectations of the sexual encounter. However, the findings also highlight some of the escalating tensions and challenges

involved in building the client-escort relationship, particularly with respect to multiple dimensions of intimacy.

6.5. Online escorting and risk management

In order to address the research question which sought to examine whether online escorts used risk avoidance strategies, and whether these strategies were specific to each of the distinctive online escort samples, there will be a reflective discussion on some of the findings identified in both the discourse analysis and the interviews. The findings identified a number of clear distinctions in how escorts manage their safety and privacy. A small number of escorts interviewed had experienced physical violence against them at the hands of male clients. As a result most escorts did not outwardly believe themselves to be at risk of client violence in the course of their work. Robbery was the main concern expressed by escorts within this study. Such a perception has also been noted within several other studies (Brocks-Gordon, 2006; Sanders et al., 2009). Although only one of the female to male escorts reported that they had been robbed by a client, fear of discrimination and physical and sexual violence were most often expressed by female to male and male to male escorts, and was present to some extent within all of the markets.

As highlighted in Chapter Six, most participants in the study did not identify themselves as at risk of client violence. Most interviewees were only aware, via the Internet or through word of mouth, of other sex workers who had been robbed, physically attacked or sexually assaulted. However, these stories tended to be identified as exceptional cases. Working alone made some escorts, particularly women, feel very aware of their vulnerability, which often resulted in them putting stringent safeguards in place. Nevertheless, there were significant differences in how escorts conceptualised and experienced risk, based on the gender and sexual orientation of the encounter. Female to male and male to male escorts were more likely than the male to female and female to female escorts to report experiences of violence and to express concerns about physical safety. Although the interviewees did not perceive themselves to be at risk of systematic violence, this may be due to the fact that they took a lot of precautionary measures in order to protect themselves against risks. However, contrary to these findings, interestingly most of the escorts who

participated also reported that they did not see their clients as violent or dangerous. Instead, the findings are very much suggestive that sex workers who operate within the online escort market have a different type of 'trusting' relationship with their clients from sex workers who work on the street. It is also interesting to note that many of the escorts in this research, particularly within the female to male escort group, stated that they would report a violent client either via third party support groups or websites, or directly to law enforcement officials. This perhaps goes so far as to suggest that the police and charitable support organisations have developed a positive relationship with sex workers.

In fact what is interesting to note is that the accounts given by female to male and male to male escorts suggest that they hold a sophisticated level of control over the client encounter. Escorts favoured such a 'script' as they were all too aware of their increased vulnerability to being assaulted, verbally abused, or bullied by clients, particularly if they appeared new to escorting, weak or unable to control the sexual encounter. Escorts often expressed the importance of maintaining focus and appearing confident, in order to take control of the sexual encounter, thus reducing the risk of client violence. Consequently, the expectations and practices of the client were largely shaped by the escort, and in this way it was the worker rather than the client who dominated the sexual encounter. To conclude, the findings have emphasised the fact that many male and female escorts are able to maintain a high level of control over the escort-client encounter in terms of the types of services they provide and the implementation of effective strategies to manage risk in the course of their work.

Many escorts also spoke about the value of the Internet in allowing them to communicate with the client before the sexual encounter. As highlighted in the findings, several female to male and male to male escorts reported their frustration at how some clients would break the sexual contract and attempt to perform sexual acts outside of the 'scripted routine'. Such an encounter was described by many female to male and male to male escorts as the client trying to take advantage by refusing to pay for sexual acts which were not previously negotiated, or attempting to control the sexual transaction. This was perceived to be a risk, as losing control of the management of the client encounter significantly increased the escort's vulnerability. As many of the escorts emphasised, if they allowed the client to perform sexual acts which hadn't

been agreed upon they faced losing control of the encounter, and as a result being coerced into performing a sexual service which they did not originally consent to. This study argues that gender influences the risk management and safety strategies employed by online escorts. In turn it also alters the type of interaction taking place between the escort and their client, as female to male and male to male escorts frequently spoke of the importance of ensuring the client abided by the scripted routine, whereas male to female and female to female escorts adopted a more relaxed and, to some degree an organic, approach to the sexual encounter. Interestingly, this heightened sense of fear is reflected in the next section, discussing the security methods employed by escorts. It is apparent from the findings of the interviews that many escorts utilised the Internet to screen potential clients and to name and shame dangerous clients.

Escorts who advertise and cater their sexual services to male clients interestingly expressed concerns about how they believe the Internet, in the past few years, has led to a demand for specialised sexual services, which has further pushed sexual boundaries. Female to male and male to male escorts were more likely than the other two escort samples to express their discontent to clients who acted in a derogatory way towards them. Many escorts argued that the performance of sexual acts such as ‘water sports’ or ‘being the recipient of bondage’ would place them in considerable danger at the hands of the clients, as they would only hold limited control over the encounter. In order to combat this many escorts refused to perform certain sexual acts, in order to protect their personal or physical integrity, and in order to maintain the client’s boundaries. Arguably this suggests that male clients are far more willing to sexually objectify the escorts, given their requests to be sexually dominant within the encounter.

Rather than viewing the male and female participants of this study as individuals who are passive and oppressed by social institutions, their accounts, when analysed, show them to be individuals who make reflective decisions. In this way this study has explored how escorts control their working environment. As discussed in the literature review, previous academic studies have also argued that sex work that occurs in an ‘unprofessional setting’ dramatically increases the risks that a sex worker might be exposed to (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Sanders and Campbell, 2007; Weitzer, 2007). The collective working environments found in many indoor sex work establishments, and

within the online escort market, as demonstrated by the findings of this research study, give sex workers control over the encounter (Hart and Barnard, 2003). Nevertheless, despite the professional culture found within the online escort market, as noted in the accounts of several escorts, this does not always deter clients who attempt to take advantage or wish to inflict harm upon the escort.

Despite the findings presented in this thesis I am sure many people will still regard sex work as an extremely dangerous profession. Despite the moral judgement of society, what this research has demonstrated is that online escorts have incorporated a professionalised culture into their occupation. What has also been demonstrated within this research is that harm-reduction principles used by escorts can help to safeguard their lives. It has been widely documented in the academic literature that sex workers are exposed to serious harm such as drug use, disease, violence, discrimination, criminalisation and exploitation. However, what has not been considered until now is how these risk factors relate to the market type, gender of the sex worker and sexual orientation of the escort-client encounter. This thesis does not attempt to deny that many, if not all, of these risk factors are present in the online escort market, but what is argued is that many escorts employ successful risk prevention strategies in managing the associated risks. The escorts in this study were seen to adopt a professional working culture in terms of working identities, adopting industry standards such as abiding by fixed prices and condom usage, employing self-policing methods, and information sharing about dangerous clients.

This professional working attitude, as expressed by many of the escorts within the research, allowed them to be more tolerant of their clients' behaviour. As discussed, many escorts expressed their frustration when a client breached the 'scripted routine' or acted outside of the boundaries of the pre-agreed 'virtual contract'. However, many escorts would continue being tolerant of the client's behaviour, thus giving the client an opportunity to rectify their behaviour. As expressed in several cases discussed in this thesis if the escort felt the client was becoming aggressive in their behaviour they would withdraw from the encounter. Similar working attitudes have also been noted in several studies on non-sex worker populations. Take for example Elston et al's (2002) study on violence against general practitioners, where it was also noted that medical professionals show a degree of tolerance to some of their patients' behaviours,

but that in response to direct displays of unjustified aggression by a patient a zero tolerance approach was taken.

6.6. Perception of risk

In order to answer the original research question which sought to investigate whether there were any differences in the perception of risk between the different online escort markets, as defined by gender, sexuality and the social class of clientele, it is necessary to refer to the data collected within the interviews. As discussed in the literature review and in Chapter Five a large body of literature argues that sex workers are at risk of violence. However, the literature fails to acknowledge the ways in which sex workers define and conceptualise violence against themselves (Cheung, 2011). In analysing the findings of the interviews it became increasingly clear that escorts prioritised risks based on their gender and the sexual orientation of their client groups. In order to combat potentially dangerous clients many escorts spoke of how they can utilise the Internet to employ practical safety precautions, such as working alongside a chaperone, screening clients via communication, and using their intuition and experience. What is particularly notable about the findings from the interviews is how the Internet has opened up a new means for escorts to vet clients and thus protect themselves, whilst at the same time creating new problems of personal security.

It is notable from the findings of the interviews that male to female escorts did not conceptualise their female clients to be potentially dangerous, therefore employing the least amount of risk-preventative safety measures. Interesting to note within the interviews with male to female escorts is that several felt their size and physical strength, compared to that of their clients, would counteract any possible risks of a client becoming violent. Although none of the male to female escorts reported, or expressed being concerned about, being the victim of a physical assault from a female client, two male escorts did report having been harassed or verbally abused by one or more of their female clients.

