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Introduction

Aims and Objectives

The position of men within sex work as clients of female sex workers is a relatively under-researched phenomenon within the sex work/prostitution literature. Despite the considerable attention given to sex work/prostitution in recent decades, the ‘male client voice’ remains under-represented at an empirical level compared to the wealth of empirical analyses available on the experiences and discourses of (female) sex workers. Men as clients are obscured within the literature as agents and subjects by theoretical analyses around the nature of gender, power and heterosexuality which focus on ‘masculinity’ and ‘patriarchy’. While these theoretical debates are crucially informative of the ways in which gender and power operate within sex work and the interaction between sex work and the wider social and cultural gender context, it neglects the subjectivities and inconsistencies of men (as individuals and members of a social group) who purchase sex.

Several reasons explain this reluctance to engage with (heterosexual) men who buy sex as the subjects of academic research: firstly, the feminist influences and origins of contemporary sex work/prostitution research has focused the field on marginalised voices and practices leading to an under-representation of those considered ‘powerful’ or ‘privileged’ within the literature; secondly, the male client who purchases sex from a female sex worker exhibits several indicators of privilege – his biological sex (male), his sexual orientation (heterosexual) and his economic power (buyer of sex) – that sit uneasily with the feminist ethos of marginalised and disempowered voices, identities and practices and instead mirrors the dominant socio-

cultural discourses of knowledge and power; and thirdly, conducting research on the purchasers of sex presents certain methodological difficulties (common to the research area as a whole) related to recruitment of research participants, the unknown size and characteristics of the general population of 'male clients' as well as difficulty in eliciting and verifying information from male clients as regards their commercial sex activities. Therefore, serious barriers related to theoretical, epistemological and methodological positions within the sex work/prostitution field have resulted in the current disengagement with male clients' experiences, identities and discourses.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore how male clients of female sex workers understand and represent their involvement with commercial sex. This will focus on three aspects of the commercial sex purchase: how male clients understand and represent their identity as the 'buyers of sex', how male clients understand and represent their relationship with female sex workers (including the interaction between commercial and non-commercial sexual relations) and how male clients understand and represent the commercial sex industry as a whole. Through focusing on these different aspects, the ways in which male clients position themselves within the commercial sex industry and the manner in which male clients engage with dominant and/or alternative discourses on sex work will be explored. This offers the possibility to engage with the subjectivities and complexities of men who buy sex thereby offering insight into the 'other half' of the commercial sex transaction. Through focusing on the meanings and interpretations which men who buy sex use in their own discourses around paying for sex, a more complex understanding can be produced of the inconsistencies, contradictions and tensions involved in producing and maintaining the 'male client' identity and the 'sexual purchase'. Additionally, the ways in which men construct the commercial sex industry – as active participants in

the commercial sex transaction – provide a lens through which to explore the extent to which (if at all) they engage with and interpret wider social, cultural, political and economic discourses around sex work. Understanding how men who buy sex construct their own identity, activities and the broader arena of the commercial sex industry allows for a deeper insight into what it means to be a ‘buyer of sex’ and how sexuality, power and pleasure are structured by the consumers of commercial sex. The objective of this dissertation is not to reinforce the power and privilege of an already privileged social group (heterosexual men) but rather to provide a socio-cultural analysis of the ways in which commercial sex is interpreted and constructed by the men who buy sex.

Research Methodology and Analysis

The research question is addressed through use of secondary analysis, made possible by the relatively recent developments in qualitative archiving and databanks. Secondary analysis is a form of qualitative data re-use which focuses on the re-analysis of a dataset for the purpose of addressing a distinct topic, question or theme from the original study (Heaton 1998, Notz 2005). Other possible forms of qualitative data re-use include description, comparison of data across time, geographic space or social context, verification of results and advancements in research design and methodology (Corti and Thompson 2004). Using the typology of secondary analyses developed by Heaton (1998) and applied by Dargentas and La Roux (2005) the secondary analysis undertaken in this study is a combination of two secondary analysis types: additional sub-set analysis and a new perspective/conceptual focus analysis. This involves applying a new perspective in order to explore a non-central

feature of the original dataset (representation and identity of male sex buyers) on a selected sub-set with a particular characteristic (men from UK).