Despite there being several websites acting as internal blacklists for escorts and often containing warnings or reviews about clients to avoid, alongside their email addresses, names or contact details, female to male escorts were the only sample to report using

such websites. The motivation behind such postings is to warn escorts of dangerous clients or scams, whilst offering advice in helping them to stay safe and avoid potential harm. This perhaps again highlights female escorts' heightened sense of fear when it comes to risks associated with online escorting and male clients, compared to those who provide sexual services to female clients. However, this form of Internet communication has led to escorts becoming vulnerable to new risks associated with selling sex. Several escorts from each of the samples spoke about being verbally harassed or abused by their previous clients, or in many cases by unknown individuals.

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, many of the advertisement websites used by the escorts allowed their clients to write a review about the escorts, in which the client evaluates the appearance of the sex worker and the quality of the service provided. Escorts spoke about the advantages of such reviews, in that they allowed for a level of trust between the escort and the client, giving the client an opportunity to read feedback from other clients about the escort and offering the opportunity to determine whether the escort provided a safe and quality service. For escorts a high feedback rating is invaluable, but on the other hand escorts spoke about negative reviews as a serious risk to their business. Many escorts went further, stating how, in most circumstances, they disputed such negative reviews as just the client being abusive, or the negative review being unjustified.

The protection that the Internet may offer some escorts has been discussed, but in the following paragraphs the focus is upon several personal security issues opened up by the Internet. While discussions of violence against escorts, to date, have outwardly focused on the prevalence of violence in the marketplace, the findings of this study suggest that most men and women did not have direct experience of physical violence. However, many did report having been verbally abused or threatened by their clients. Despite many of the escorts within the research not perceiving themselves to be at serious risk of client violence a number spoke of having been verbally insulted by clients in person or via Internet reviews. This often occurred if the client disagreed about the appearance of the escort, the sexual acts allowed within the scope of the encounter, the quality of the service, or the financial agreement. What is perhaps most concerning is that a number of escorts across the markets, however more so the female to male sample, spoke about the looming psychological threats either mediated through

the Internet or telephone communications such as text messages and voicemails, which often resulted in them feeling intimidated. As highlighted in Chapter Five, verbal abuse towards the sex worker may not always take place during the escort-client encounter. Clients may not verbally abuse sex workers face-to-face, but do this instead by placing messages on the Internet or sending abusive emails or text messages. The findings have also highlighted that although electronic messages are a crucial part of the communication between escorts and their clients, at the same time these forms of communication can be abused in order to target escorts with messages of hate and violence. In this respect the technological advances in relation to the Internet have brought new threats to bear on escorts in the form of virtual violence. This particular type of violence has created a heightened sense of psychological fear amongst escorts, with negative reviews potentially damaging the escort's business reputation.

6.7. Sexual health risks and management

Findings from the interviews also highlighted that risks associated with selling sex via the Internet go further than being physical and psychological. Sexual risks associated with the transmission of STIs and HIV posed a significant risk to escorts, not only in terms of health, but also in relation to the reputation of their business; however most escorts saw these risks as easily manageable. As discussed earlier, in Chapter Five, female to male and male to male escorts were the only two samples within the interviews to report receiving frequent requests for non-condom use. In Chapter Five reference was made to one particular study that documented the negative condom beliefs or attitudes towards usage of various populations. These studies have concluded that because condoms were worn by men, and because men frequently reported experiencing physical discomfort such as erection problems and loss of sensation through condom usage, men were far more likely to display negative attitudes towards condom usage than female participants (Crosby et al., 2003; Mizuno et al., 2007). These findings are very much consistent with the findings of this study, where none of the male to female or female to female sample reported receiving any requests from their female clients to engage in risky sexual behaviours.

Nevertheless, although the findings of this research report that requests for unprotected penetrative sex are frequent for some escorts, all escorts involved in this particular

research refused to honour such requests. The consistent use of condoms and fixed price codes within the online escort market, discussed by all except male to female escorts, are positive examples of social norms existing within this particular market type. In the accounts given by escorts within the interviews it became apparent that in most cases male and female escorts took an active role in protecting themselves from sexually transmitted infections. In some cases this message was relayed to the clients before they even contacted the escort, via the escort's advertisement. Several escorts reported that they made it clear to clients via their online chats or within their online advertisements that under no circumstances would they participate in unsafe penetrative sex. In this context, escorts utilised the Internet as a medium of communication to reinforce the fact that they only engaged in safe sexual practices. However, such findings were not reflected in the discourse analysis performed within this particular research study.

Contrary to escorts refusing unprotected penetrative sex with their clients, and at times educating clients about the importance of safe sex, several male to female escorts admitted that they had previously engaged in unprotected sex with one or more of their clients. As reported by several male to female escorts, many did not perceive having sex with clients as a risk-taking behaviour. In their accounts most men emphasised that they had unprotected sex only with their regular female clients. In the accounts of these men a 'trust relationship' existed between the escort and their regular client, and this underlay their engagement in unprotected sex. However, as previously discussed, there should not be an assumption made from the findings of the data that male to female escorts are the least likely group to engage in safe sex with their female clients, due to the fact that none of the escorts who participated in this research were asked directly if they had ever engaged in unprotected sex with a client, and were just asked in general to explain the sexual risks that they associate with their work. Nevertheless, this raises the importance of examining the relatively unexplored space of online male to female escort services and their sexually risky behaviours.

Perhaps surprisingly, and arguably in contradiction to the rest of the research study's findings, many escorts reported that practicing safe sex was limited to penetrative sex. In their accounts most of the escorts demonstrated their awareness of the sexual risks involved in having unprotected oral sex with their clients, and despite most escorts

stating that at times they felt uncomfortable doing so, they also expressed that such a service was expected by their clients. Despite escorts appearing to be aware of the risks associated with performing or receiving unprotected oral sex the risk of catching an STI was understood as an occupational hazard. It was the opinion of several escorts that most of the sexually transmitted infections which could be transmitted by oral sex could be easily treated with the help of local GUM services.

Accounts presented in the study show that there are no significant differences between male and female escorts who provide sexual services to male clients, in terms of condom usage. The findings have however highlighted that for most of the escorts within the sample providing or receiving the acts of fellatio, cunnilingus or anilingus was a regular occurrence. As discussed previously, the findings of this research differ from those of previous studies of this nature which have suggested a standardised practice of condom usage. Several of these studies, for example those conducted by Parsons et al. (2004) and Sanders and Campbell (2007), have also suggested that such risk-taking behaviour in return for financial gain is seen as a breach of the code of acceptability, while 'non-normative' acts would not be sold within certain markets of prostitution.

Escorts involved in this research reported to be highly knowledgeable about HIV transmission and all were motivated to use sexual protection within the client encounter, with the exception of oral sexual contact. The present research contributes to a shift of academic attention in terms of issues relating to sexual health, placing heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian accounts and experiences of sexual health at the centre of research. From the findings it is clear that many interviewees balanced the risk of contracting an STI against financial incentive. As discussed in Chapter Five, the findings of this study were reflected in several large studies examining the risk of HIV transmission through the performance of oral sex, where it was concluded that the risk of transmission was significantly lower than the risk of transmission via penetrative sex (van Grievsen et al., 1987; Schacker et al., 1996). The findings herein arguably suggest that either escorts have to some extent succumbed to the market demands set by their clients' expectations or that escorts or their clients are ignorant of the risk of sexually transmitted infections associated with the performance of oral sex.

6.8. Internet and escorting services

The findings of this study have highlighted that the Internet and the online marketing of sexual services have had a significant impact on the working roles and lived experiences of online escorts within the UK. The research findings have revealed details of the conditions under which sex workers are working as escorts and specifically how the Internet has interfered, facilitated and altered the way in which escorting has been organised and operationalised. As documented several escorts who participated in this study made the transition into escorting from other sex markets such as webcams and erotic pole dancing. Those escorts who previously worked within another sector of the sex industry spoke of a gradual transition to escorting due to the Internet, often perceived as an obvious shift. In this context both men and women were enticed into the escort market as a result of the advantages the Internet offers. How significant this transition is in terms of workers in the sex industry leaving other sectors to work in the Internet escort market is not clear and should be left to future research, but nevertheless such findings suggest that this may be substantial.

What is unique about the research findings is that they have confirmed a number of new personal security risks that sex workers are now vulnerable to. Although most of the escorts who participated in this study spoke positively about the benefits of the Internet in both marketing and communicating with their clients online, many also spoke of how it provided a channel to target escorts with messages of hate and violence, fraud and scams. Those escorts interviewed spoke of new concerns over risks, such as their vulnerability to online stalking, harassment and blackmail. Such new risks are far from insignificant and potentially present serious threats to both male and female escorts' safety. Escorts are now faced with violence, aggression and harassment both offline and online. This type of virtual violence can understandably create a heightened sense of psychological fear amongst escorts. In addition, unjustified negative reviews can be extremely damaging to the escort's reputation and arguably equate to slander on behalf of the clients. As a result, technological advances in relation to the Internet have rendered sex workers susceptible to a number of undocumented risks that go beyond the well documented crimes discussed in Chapter One.

As documented in the findings the Internet offers escorts an opportunity for information sharing and a virtual space wherein they can issue warnings about undesirable or dangerous clients. In this context the Internet is invaluable, but this online community is not seen as being accessible to all escorts. As highlighted in the findings of this particular study it was only the female to male escort sample that spoke of using these particular websites, such as 'Uglymugs'. This may be in part because of differences in relation to gender, sexual orientation, social background and career history, or possibly notions of hierarchy between the different escort samples regardless of their shared profession.

In order to develop our understanding of the working lives of online escorts we must first understand the role of and opportunities relating to the Internet, and the associated risk should not be underestimated. The findings of this research will hopefully expand our understanding of the needs of male and female sex workers in the context of violence.

6.9. Professional culture

This thesis began by identifying how female to male, male to male, male to female and female to female escorts advertise their sexual services, experience selling sex services via the Internet, and conceptualise and manage risks associated with doing so in relation to the gender and sexual orientation makeup of the sexual encounter. Given the results of this research there can be no doubt that the online escort industry is highly organised and professionalised in managing the risks associated with selling sex.

To date, heterosexual male, gay and lesbian sex workers have rarely been regarded as of functional concern in the research literature. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute greatly to challenging the omission of literature that focuses on these particular sex markets. As demonstrated in the literature review, academics have long considered the selling of sexual services as inherently dangerous. Biological, medical and psychological research on prostitution has also tended to focus on assessing the risks associated with selling sex, and the impact of these risks on the sex worker. As a result previous research attention has categorised and quantified hazards associated with selling sex, resulting in the assumption that risk in prostitution is inevitable, and

that sex workers are forever victims. The findings of this research will aid in the reconceptualisation of the risks associated with prostitution in the hope of allowing a new theoretical discussion to further explore the ways in which academics continue to construct and legitimise risk within the sex work market.

6.10. Limitations of the study

During the course of this research I was presented with a number of difficulties with regard to participant recruitment, particularly when appealing to female to female escorts to participate in the study. Participant recruitment was encouraged in the form of email, which often resulted in little or no response. For the purpose of future research careful consideration will be given to the manner in which the recruitment process takes place. After the completion of this research I became aware of researchers in a similar field making use of other technologies such as Twitter and Facebook as a method of advertising to and recruiting potential participants. Regardless of the success rates these projects had in recruiting, the idea of utilising social media alongside email recruitment seems like a viable option in advertising the research to potential participants.

As highlighted in Chapter Two and in the analytical chapters, what we do know is that there are an increasing number of sex workers willing to capitalise on and market their services to the female client. However, due to difficulties in obtaining access to escorts who cater for female clients, what is still unsure is whether there is an oversupply in terms of the demand. It is therefore fundamental that future research considers the female client further.

Transgender escorts were regrettably not included in this research due to the time constraints set out in the PhD. To date we still know relatively little about the lived experiences of trans-identified sex workers and the ways in which they conceptualise and respond to risks faced during the course of their work. Therefore, I emphasise the need for future research in this area. One final limitation of this study is that it was restricted to escorts who operate in the South-East of the United Kingdom. I feel that a much larger study over a wider geographical area would help reinforce the findings presented in this piece of research.

6.11. Policy implementations

Numerous studies have suggested the need to develop a new framework for understanding the sex industry (Ditmore et al., 2010; Hardy et al., 2010). In line with Weitzer's (2009) argument, as set out in the beginning of this thesis (Chapter One), there have been two core criminological theoretical perspectives which have dominated the literature on prostitution: the oppression paradigm and the empowerment paradigm, which are diametrically contrasting models founded on very different suppositions. The issue of gender and oppression is a central debate within prostitution, but its relevance to individual sex markets is distorted at times. Weitzer (2009) has presented us with an alternative perspective, which he referred to as the 'polymorphous paradigm', based upon a collection of occupational arrangements, power relations and workers' experiences, in relation to self-agency, objectification and victimisation. Here I support Weitzer's stance and argue that future research wishing to inform prostitution policy and legislation should adopt a polymorphous approach to sex markets, thus allowing for a more innovative approach to researching sex work, whilst also presenting a model of a particular ethical sex market.

Decades of legislative and policy responses to prostitution in England and Wales, as discussed in the literature review, have failed to acknowledge any distinction between 'voluntarily' and 'forced' sex work. As it stands, in England and Wales governmental support is increasingly lending favour to the adoption of a neo-abolitionist approach to prostitution. To date, the legislative context of sex work has been largely framed with respect to heterosexual prostitution, which is considered to be inherently violent and exploitative, such that the role of the law is to restrict and reduce supply and demand. Despite the reform process paving the way for the adoption of provisions founded on the concept as sex work as a form of work, the focus is nonetheless grounded in the realm of sexual offences, and a neo-abolitionist policy perspective on prostitution has become increasingly influential (Home Office, 2004, 2006). The phrase 'commercial exploitation' has been propagated throughout the new policy documents and as a result has now been deployed in effect as a synonym for prostitution (Scholar and Carline, 2007). Further questions should be raised in order to more closely examine whether the criminalising of clients will in fact reduce sex

workers vulnerability. To date, the strict liability offence (S.14) is rarely enforced (Kingston and Thomas, 2014).

Arguably the UK legislative focus on heteronormative sexual relationships within prostitution related research is problematic as it has created a gender bias that has influenced public policy, thus resulting in limited studies of Internet-based heterosexual, gay and lesbian prostitution services, a subsection of the sex industry undergoing phenomenal growth. Here it is argued that future policy should consider escorting as a gendered activity performed by both heterosexual and homosexual men and women, and sex work in general as a form of work, rather than solely focusing on the sex aspect.

However, in the UK feminists' and activists' perspectives on prostitution have been largely supported, in particular during the Blair era. As a direct consequence global discourses on sex trafficking have been largely implemented, and such laws have been increasingly used against sex workers. Arguably, such an approach has resulted in sex work once again being socially marginalised and framed as an unacceptable form of work. Various organisations such as the UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP) have launched campaigns to challenge the legislative context of prostitution in the United Kingdom and have long argued that the law should protect those involved in sex work rather than attempting to prohibit prostitution. Nevertheless, laws relating to prostitution in the UK have not significantly changed since the publication of *The Wolfenden Report* in 1957 (see Chapter One). The lack of legal protection for sex workers may be explained by the fact that many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) struggle to secure funds for projects if they don't comply with key topics such as 'AIDS prevention', 'trafficking' or 'violence' (Agustin, 2010), something that as a researcher I have previously encountered.

What has been missing from legislative policy for far too long now are the voices of sex workers and their lived experiences of selling sexual services. In future scholars should value the narratives and lived experiences of those involved in the sex industry and include them in the policy-making process.

Substantial differences in the ways in which heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian online escorts perceive and manage the risks associated with selling sexual services online have been identified in this thesis. Both male and female participants in the research often spoke about the significant benefits of online advertising and sex work, but at the same time discussed a host of other risks and concerns introduced through the use of new technologies. Therefore, I encourage future policy discussion to consider the findings of this and similar studies that have highlighted the new security risks such as online harassment, stalking, and hate crimes and more financially exploitative experiences as part of a broader spectrum of risk that sex workers experience. I argue here for a more expansive understanding of sex work in which there can be a more productive use of criminal law. Future policy should recognise the significant benefits that the Internet offers to both male and female independent escorts, in terms of self- agency and allowing for improved working safety conditions. I also argue that future policy legislative developments need to be more reflective of the complexity of the UK sex market both on and offline. As the findings of this study have highlighted, the perception and management of risk differed between the different online escorts samples. These findings alone, it is hoped, may open up a debate for a gendered model of prostitution and one that also takes into account sexual orientation.

6.12. Future research

The accounts provided by escorts within this study demonstrate that male and female escorts' experiences of risk during the course of their work are greatly influenced by the sexual orientation of the services which they offer their male or female clients. Consequently, the understanding of risk by escorts within this study was very much dependent on the gender and sexual orientation of their services. This complexity makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to fit participants' experiences into a pre-categorised research approach.