The material used for secondary analysis is from a study conducted by principal investigators Bridget Anderson and Julia O’Connell Davidson entitled ‘Market for Migrant Domestic and Sex Workers, 2002-2006’¹. This study was accessed through Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) Qualidata which is the specialist qualitative service of the UK Data Archive providing access to qualitative and mixed methods datasets for re-use and re-analysis. ESDS Qualidata acquires the majority of its datasets through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Data Policy which ensures that “high quality and well-documented qualitative data that have longer-term value are produced” through collaboration between data creators and ESDS Qualidata (Corti, Witzer and Bishop 2005). Therefore the datasets available through ESDS Qualidata are all particularly well-suited to secondary analysis due to the high quality of research data, the types of research deposited (which displays a high level of regard towards issues of methods, consent and ethics) and the sociological value of such datasets for future use.

Due to the complexity of secondary analysis and its relative infancy as regards accepted methods, guidelines and procedures, the reporting of details related to the original study and the process of secondary analysis are key to ensuring the validity and value of the outcome of the secondary analysis (Thorne 1994, Heaton 1998). Janet Heaton (1998) recommends that the process of reporting “include an outline of the original study and data collection procedures, together with a description of the processes involved in categorising and summarising the data for the secondary analysis, as well as an account of how methodological and ethical considerations were

¹ ESDS study number 6109, ESRC grant number R000239794.

addressed”. Therefore, in order to comply with this standard of reporting and to ensure complete transparency in the procedures undertaken for secondary analysis, these issues will be addressed in the following sections including a brief overview of the design, methods and analysis of the original study.

The Original Research Study

The original study ‘Market for Migrant Domestic and Sex Workers 2002-2006’ (MMDSW) was built upon a multi-country pilot study commissioned by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs to investigate the demand for migrant domestic workers and sex workers in Sweden, Italy, Thailand and India and the relationship between demand and trafficking. The data for ‘Market for Migrant Domestic and Sex Workers 2002-2006’ was collected in the United Kingdom and Spain and was designed to complement and supplement the data generated through the pilot study. The purpose of the MMDSW study was to contextualise the demand for migrant labour through providing a more nuanced investigation of the linkages between demand, labour and trafficking; to explore contemporary assumptions around the association of trafficking with prostitution (rather than other similar sectors such as domestic labour); and to explore how demand functioned in relation to issues around forced/free labour, children/childhood, gender, race, age, nationality, legal and illegal markets across different sectors, the (dis)continuities between sex work and domestic work and the role of the socio-cultural imagination in constructing demand for migrant workers.

The MMDSW study was designed to parallel the methods and design of the pilot study and therefore included semi-structured, in-depth interviews with sex worker’s clients, men who had never purchased sex (client control interviews), sex

sector third party beneficiaries, domestic worker's employers, domestic work third party beneficiaries and separate surveys on domestic work and commercial sex conducted in the UK (London) and Spain (Barcelona). In addition, the MMDSW study included three elements not present in the pilot study: (1) interviews with representatives from various organisations involved with migrant labour and/or domestic work or commercial sex in the UK and Spain and (2) ethnographic and survey data from Tenerife on tourism and migrant labour, with a particular focus on sex tourism and (3) a telephone survey of commercial sex premises in London.

Access to the complete dataset was not available through ESDS Qualidata, reflecting the particular level of consent obtained from various participants, therefore the available data was carefully assessed as to its quality and compatibility with secondary analysis. Of the eleven available qualitative interviews (of a total of fourteen; three were unavailable for access) conducted with male British clients of sex workers, all eleven were found to be of a suitable quality and depth for secondary analysis. The requirements for selection were based on guidelines developed by Heaton (1998) and Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen (1997) that assess the 'fit' of data to secondary analysis through (1) the extent of missing data which may be irrelevant to the original study but pertinent to secondary analysis, (2) the level of congruence between the original research question and the research question of the secondary analysis (similarity is desirable) and (3) the quality of the dataset including completeness, accuracy and a clear relationship between the interview questions and responses. Missing data relates to the level of conformity across a dataset or individual data sources of the particular theme, concept or phenomenon under study in the secondary analysis (Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen 1997, Heaton 1998).

Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen (1997: 412) suggest that "qualitative methods that

involve asking the same open-ended or semistructured interview questions of all study participants could minimize missing data and allow concerns about the meaning of missing data to be more accurately addressed". Following this strategy and paying particular attention to the issue of "discretionary use of probes" in semi-structured interviews (Heaton 1998) which could produce uneven or missing data across the dataset, the qualitative method for interviewing used in the original study was found amenable to secondary analysis as it employed a semi-structured interview schedule which produced in-depth responses rich in explanatory material. The sensitive and taboo topics (sexuality, commercial sex, race and gender etc.) explored by the original research team also strengthen the validity of applying secondary analysis due to the difficulties in interpreting such narratives (van den Berg 2008).

The level of congruence between the original research question (demand for migrant sex workers) and the secondary analysis research question (British male clients' understanding and representation of commercial sex) was considered sufficiently high and therefore likely to produce meaningful analysis. The two research questions address the same phenomenon of commercial sex and specifically focus on the role of the buyer within commercial sex transactions, thus ensuring that there is a sufficient level of relevant data related to the secondary analysis research question. The final assessment of 'fit' relating to the overall quality of the dataset was conducted through an examination of all available interview transcripts of male British clients of sex workers. The interview transcripts were considered of a suitable quality since each was a full and complete transcript of a face-to-face audio-recorded interview with minimal disruptions and/or inaudible sections; the transcripts did not contain any noticeable or significant typos or mistakes; and there is clear continuity and interpretability between the interview questions and responses. In addition, the

credibility of the research team involved in the original study adds to the durability and rigour of the study and to the reliability and validity of the qualitative methods employed including the high level of qualitative research skills employed to develop and produce the research materials.

Advantages and Limitations of Secondary Analysis

The re-use of quantitative datasets has a long established tradition with the social sciences yet no comparable tradition or methodological literature exists for the re-use of qualitative data (Corti, Witzer and Bishop 2005, van den Berg 2008). Despite this, several researchers have addressed the potential applications of secondary analysis including the advantages and limitations (Hammersley 1997, Szabo and Strang 1997, Long-Sutehall et al 2011). Secondary analysis provides substantial benefits by reducing the cost and time of generating new research data (Corti, Witzer and Bishop 2005, Szabo and Strang 1997), avoiding the duplication of research studies (Corti, Witzer and Bishop, 2005), minimising the burden on the pool of potential research participants (Thorne 1994) and providing access to data on elusive populations or sensitive research topics (Corti, Witzer and Bishop 2005, Long-Sutehall et al 2011). Two significant issues for secondary analysis concern the nature of consent and the issue of reflexivity and de-contextualisation which will be discussed in further detail.

The issue of informed consent is a prominent feature in the ethical concerns around secondary analysis. The extent to which prior consent obtained through the original study can adequately cover the goals and objectives of the secondary analysis is particularly relevant in cases where sensitive or controversial subjects are involved (Thorne 1994). A copy of the plain language statement for participants in the sex

worker's client interviews, included in the MMDSW dataset, was examined in order to ascertain the level of awareness and scope of the participant's consent. Participants were informed that they would be taking part in an "international study on sexuality and commercial sex that is being conducted by sociologists at Oxford and Nottingham University" and that the purpose of the study was to "find out what men feel about sexual relationships, marriage, and prostitution" (User Guide, ESDS Qualidata). The use of this dataset for secondary analysis was not deemed unethical as the new research question does not "in any way shift the focus of the initial intention of research" (Long-Suthehall et al, 2011: 339).