Despite the substantial body of literature on violence against sex workers and the emotional health of sex workers, little focus has been placed so far on the lived experiences of online escorts, particularly male and female escorts who cater for the female client. In addition to this, as emphasised in Chapter Five, the findings identified a number of inconsistencies in condom usage, particularly within several interviews

with male to female escorts. Several studies have highlighted the extent to which male sex workers actively presented negative attitudes to condom usage and that a high proportion of female clients reported not to have used sexual protection with a male sex worker (Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001). However, these studies were conducted outside of the UK context and specifically focused on female sex tourism and male sex workers who are commonly referred to as 'beach boys' (Sanchez Taylor, 2001). I therefore argue that before any generalisations can be made about these specific findings further research is required to investigate condom usage within male to female sex work populations.

Most of the literature to date has focused on the prevalence of the risk of physical violence against sex workers. The findings of this study have highlighted that although most escorts did not have direct experience of physical violence many of them did however report having been abused or threatened online by their clients or members of the public. I hope the findings of this study will encourage further research to investigate this emerging form of violence against sex workers.

As argued in Chapter One, most of the literature on prostitution has been concerned with female street sex workers. This thesis has made the case that the indoor market in general, but more specifically the online escort market, greatly differs from street-based sex work. I therefore encourage further research on distinctive online escort markets to help push the research agenda to the centre, in order to obtain a more balanced overview of sex markets, one that focuses on actors and structures that have received inadequate consideration, and in particular male and female sex workers who cater for female clients, and male and female clients in general.

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APPENDIX A



Royal Holloway Ethics Approval Form

Please complete all parts of the form and the checklist. Please append consent form(s) and information sheets and any other materials in support of your application. If relevant, please also append the appropriate department-specific annex.

All applicants should refer to the Royal Holloway, University of London Research Ethics Guidelines document.

Check one box:

STAFF Project POSTGRADUATE Project UNDERGRADUATE Project

20/10/2012

Application date:

1. Title of research/consultation

‘An examination of four distinctive online escort markets?’

2. Main researcher/investigator

Name: Kristofor Burghart	Job Title: PhD Candidate	Organisation: The Royal Holloway, University of London
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3. Line Manager of main researcher/investigator

Name: Prof Denney	Job Title: PhD Supervisor Lecturer in Sociology	Organisation: The Royal Holloway, University of London
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Start date Funding	01/10/09	Duration 4 Years
Agency	N/A	
Contact e-mail address:	kristofor.burghart.2009@live.rhul.ac.uk	krisburghart@hotmail.com

Does your project involved NHS patients, staff and facilities? Yes No

Section 1

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main experimental procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?			X
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	X		
3	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	X		
4	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	X		
5	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			X
6	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	X		
7	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?			X
8	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	X		
9	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	X		

If you have ticked 'NO' to any of Q1 – 9, please give an explanation in the box below (expand as necessary):

		YES	NO	N/A
10	Will subjects/participants be paid?	X		

11	Is electrical or other equipment to be used with subjects/participants?		x	
12	Are there any financial or other interests to the researcher(s) or department arising from this study?		x	
13	Will your project involve deliberately misleading subjects/participants in any way?		x	
14	Is there any realistic risk of any <i>subjects/participants</i> experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If yes, describe any measures to avoid/minimise harm to subjects in the box below.	X		
15	Is there any realistic risk of <i>researchers</i> experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?	X		
16	Will the project require approval by any ethics committee outside Royal Holloway (eg NHS NRES committee)?		x	

17	Do subjects/participants fall into any of the following special groups? (see attached guidelines)	a) Children (under 16)		x	
		b) Those aged 16-18		x	
		b) People with learning or communication difficulties		x	
		c) Patients		x	
		d) People in custody		x	
		e) People engaged in illegal activities. (e.g. drug taking)		x	

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of questions 10-17, please provide full details in the box below (expand as necessary).

Q10: Participants will be given £20 as a small gesture for their time, as well as covering any expense in attending the interview.

Q14: The researcher’s interaction with the participants should not cause them any discomfort. However due to the sensitive nature of the topic (requesting information about the self-regulation against risk, and the perception of risk) the Interview Schedule (Appendix D): has been carefully developed to ensure that information is only gained at the discretion of the participant, therefore the participants will only share information they feel comfortable with. Participants will then be asked their convenience and availability and interviews will be scheduled around this information. The interview environment will be talked through with the participants, allowing them to feel comfortable with the decision. These however must adhere to ethical guidelines to ensure safety for both parties and confidentiality for the participant (See section 17.d.ii) Therefore there should not be any inconvenience caused. In addition, through the Information Sheet and Consent Form, the participants will be aware of their confidentiality and right to withdraw at any stage of the research. Finally the information sheet will inform the participant of the researcher’s role in guiding them to a relevant contact if they become distressed in any way by the research. When the interview is scheduled, the researcher will take their time to run through the information sheet and consent forms again face to face to ensure that the participant is happy and can ask any questions. It is hoped that the research information given out before this contact will allow this process to be a time to revisit the purpose of the research rather than be introductory, thus a process of double checking understanding and consent. They will then be asked to sign an Information Sheet and Consent Form at the time of the interview. Once this has been signed then the interview will begin.

Q15: The researcher is aware of his vulnerabilities whilst working alone, away from the University. Interviews will be carried out in a public fieldwork site convenient for both the researcher and participant, such as a cafe, gallery, public park, library (or other suitable location requested by the participant) within the London area. The public fieldwork site will be agreed by the participant and researcher a minimum of 24 hours prior to the interview, to allow the researcher the opportunity to assess the risks of the proposed environment and to identify and control any potential hazards as far as reasonably practicable. In addition, potential fieldwork sites will be assessed for access and ease for appropriate communication and emergency procedures that will be established and maintained before and throughout the interview. It is essential that, if something goes wrong, assistance can be summoned and emergency services notified. Mobile phones are one convenient form of communication, but they are not suitable for all circumstances or areas (For example, mobile phone network coverage). The researcher will take precautions as expected within the lone working policy and make sure that a fieldwork log is carried out for all visits (See Appendix E). The field work phone in/monitoring sheet will ensure that the time, date and location of the interview is relayed before hand to the faculty administrator as well as a friend or colleague, whom will additionally be informed of when the interview finishes and both parties have departed. It is also necessary for contacts not involved to be able to alert others or to take action if there is evidence to suggest that something has gone wrong. The person or persons nominated by the researcher must be competent and have the ability to complete the fieldwork phone in/monitoring sheet (Appendix E). In regards to the researcher becoming distressed or traumatised during or after the fieldwork, he has available support offered through his PhD supervisors (David Denney and Sarah Moore) and has gathered contact information for trained counsellors at the Royal Holloway, University of London

3. If this research/investigation forms part of a qualification or course please provide details

The research is being carried out for fulfilment of a PhD in Sociology from the Royal Holloway, University of London.

4. What is the aim of this piece of work i.e. what do you want to investigate?

Where relevant, please ensure that you investigate options early with potential participants as part of the consultation process. If participant input into the process now may help refine further options to consult on again at a later stage, please make this clear.

Aims

3. What are the dominant discourses used in escorts' online advertisements, particularly as they relate to sexuality, gender and social class?
- 4.
5. What role does the Internet play in online escorts' working lives?
- 6.
7. Do online escorts use risk avoidance strategies, and are these strategies specific to each of the distinctive online escort samples?
- 8.
9. Are there any differences in the perception of risk between the different distinctive online escort markets, as defined by the gender, sexuality and social class of their clientele?

Objectives

- Identify the common discourses used in online escort advertisements, in relation to the gender, sexuality and social class of both the service provider and customer.
- Identify the self regulatory practices adopted by each of the distinctive online escort markets, in relation to the gender and sexuality of a sex worker and clientele.
- To collect and analyse primary data, through interviews with heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escorts, in order to explore experiences and perceptions of risk within different types of client groups (heterosexual male and female clients, as well as gay and lesbian clients), and to compare the different risk limiting behaviours used by each distinctive online escorts market.

Research Questions

- (1) Are there any dominant discourses used in escort online advertisements, particularly as they relate to sexuality, gender and social class?
- (2) Do online escorts use risk avoidance strategies, and are these strategies employed by all distinctive groups or are specific to each of the distinctive online escort samples?

(3) Are there any differences between the perception of risk between the different distinctive online escorts markets, as defined by gender, sexual orientation and social class of their clientele?

Central to the research study is how and why, male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort markets differ in these three key analytical questions?

1) Purpose of project

Very little is known about online prostitution services and markets, since most of the criminological and sociological literature focuses on the illegality, deviance and discourses of female street prostitution (Weitzer, 2005; Levitt and Vankatesh, 2007). This thesis seeks to demonstrate how previous criminological and sociological analyses of prostitution, in England and Wales, has continuously overlooked the male heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort market, a subsection of the sex industry that is experiencing significant growth (Sharpe and Earle, 2005; Levitt and Vankatesh, 2007; Scott and Cunningham, 2009; Weitzer, 2010)⁵. The rise of online escort solicitation services, and advertisement websites, has further augmented prostitution markets, on and off-line, which is now increasingly based on class-structured gender lines, which cater for different client's sexualities and specific sexual desires (Scott and Cunningham, 2009). In order to overcome some of the deep-rooted myths about prostitution, this thesis differs in its criminological and sociological standpoint by devoting its attention to the vocational and risk aspects of the online escort market, rather than its illegality and deviance.