A major methodological challenge to secondary analysis – and the focus of most critiques of the approach – is the argument that qualitative data is de-contextualised by secondary analysis and thus exposed to invalid evaluations. The root of this argument is that qualitative data cannot be treated in the same manner as quantitative data as qualitative data is co-constructed by the researcher and the researched and therefore loses meaning, inference and interpretability outside of its context (Parry and Mauthner 2005). Moore (2007) accepts this premise of 'co-construction' but argues that the distinction between secondary and primary analysis obscures the processes of contextualisation involved in secondary analysis: "A new research project provides a new context for the creation and emergence of 'data', particularly through the contemporary production of the relationship between researcher and data. Thus secondary analysis is not so much the analysis of pre-existing data; rather secondary analysis involves the process of recontextualising, and reconstructing, data" (see also Silva, 2007). Long-Suthehall et al (2011) argue that it is common practice for research teams to have multiple interviewers and therefore researchers are routinely analysing interviews which they themselves did not conduct,

and therefore co-construct. The original study for secondary analysis used several interviewers, not all of whom were present at every interview.

Issues of de-contextualisation, while pertinent, have to be addressed within the specific limitations of data access, knowledge of the context in which the interview takes place and the ability for re-contextualisation in secondary analysis. The selection of British men from the dataset was intended as a means of ensuring the discrepancy between socio-cultural context of the current researcher and the data was minimized as far as possible. However, for the current secondary analysis, the unavailability of the original audio-tapes presents certain limitations on the interpretation of responses. Therefore the results of this analysis may be liable to loss of nuance and subtlety, misinference or misinterpretation while also limiting the methodological possibilities for analysis due to the format of the transcriptions. Overall, the potential benefits of employing an “investigative epistemology” (Mason 2007) through secondary analysis outweigh the (potential) limitations on the research results. This perspective questions the “unique epistemological privilege... accorded to the (original) researchers’ reflexive practices” and encourages curiosity and creativity in data use; a practice which opens up qualitative data to valuable and insightful re-analysis from a distance (Mason 2007).

Discourse Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Discourse analysis was chosen as the method for interpreting the interview transcripts as it is highly relevant to textual analysis and provides scope to explore inconsistencies and tensions within the text (van den Bergen 2008). Given the nature of the research question (focusing on identity/identities and the construction of

specific experiences and activities) and the theoretical outlook of the current researcher (social constructionist; no singular 'truth' exists) discourse analysis provides the most lucrative and productive method for addressing the aims of this research study. Discourse analysis is "concerned with language-in-use; that is, how individuals accomplish personal, social, and political projects through language" and conceptualises language as that which "both mediates and constructs our understanding of reality... [and which] defines the social roles that are available to individuals" (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007: 1374). Therefore discourse analysis provides the required analytical tools and framework to examine the meanings, inconsistencies and tensions which are produced in discourse and how the discourses which are drawn upon to produce social identities and positionings. The interview transcripts were analysed through careful readings and re-readings in which themes and contradictions were identified. The contradictions are understood as 'ideological dilemmas' (Potter and Wetherell 1987, Weatherall and Priestley 2001) in which participants draw on contradictory discourses and ideas to convey meaning. Specifically these ideological dilemmas were used to examine the ways in which clients engaged with contemporary discourses around sex work and/or prostitution including issues of power, control and work. Important for this analysis were also the topics and issues which are rendered silent through particular constructions of 'buying sex' and prostitution. Themes of particular relevance to this analysis surrounded emotion, authenticity and pleasure due to the prevalence of such topics in recent research with sex workers and the identification of such themes within the interview transcripts.