This research study will allow for an in-depth examination of how the regulatory practices used by escorts, have connected to a set of related transformations that have occurred within broader spheres of economy, culture and sexuality, and how such a connection has revolutionised standards in the selling of sex acts. This research will begin by detailing the relationship between money and sex at a 'micro level', in order to reveal the relationship between escorting and social economic status, of both the sex worker and client via online advertisements. This research will also provide an insight into risk, and experiences of the risks involved in online escorting specific to the gender and sexuality of the escort, thus reflecting the broader trends at work, when selling sex.

Therefore, through the exploration of online escort markets, the research will provide important information in respect of a relatively under-researched area. Importantly it will highlight if there are recurring and predominant themes within

all prostitution markets, or contrasting themes in relation to the gender and sexuality of the service provider and client. Findings from the research study will inform the UK, and alternative interested parties, of a realistic picture of online escort sex markets and the required expectations surrounding this. In turn, it is hoped that the findings of the research study will also aid developments within the knowledge base of the online escort sex market, and related theoretical considerations relevant to gender, sexual orientation, social class and perception of risk within online escorting. It is vital that online escort voices are heard to gain an insight into their experiences and perception of risk; if certain groups of online escorts hold the possibility of heightening risk, then these need to be addressed to show possible implications to developments within social policy responses. With this in mind, this thesis will provide a better understanding of sociological influences within a particular prostitution context, and furthermore produce theoretical support for developments in policy and practice that can enhance the safety of individual groups of sex workers.

6. Methods and measurements to be used (widely used questionnaires need not be appended, but previously unpublished questionnaires should be submitted for approval). Please provide a full list.

This research will consist of two aspects of qualitative research on heterosexual male and female, gay and lesbian escorts, in London, UK, during 2013. Central to the research is how and why, male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort markets differ in these three key analytical questions.

a) Discourse analysis

The first method used within this research thesis will attempt to answer the research questions, that seek to identify the dominant discourses used in escort online advertisements, particularly as they relate to sexuality, gender and social class. The social class and socioeconomics of sex workers, and their clients, remain a fundamental starting point in understanding sex work, and in particular the online escort market, not only in the advertising and targeting of middle class clients, but in the implementation of middle class values in its advertising and self-regulatory structuring (Ray, 2007; Bernstein, 2008; Young, 2009). This discourse analysis will examine the statements in the language used within the advertisement, and how they identify themselves through linguistic code as subjects in social contexts. This analysis will involve a careful examination of ten advertisements, selected from each distinctive escort websites (equalling forty advertisements), noting the terms, descriptions, and figures of speech used to refer to the sexual orientation, types and styles of services available. Central to the analysis is an examination of the basis of the common understanding, by the service provider, and the customer, of their respective roles, and how the language used within the advertisements upholds this, in relation to class distinctions and the sexual orientation of the encounter.

b) Qualitative semi-structured interview

Much of the research suggests a number of new risks are posed by technology, within the provision of prostitution services, but does not confirm a change in the relationship between risk management and prostitution, particularly in relation to the gender and sexual orientation of the encounter. To ensure a method of enquiry that would allow exploration of issues too complex to investigate through quantitative means, a qualitative interview will be used, presenting semi structured

open ended questions (Banister et al, 1994; Babbie, 2001; Noaks and Wincup, 2004), in order to examine the research questions; do online escorts use risk avoidance strategies, and are these strategies medium or specific to each of the distinctive online escort samples? Other questions will consider whether there were any differences between the perception of risk between the different distinctive online escorts markets, as defined by gender, sexual orientation and social class of their clientele? Interviews will allow for an investigation of the key risks involved in the participation of sex work, and the perception of risk, relevant to the gender and sexuality of the client, whilst asking further questions on these and surrounding issues. A secondary role of the qualitative semi-structured interviews will be to examine whether perceptions of the risks involved in online escorting differ, in relation to the sexual orientation of the encounter. The precise aim of using this semi structured approach was also to allow the interviewee to elaborate on some of the questions, as well as having some control over the direction that the questioning takes, allowing the questions to be tailored to the interviewee, rather than being bound by standardisation, irrespective of how the interviewees' discussions were to be portrayed (Banister et al, 1994).

7. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

1. Discourse Analysis

The scope of the research study will be limited to online escorts services, with only four different search terms/keywords being used, 'female escorts', 'gay escorts', 'straight male escorts' and 'lesbian escorts', in order to identify the relevant websites. The websites chosen for research will initially be identified using Google – search engine, due to it being consistently ranked as the preferred search engine in online polls (retrieved 23 April 2012). Two other search engines Yahoo.co.uk and Bing.com were also investigated to ensure that there was a significant overlap among the results found on all three search engines. Websites will only be included in the study if they advertise independent escort services in London, or surrounding suburbs. For these reasons, escorts websites for this study will be selected from such review websites identified through google.co.uk search engine; Punternet (www.punternet.com) for female escorts catering to heterosexual men, Sleepyboy

(www.sleepyboy.com) for male escorts catering to homosexual or bisexual men, Menforhire (www.menforhire.org.uk) for male escorts catering for heterosexual females and Firstcallescorts (www.firstcallescorts.co.uk/lesbian-escorts.php) for female escorts catering for lesbian or bisexual female customers. The researcher will analyse two advertisements in total for each of the sample groups' entries on a weekly basis, which will roughly be equivalent to twenty percent of all the entries, until all of the 10 adverts for each distinctive escort group is collected from each of the selected websites. This method of data selection will additionally ensure analysis does not reach the point of saturation, or previously analysed adverts are not used. These selections will be done to ensure that each week of the month, in which field work takes place, is substantially covered. These entries were decided upon in consultation with the researcher's supervisors; they will not be ranked, but put in order in which they were submitted, allowing for the best method of data collection, whilst meeting the needs of this particular study. Also, it is expected that it will not be possible to download and analyse the content of all of the ten cases due to the adverts on each of the specific advertisement websites being rejected, and disregarded over a certain time period. The researcher also felt that such a selection process would be more representative of the chosen websites site monthly operation. The number of adverts posted on particular days is expected to vary greatly in the female heterosexual advertisement website, but are expected to be less significant in the lesbian escort website.

2. Qualitative Semi-structured interviews

The study will comprise of semi structured interviews with the following participants:

- Female internet escorts who predominantly advertise to heterosexual male customers n = 10
- Male internet escorts who predominately advertise to homosexual or bisexual male customers n = 10
- Male internet escorts who predominately advertise to heterosexual female customers n = 10
- Female escorts who predominately advertise to lesbian or bisexual female customers n = 10

The total number of participants is expected to equate to $n = 40$

It is important to note that the researcher will specifically target internet escorts who predominantly target a specific gender and sexuality, in order to eliminate escorts who may target both genders, therefore adding an increased level of validity to the overall qualitative findings.

The number and type of participant are the result of a purposive sampling approach designed to answer the principle research question and in order to reflect the variation in experience and perspective of risk involved in online escorting. A secondary consideration was to restrict total participants to a number both manageable and appropriate for the purposes of a PhD.

Participants for the research will be randomly selected from the advertisements featured in the selected websites; from this list (through picking random numbers) a short list will be compiled. Initial contact will be made by phone, or email, during a period of one month, in order to gain a representative sample of 10 participants from each of the distinctive websites chosen. In the case of non-responses, the researcher will pick additional random numbers until the sample number is complete: following the above process. Participants.

The interview is expected to take, on average, between thirty to forty minutes, as time constraints are expected to be an issue to both parties involved within the interview. This process of interviewing will be repeated at different times of the day, within the various participant groups, across the South-East of England, in order to obtain the widest possible sample. Another constraint is concerned with the location of the research, which is why London was chosen as it will provide a diverse participant sample within an area that is accessible to the researcher. In addition London was chosen due to the constraints of funding and time management, A further consideration is the difficulties of obtaining a representative national sample within this relatively small piece of research.

If the researcher is unable to recruit enough participants for each of the distinctive samples, via the advertisement websites, an alternative means of recruitment will be accessed through the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP). After initial discussions with the ECP, agreement was made that the organisation could act as gatekeepers within the negotiation of access in recruiting the sex workers.

8. Consent and participant information arrangements (see checklist below). Include description of procedure for obtaining second consent where deception was involved (see guidelines).

See Appendix A for information sheet and Appendix B for consent form.