Intimacy and Authenticity in Commercial Sex

The subjective framing of sex workers' emotions while selling sex is a significant development in the literature on commercial sex. Several researchers, drawing upon the work of Hochschild (1983), have argued that sex workers perform emotional labour with clients, in which he/she regulates his/her feelings, and/or those of the client, to perform the role of 'prostitute' (Sanders 2004, Brown 2007, Hoang 2010; 2011). This perspective is founded on the idea that commercial sex is 'work', in the sense that the emotional labours performed by sex workers are comparable with the emotional labours of other workers in service industry occupations. Emotional labour involves managing the social interaction between client and worker in such a way as to minimise damage or harm resulting from the interplay of genuine emotion (on the part of either sex worker or customer) and emotional, social and cultural expectations (Hoang 2010; 2011, Kontula 2008). The role that clients play within the 'emotional labour' of sex work is less well developed within the literature. As customers of the service (commercial sex), it is commonly assumed that the emotions and feelings, desires and wishes of the client are genuine and are genuinely exercised within the context of the service. Secondly, the ways in which clients interact with and perceive emotion and feeling within the sexual transaction are rarely discussed, especially as regards awareness and recognition of emotional labour on the part of the sex worker. A notable exception to this is the recent work on authenticity and intimacy in commercial sex by Bernstein (2001; 2007a; 2007b), Frank (1998; 2002) and Huff (2011). Bernstein's (2001; 2007a; 2007b) concept of 'bounded authenticity' provides an important analytical framework for exploring how intimacy and emotion are experienced within commercial sex. This concept will be utilised further in the

analysis of male clients' discourses as regards issues of authentic/inauthentic emotions in commercial sex and boundaries between commercial and non-commercial sex.

The clients routinely positioned their entry into and/or use of commercial sex as satisfying a particular need, or as the result of a particular disadvantage. This reflects findings from other studies conducted on the demand for commercial sex. However, these discourses also revealed that need and/or disadvantage is built into ideas around authentic emotion and natural/unnatural sexual experiences. One client described his need for 'physical tenderness' in terms of natural/unnatural sexuality:

"I was perfectly capable of dealing with the mental isolation but I wasn't capable of dealing with physical isolation, and that actual kind of *physical tenderness* is something *I do feel that I need*. And I think that again, if for some reason it again became impossible for me to get that in a *natural way*, then I would pay for it" (M)

M. frames his own subjective and emotional position within a discourse of natural and unnatural sex where a hierarchy is established between the 'physical tenderness' from a 'natural way' and the 'physical tenderness' from commercial sex. This reveals that there is an awareness of artificiality in commercial sex – it is positioned against the assumed naturalness of non-commercial sex – and reveals how the emotional state of loneliness (isolation) is projected onto and experienced through the body (physical isolation and physical tenderness). The awareness of artificiality, however, does not necessarily devalue its meaningfulness as an important experience within the context of the client's own desires and needs. For Bernstein (2001; 2007a), the concept of 'bounded authenticity' is a product of the simultaneous problematising and

normalising of commercial sex. The normalising of commercial sex is seen by its status as an easy and accessible alternative to non-commercial sexual relations, yet it is problematic due to its construction as unnatural. The corporeality of emotion alongside the unnatural state of commercial sex suggests that, for this client, imagined boundaries around proper and improper emotions and sexuality frame his understanding of his own position as a client of commercial sex. In attempting to understand his position as a client of commercial sex, M. places value on embodied caring through sex but constructs his identity precariously, as someone who has deviated from the 'natural' sexual community. M.'s discourse frames emotion and intimacy as capable of being purchased but simultaneously questions the authenticity of what is being purchased, thereby revealing how market relations (*paying for it*) can provide new means of facilitating sexual intimacy (Bernstein, 2007a) but without necessarily making 'market intimacy' the preferable option. The concept of sexual choices – being able to purchase sex when it is unavailable non-commercially – and the ability for male clients to transgress the boundaries of the sexual community without permanent exclusion is an important and recurrent theme, which places sex workers in a precarious and bounded position as non-members of the sexual community with limited sexual choices (O'Connell Davidson 1998).

Emotion forms a central element in the concept of what is 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' within commercial sex. The embodied aspects of commercial sex (*sex acts*) and the emotional and caring needs (*emotionality*) of the clients are often presented as distinct and conflicted spheres of the commercial sex purchase. One client, A., marks the distinction between being 'aroused physically' and being 'aroused mentally' during his experience of commercial sex. For A. the lack of mental arousal results in an unsatisfactory bodily experience where he does not achieve