9. Possible benefits to subjects/participants of taking part in this research.

Participants within the qualitative research will all be sent a brief summary of the research findings, or the ability to request an electronic access to the final thesis.

10. Description of procedure for obtaining parental consent for research involving participants aged under 16 (or 18, if relevant).

N/A

11. Data security and destruction and data protection procedures.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity is kept the following procedure has been put in place:

After confirmation has been made of participant status, each participant will be given a unique ID number. This will be used in all documentation relating to that individual including hard copies, recordings and computer saved files. All of which will be stored on an encrypted file on a password protected encrypted drive and will remain at the site of the university. A separate password encrypted file will link participant's unique ID number to a pseudonym. Every effort will be made to ensure the participants details will not be recognisable.

Hard copies will be stored in a secure filing cabinet until the data have been coded into a password protected file. Once the data has been coded successfully, the hard copies will be destroyed.

Voice recordings will be gathered in the field and will be heavily secured from the onset with each recording being linked to a pseudonym (as highlighted above). As soon as the recordings have been made, care will be taken by the researcher to transfer them into an encrypted file on portable password protected drive (remaining coded) before travelling with the data. Backups will also be made to portable media (USB drives) that have been encrypted and will be carried separately. The original recordings will be permanently deleted from the device as soon as this has occurred.

Every effort will be made to anonymise quotes such that they are not easily recognisable.

Quotes that are used from the interviews will be anonymised within the PhD and in any other publications or conference presentations. As highlighted above, every effort will be made to anonymise quotes so the participants are not identifiable from what the researcher publishes or presents.

12. What equalities issues have you identified? How will you ensure the inclusion of all relevant groups?

It is predicted that due to this research being for a doctorate it will not lead to any implementation of a policy or strategy. However in terms of offering insights into sex markets and moreover the online

sex market, which is based on class-structured and gender lines, which cater for different client's sexualities and specific sexual desires, the following points have been considered:

There will not be negative consequences or discrimination to any participant within the study on the grounds of race, gender, disability, faith, sexuality or age. The researcher understands that different people have different experiences and needs, and recognised that a 'one size fits all' approach to those who work online, can result in disadvantage and discrimination. Thus, in addition to the absence of the above discrimination, no participant will be discriminated against on the grounds of their behaviour. The research aims to merely provide an insight, and will not negatively portray any individual within the study. Therefore there will be no adverse impact to any participant in the study.

It is hoped that the research will allow for a better understanding of risks, and protection experienced for those who operate within online escorting, such information can also be used as a knowledge base for risk and protective factors for all sex markets.

As highlighted within pg. 8, the English Collective of Prostitutes may be used if the researcher is unable to recruit enough participants for each of the distinctive samples, via the advertisement websites. In agreement with the English Collective of Prostitutes, the organisation would act as gatekeepers for the negotiation of access in recruiting the sex workers. In these circumstances, the inclusion criteria are detailed, and will allow the gatekeeper to circulate the invitation to participate to those who fit within the criteria. If others express interest, and feel they should be part of the research (with the exception of those under 18), then the researcher will do his best to accommodate them.

13. What provision have you made to undertake data entry and/or analysis, if applicable? Who will be analysing your data?

The researcher, Kristofor Burghart will have access to the data, however occasionally the supervisory team may also have access to anonymous data when required to guide and help with the analysis. Any data given will be made anonymous through coding (not applicable if aggregate or summary data) and saved in encrypted files.

Interviews

As highlighted above, all names and details will be made anonymous through coding and saved in encrypted files. The analysis will be solely completed by the researcher.

14. Which method/s of analysis will you be using?

Interviews

The research is predominantly qualitative in nature and does not require statistical review. All interviews will be recorded, and transcribed by the researcher, and analysed thematically in relation to key hypotheses, using the NVivo Data Analysis Software (NVivo 10) programme.

Thematic analysis will be used, being a process which presents a coherent way of organising interview data in relation to the overall research questions. The themes will be grouped together to enable the analysis of both the elements of the research questions, and the preoccupations presented by the interviewees (Banister et al, 1994; Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Open coding will be used to establish the themes, then axial coding to provide links, and finally selective coding to highlight the key themes which will be used for the final analysis. This interpretive and flexible coding practice will reflect the key patterns in the participant's responses from all four samples, informing full discussion of the extent to which different escort submarkets differ (Robson, 1993).

15. How will you protect the privacy of participants?

This section will be presented in line with the eight principles that need to be adhered to, as directed within the Data Protection Act (1998).

- **Data must be processed fairly and lawfully**

All data will be processed using the same thematic analysis (interviews). All data will be processed lawfully and will remain confidential. As the topic includes the discussion of offending (although minimally within Section One of the Interview Schedule), the participants will be informed before one week before the interview date in disclosing information about the following:

That they should not disclose to the researcher of any present or planned offending, as the researcher will have to report it to the police. The researcher is aware that he is under no legal obligation to inform authorities about past offending, providing it has not involved terrorism, child abuse, sexual or violent

offences or driving offences. If a participant does disclose any of the above information the researcher will terminate the interview, and inform them of the researcher's duty to contact the police.

- **Data must be collected and processed for only one or more specified purposes. In other words, we must not collect data for one reason and then use it for something else**

The data collected will only be used as set out within this application and supporting documents. It is not anticipated that alterations will be made within the research analysis.

- **Data we hold must be adequate for its purpose or purposes but not excessive or irrelevant**

The Interview Schedule has been produced to ensure that only information necessary for the research is collected. Although full transcriptions will be made for all interviews, once coded irrelevant information will not be kept.

- **Data must be accurate and, where necessary, kept up-to-date**

Full transcriptions will be made by the researcher to ensure all information is correct and double checked. All data collected is in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

- **We must not keep data for longer than necessary**

Kristofor Burghart will be the sole custodian of the data generated by the study, during tenure as a PhD student (estimated September 2014) and thereafter my supervisors for a period of 2 years, in line with recommendations.

- **We must process data in accordance with the rights of the data subject under the Act**

Processing data will be in accordance with the privacy of the participant and the governing principles, as highlighted within the Data Protection Act (1998).

- **Data must be kept securely and we must guard against its accidental loss**

All data will be stored on an encrypted file, on a password protected encrypted drive, and will remain at the site of the university. A separate password encrypted file will link a participant's unique ID number to a pseudonym. Therefore at no stage will the participant's details be recognisable.

Hard copies will be stored in a secure filing cabinet, until the data have been coded into a password protected file. Once this has been coded successfully, the hard copies will be destroyed. Voice recordings, gained through a digital recorder, will also be stored in a secure filing cabinet until the data is transferred to the encrypted file, on a password protected encrypted drive and coded. Again, once this has been completed the voice recordings will be deleted from the device.

- **We must not transfer personal data outside the European Economic Area unless the Country receiving it has an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of data subjects**

No data will be transferred away from the researcher.

16. How will you ensure you adhere to the Data Protection Act (1998)? See the Royal Holloway, University of London, Research Ethics Guidelines for further information

After confirmation has been made of participant status, each participant will be given a unique ID number. This will be used in all documentation relating to that individual, including hard copies, recordings and computer saved files. All of which will be stored on an encrypted file, on a password protected encrypted drive, and will remain at the site of the university. A separate password encrypted file will link participant's unique ID number to a pseudonym. Therefore at no stage will the participant's details be recognisable.

Hard copies will be stored in a secure filing cabinet until the data has been coded into a password protected file. Once this has been coded successfully, the hard copies will be destroyed.

Recordings, gained through a digital recorder, will also be stored in a secure filing cabinet until the data is transferred to the encrypted file, on a password protected encrypted drive and coded. Again once this has been completed, the voice recordings will be deleted from the device. Therefore at no point will the participants be distinguishable through either their written or oral accounts.

SECTION 17 : ETHICS

THE RESPECT, DIGNITY, RIGHTS, SAFETY AND WELL BEING OF PARTICIPANTS MUST ALWAYS BE OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE.

Please detail how any ethical issues which are pertinent to your project will be addressed

a. Are there any communication difficulties due to language, literacy, sensory or speech impairments and how are these being addressed?

Details:

All participants that take part will be capable of speaking English. If potential participants are not able to comprehend any written information, after it has been verbalised to them, they will not be able to be considered for the research, as there is no funding available for translation. If a potential participant is unable to read or write, but can speak and understand English they will be able to take part in the study. This is due to the research being able to be based on verbal communication. In addition, the consent forms can be signed after the information has been verbalised to them.

b. Are you planning to exclude certain types/groups of participants who are relevant to the research?

Details:

No, the inclusion criteria will be used to form the samples.

c. Will you be covering costs or offering payments to your participants?

Details:

Participants will be given £20 as a small gesture for their time, as well as covering any expensive in attending the interview.

d. Is there any potential risk or harm to your participants or researchers?

i) Participants

The researcher's interaction with the participants should not cause them any discomfort. However due to the sensitive nature of the topic (requesting information about the self-regulation against risk, and the perception of risk) the Interview Schedule (Appendix D): has been carefully developed to ensure that information is only gained at the discretion of the participant, therefore the participants will only share information they feel comfortable

with. Participants will then be asked their convenience and availability and interviews will be scheduled around this information. The interview environment will be talked through with the participants, allowing them to feel comfortable with the decision. These however must adhere to ethical guidelines to ensure safety for both parties and confidentiality for the participant (See section 17.d.ii) Therefore there should not be any inconvenience caused. In addition, through the Information Sheet and Consent Form, the participants will be aware of their confidentiality and right to withdraw at any stage of the research. Finally the information sheet will inform the participant of the researcher's role in guiding them to a relevant contact if they become distressed in any way by the research. When the interview is scheduled, the researcher will take their time to run through the information sheet and consent forms again face to face to ensure that the participant is happy and can ask any questions. It is hoped that the research information given out before this contact will allow this process to be a time to revisit the purpose of the research rather than be introductory, thus a process of double checking understanding and consent. They will then be asked to sign an Information Sheet and Consent Form at the time of the interview. Once this has been signed then the interview will begin.

ii) Researcher

The researcher is aware of his vulnerabilities whilst working alone, away from the University. Interviews will be carried out in a public fieldwork site convenient for both the researcher and participant, such as a cafe, gallery, public park, library (or other suitable location requested by the participant) within the London area. The public fieldwork site will be agreed by the participant and researcher a minimum of 24 hours prior to the interview, to allow the researcher the opportunity to assess the risks of the proposed environment and to identify and control any potential hazards as far as reasonably practicable. In addition, potential fieldwork sites will be assessed for access and ease for appropriate communication and emergency procedures that will be established and maintained before and throughout the interview. It is essential that, if something goes wrong, assistance can be summoned and emergency services notified. Mobile phones are one convenient form of communication, but they are not suitable for all circumstances or areas (For example, mobile phone network coverage).

The researcher will take precautions as expected within the lone working policy and make sure that a fieldwork log is carried out for all visits (See Appendix E). The field work phone in/monitoring sheet will ensure that the time, date and location of the interview is relayed before hand to the faculty administrator, supervisor as well as a friend or colleague, whom will additionally be informed of when the interview finishes and both parties have departed. The researcher will ensure that the faculty administrator will be contactable at any given time throughout the interview in order to seek advice and support, and most importantly, for help if an emergency should arise. All contact with the faculty administrator will be relayed to the researcher's supervisor when applicable. Before any given interview, a full and thorough risk assessment will be performed, which has been approved by the department's supervisor of ethics. It is also necessary for contacts not involved to be able to alert others or to take action if there is evidence to suggest that something has gone wrong. The person or persons nominated by the researcher must be competent and have the ability to complete the fieldwork phone in/monitoring sheet (Appendix E). It is also necessary for contacts not involved to be able to alert others or to take action if there is evidence to suggest that something has gone wrong. The person or persons nominated by the researcher must be competent and have the ability to complete the fieldwork phone in/monitoring sheet (Appendix E).

In addition the researcher has consulted the ethical guidelines highlighted within Royal Holloway, University of London and British Sociological Association, and has complied the following precautions in conjunction with these documents:

- In relation to overall risk or harm, the researcher will ensure that he is safe at all times by:
- Keeping a mobile phone with them at all times
- Carrying out the research in a public place
- Being aware of the area in which the research is taking place and access routes to it
- Carrying an attack alarm
- Using an inexpensive mobile phone that is pre-programmed with relevant emergency numbers. The phone, along with the researchers university email address will be the only available means of contact from participants.

- Avoiding carrying or wearing any valuable items.

Finally, in the unlikely event that the researcher becomes distressed or traumatised during the fieldwork, he has gathered contact information for trained counsellors at Royal Holloway, University of London.

e. How will you provide additional information, advice or support, where appropriate?

Details:

The researcher will be available via email and a research telephone number. He will make sure the participants are aware of contact availability, Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, with out of hours concerns being dealt with only within these working hours.

If the researcher is not able to give advice or support on certain matters, alternative contacts will be given. These will include details of those within English Collective of Prostitutes, as well as details of independent community centres and counselling services.

The researcher is aware he is not to offer counselling or advice as he is not trained, but will offer support in directing the participants to the relevant contact details.

f. Are there any other ethical issues which need consideration?

Details: N/A

18. Would you like to give any additional information about your proposed consultation/research?

There are no inevitable benefits for research participants. However, providing a forum that encourages the participants to express their views and experiences in what is a relatively under researched area could be empowering for those involved. In addition, for those who do express an interest in this area, a full written report and/or summary of the findings will be sent to them through their preferred means. In addition, the research is planned to be presented within peer reviewed journals, conference presentations and presentations to the English Collective of Prostitutes.

19. Additional information about the research

Please see attached for the following information:

Appendix A – Ethics form

Appendix B – Autobiography

Appendix C – Information sheet

Appendix D – Interview schedule

Appendix E - Consent Form

Appendix F - Audio recording consent form

Appendix G – Fieldwork phone in/ Monitoring sheet

Appendix H – Interviewee demographics

Section 20: STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Applicant: Kristofor Oscar Burghart

Department: Criminology and Sociology

Title of project: An examination of the distinctive online escort markets'

Start Date: 01/09/2012

Please complete the appropriate section below:

1. This project has been considered and has been approved by the Department of Criminology and Sociology for 18 months.

Signed: Print Name:.....

Date:

(Chair, Departmental Ethics Committee)

2. This project has been considered by the Royal Holloway, University of London Research Ethics Committee and is now approved for months.

Signed: Print Name:

Date:

(Chair, RHUL Ethics Committee)

3. This project has been approved by Chair's action and is authorised for months.

Signed: Print Name:

Date:

(Chair, RHUL Ethics Committee)



APPENDIX B

Autobiography

My name is Kristofor Burghart and I am currently a PhD student at the Royal Holloway University of London, embarking on a research thesis entitled 'An examination of online distinctive sex markets'. I am particularly interested in researching prostitution, specifically online escorting, as very little is known about online prostitution services.

I am always been interested in the discourses surrounding prostitution, and how scholarly and media concerns often generalises prostitution and prostitution markets. At the age of 18, I decided to study Criminology at Southampton Solent University. This inspired me to carry out my dissertation in the control and regulation of street prostitution. My conclusions highlighted the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to aiding those to exit street prostitution.

Following this, I was offered a place to study for an MSc in Criminology and Criminal Psychology at Portsmouth University. This allowed me to move my research towards online prostitution markets. This research thesis acknowledged a clear distinction between 'indoor' and 'outdoor' sex work, by accounting the experiences and perceptions of women and clients. The research examined the content and design of online female escort advertisements focusing on the professional business ethics, routines and regulation evidence in the ways in which female providers advertised. The findings of the research highlighted some of the regulatory practices used by escorts, and how they have connected to a set of related transformations that have occurred within broader spheres of economy, culture and sexuality, and how such a connection has revolutionised standards in the selling of sexual acts.

This work has led me to my current study which seeks to investigate how previous criminological and sociological analyses of prostitution, in England and Wales, has continuously overlooked the male heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escort market, a subsection of the sex industry that is experiencing significant growth. The rise of online escort solicitation services, and advertisement websites, has further augmented prostitution markets, on and off-line, which is now increasingly based on class-structured gender lines, which cater for different client's sexualities and specific sexual desires. This research will also provide an insight into risk, and experiences of the risks involved in online escorting specific to the gender and sexuality of the escort, thus reflecting the broader trends at work, when selling sex. Therefore, through the exploration of online escort markets, the research will provide important information in respect of a relatively under-researched area. Importantly it will highlight if there are recurring and predominant themes within all prostitution markets, or contrasting themes in relation to the gender and sexuality of the service provider and client.



APPENDIX C

Information Sheet

Research Title: ‘An examination of the distinctive online escort markets’

What is the research for?

The above research thesis is for fulfilment of a PhD in Sociology, at The Royal Holloway University of London.

What is the aim of the research?

Qualitative semi-structured interviews will be conducted on male and female heterosexual, gay and lesbian online escorts, in order to collect detailed information about the characteristics and working practices, to allow for an explanation of the key risks involved in the participation of online sex work. A secondary role of the interviews will be to examine whether perceptions of the risks involved in online escorting differ, in relation to the sexual orientation of the encounter.

Why is the research worth doing?

To explore the way in which each of the distinctive online escort markets differ in self-regulation in the management of potential risk by methods of self-policing. The research will highlight the reasons for involvement within the escort market, instead of purely highlighting the predominance of it. It is vital that your voices are heard to enable insights of your experiences; if certain types of online escort markets hold the possibility of heightening risks dependent of the sexuality orientation of the sexual encounter, then these need to be addressed to inform developments within social care policy responses. Sex workers should be rendered with a far more positive and supportive social policy recognition and protection. It is hoped that the outcome of the research will inform the UK and alternative interested parties, of a realistic picture of sex markets and the required expectations surrounding this.



What does the Interview involve?

The interview consists of two sections:

- The first is formed in a brief questionnaire style; you can fill it in or ask the researcher to do it. It consists of basic **information about yourself**, type(s) of prostitution markets you have experienced and details of basic demographics.
- The second part will consist of asking **open questions**, on **aspects of life in prostitution**. You will be asked a series of questions in regards to aspects of the self-regulatory nature, and your perception of the risks involved within online escorting. It will allow an explanation of the key risks involved in the participation of sex work, and your perception of the involved risks in escorting, dependent on the sexual orientation of the encounter, whilst asking further questions on them and surrounding issues. With your permission I would like to record this part of the interview.

Where the study is taking place

On an agreed location which is deemed suitable to be safe by the researcher, and most importantly the interviewee (e.g. public spaces such as a café or restaurant). Such a location will be discussed and agreed by both parties; the researcher and interviewee, beforehand via telephone or email. The time, date and location of the interview will be relayed beforehand to the supervisor, whom will additionally be informed of when the interview finishes and both parties have departed. The researcher will ensure that the supervisor will be contactable at any given time throughout the interview in order to seek advice and support, and most importantly, for help if an emergency should arise. Before any given interview, a full and thorough risk assessment will be performed, which has been approved by the department's supervisor of ethics.

Participation is entirely voluntary

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You have the right to withdraw at any time or request that any information you give during interview or risk assessment is not used in the final report. Further, a decision not to participate will have absolutely no negative effect on you. Your interests and wishes are paramount within the research.



APPENDIX: D

Interview Schedule

NB: Semi structured interview, thus the broader areas are highlighted and the extent to which they are spoken about and/or developed remains at the discretion of the interviewee.

Social demographics - age, gender, perceived class, location, race/ethnicity, education, employment, income, and sexual orientation.

Work conditions – open for the participants lead.

Sexual behaviour – Frequency of work related sexual practices and the safety procedures taken (relating to both engaging and receiving of acts). The sexual practices are: foreplay (anything other than mouth to genitalia contact with necessary precautions) oral sex (fellatio, cunnilingus or anilingus - with or without protection), vaginal or anal penetrative sex (with or without protection), role play, group sex and dominatrix.

Section 1 – Participants Demographics

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
4. What is your Nationality?
5. What is your actual age? And what age to provide to clients?
6. Term used to describe job role?
7. Where do you live at the moment (flat/house/hostel/etc)?
8. Post code area

9. Do you have if any educational achievements, if so to what level?
10. What is your employment status?
11. What is the length of time that you been working as an escort?

Section 2 – Client contact

12. On average what is the amount of time spent each week devoted to sex-work related activities, such as communicating with client, soliciting clients on the internet and the time spent travelling to and from appointment?
13. How much do you typically charge your clients? In an average week, how much money do you make from sex work?
14. Could you provide a brief summary of what your clients generally ask for out of the encounter? What do you provide?
15. Are all your clients male/female or both? How would you describe the sexuality of your typical clients?
16. How do you think the internet acts as a role in soliciting clients and communicating with clients?

Section 3 - Previous employment and motivations of involvement within sex work

17. Why did you become involved (money/excitement/other)?

Section4 – Risks and escorting

18. What do you believe to be the main risks that your client(s) may present?
19. If dangerous, describe the strategies used for staying physically and emotionally healthily while maximising profit?
20. Describe how you manage sexual risk and sexual safety with your clients?
21. Do you have any limits and boundaries for sex work (i.e. barebacking unsafe sex, sexual practises?)

Section 5 - Summary of interview

22. Is there anything you would like to add or ask the researcher about?



APPENDIX: E

Consent Form (Confidential)

Research Title: 'A holistic approach to gendered based escort/outcall sex markets'

Conducted by Kristofor Burghart of a PhD fulfilment

Please insert [x] next to yes or no, all questions must be answered.

1. Have you read the information sheet highlighting the aims of the research and your requirements as a participant? Yes No
2. Have you had the opportunity to ask any questions about what the research will involve? And received satisfactory answers to any questions? Yes No
3. Have you received enough information about this study? Yes No
4. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study:
 At any time? Yes No
 Without having to give a reason for withdrawing? Yes No
5. If needed, are you aware that Waves Community Centre will offer assistance in any emotional, mental or practical problems brought to light through this research? Yes No
6. Do you agree to take part in this study? Yes No

Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Researcher Signature (Kristofor Burghart. The Royal Holloway University of London):

Date:

NB: This Consent form will be stored separately from the responses you provide. Please note: There should be no data collected on the consent form as this will be stored separately from data.



Appendix: F

Audio Recording Consent Form

Consent:

I AGREE to allow all of my participation in the in-depth interview to be recording using an audio recording device. I understand that this device is being used to accurately record what I say during my participation in this study and will later be transcribed and possibly used in the final research report. I also understand any given information that is recorded is subject to be used.

Name Participant:

Participant Signature:

Date:



Appendix: G

Fieldwork Phone-in / Monitoring Sheet

Fieldworker: _____ Date: _____

Location visited: _____

Persons met: _____

Purpose of meeting: _____

1. Time left home / work: → **Ask for ETA in field and enter in 2**

2. **ETA (estimated time of arrival) in field**
 delayed delayed
 Tick when arrived in field
 If no contact from fieldworker within 30 MINS of last ETA in field: **RING BACK - If no answer, Phone Police Contact**

3. **EDT (estimated departure time) from field**
 delayed delayed
 Tick when departing from field
 If no contact from fieldworker within 30 MINS of last EDT from field: **RING BACK - If no answer, Phone Police Contact**

4. **EHT (estimated home arrival time)**
 delayed delayed
 Tick when arrived home
File this Phone-in log
 If no contact from fieldworker within 30 MINS of last EHT: **RING BACK - If no answer, Phone Police Contact**

KEY PHONE NUMBERS (Fieldworkers and Project Leaders)
Kristofor Burghart - FIELD MOBILE: XXXXXXXX / Pers. Mobile: XXXXXXXX / Home contact: 'Name' XXXXXXXX

David Denney - Mobile: XXXXXXXX / Office XXXXXXXX / Home: XXXXXXXX
 Dr Gabe - Mobile: XXXXXXXX / Home: XXXXXXXX

POLICE CONTACT: XXXXXXXX



Appendix: H

Interviews demographics

Gender and sexual orientation of services	Age	Nationality	Sexuality	Length of time working as an escort – Approx.	Education level
Female to male: 1	40's	British	Heterosexual	2.5 years	A-Level
Female to male: 2	35	British – African	Heterosexual	2 years	High-school
Female to male: 3	29	New Zealand	Heterosexual	1.5 years	University undergraduate degree
Female to male: 4	26	British	Heterosexual	2 years	University undergraduate degree
Female to male: 5	Mid 40s	British	Heterosexual	4 years	High-school
Female to male: 6	32	British	Heterosexual	6 to 7 years	College
Female to male: 7	28	British	Heterosexual	5 years	College
Female to male: 8	34	British	Bisexual	4 years	University undergraduate degree
Female to male: 9	35	British	Heterosexual	3 years	College
Male to male: 1	29	British	Bisexual	2 years	College
Male to male: 2	25	British	Gay	1.5 years	University undergraduate degree
Male to male: 3	36	British/Italian	Gay	3.5 years	University undergraduate degree

Male to male: 4	43	British	Gay	5 years	College
Male to male: 5	32	British	Gay	2.5 years	College
Male to male: 6	26	British	Bisexual	1 year	College
Male to male: 7	23	British	Gay	1.5 years	University undergraduate degree
Male to male: 8	29	British	Gay	3 years	University undergraduate degree
Male to male: 9	31	British	Gay	4 years	College
Male to female: 1	40	British	Heterosexual	3 years	College
Male to female: 2	38	British	Heterosexual	1 year	Postgraduate degree
Male to female: 3	42	British	Heterosexual	2.5 years	Mature student
Male to female: 4	34	British	Heterosexual	3 years	University undergraduate degree
Male to female: 5	39	British	Heterosexual	4 years	Postgraduate degree
Male to female: 6	40	British	Heterosexual	5 years	Postgraduate degree
Male to female: 7	37	British	Heterosexual	3 years	University undergraduate degree
Female to female: 1	35	British	Bisexual	2.5 years	University undergraduate degree
Female to female: 2	32	British	Heterosexual	3 years	College