climax. What is most revealing here is the use of language related to artificiality and lack of emotion. Referring to the sex worker, A. explained that ‘she was trying hard, she was kind of going through the motions, in terms of her script you know’, therefore demonstrating an awareness of the unnatural and forced performance of the sex worker. What this makes relevant is the extent to which male clients are aware of the emotional labour and performance aspects of commercial sex, and the extent to which they themselves engage in such practices. For A, there was a conscious recognition of his own part in the performance, as he felt compelled to ‘half fake a climax’ in order to satisfy the expectations of the sex worker and to perform his own role as a man engaging in sex. The overall negativity which A. associates with his commercial sex encounter is explained through the intertwining of private life with public life. It is suggested, however, that is not necessarily the merging of private and public life which causes tension, since these spheres are constantly influencing and interpreting each other, but the extent to which such blurring of boundaries becomes explicit and perceptible within commercial sex.

When the performance is unconvincing in commercial sex, this causes issues for the clients because it forces the illusion or fantasy of authentic interpersonal exchanges to become unsustainable and provokes confrontation of the exact nature of the transaction (Pettinger 2011, Peng 2007, Sanders 2008). Plumridge et al (1997: 174) state that male clients want the “myth of social warmth sustained” and any infringement on this façade of sociability risks revealing the underlying motivations (payment, money) and roles (buyer and seller) of the commercial sex relationship. Boundaries are constantly negotiated and maintained within commercial sex and it is the maintenance of these boundaries which is central to the identity of the male client. The comparison between the experience of his friend, who had sex with a sex worker

at the same time in another room, and his own experience is particularly revealing of the way in which awareness of the performance, and not the *actual* performance, is conceptualised as problematic:

“Um, and um, but yeh, the one that Steve had sex with was really putting on the act and putting on the thing, and the one I had sex with wasn’t putting on an act, well she was putting on an act it wasn’t that she wasn’t but basically she stripped down, take off your clothes, this is what it is, you know. Money, because you’re the one fucking me. And it felt like mechanical” (A)

For A., the evaluation of the two sex workers in the context of their respective ‘acts’ and ‘performances’ suggest that emotional labour is not an unacknowledged and invisible aspect of commercial sex, but is very much part of the purchase (Peng 2007). For Lever and Dolnick (2000: 86), pretence is a core component of the more expensive forms of sex work such as escorting, where clients and sex workers “agree to pretend that her caring and sexual attraction for him are real”. Emotional labour establishes and maintains boundaries between the private and the public, the seen and the unseen, and this is a crucial requirement for men in negotiating a positive self-identity as clients.

The boundaries between artifice and authenticity within commercial sex were constantly negotiated by the clients interviewed, as they attempted to reconcile their personal experiences with broader knowledge of the commercial sex industry. One client positions his own ‘genuine friendships’ with Thai sex workers against the artifice of commercial sex in general, which he states is ‘an industry where a lot of acting goes on’ (G). Discourses around care, emotion and authenticity were also used

to construct gendered images of male and female sexuality. For one client, the sex workers which he ‘always seem[s] to end up with’ are those who ‘want to take care of me’ and ‘almost seem to adopt a, like mothering instinct’ (B). The over-use of the word ‘seem’ in his explanation of caring in commercial sex suggests a certain ambiguity as to whether the care is his own perception of the encounter, or a genuine product of the relationship. This discourse, however, firmly situates the client within the context of a natural and loving relationship (mother-son) where the burden of care is placed firmly on the sex worker as the ‘mother’. The reference to mothering within the context of sex work suggests an attempt to distance *the sex act itself* from the purchase of commercial sex by engaging a gendered and essentialist discourse on the innate and instinctual caring qualities of women. Female sex workers are not only expected to provide an emotional and authentic experience but are expected to do so distinctly *as women*: it is women’s assumed ‘natural’ emotions, qualities and biology which are sold and purchased, rather than a universalised concept of human emotion and warmth. Caring within commercial sex is, then, distinctly gendered. Clients engaged with discourses around biological differences – men had to ‘sow their seed’ (F and D) while women were ‘nurturing’ (F) – which was not only used to explain the demand for commercial sex but also to construct the gendered roles of (male) client and (female) sex worker. This discourse is used to create the image of an unfettered and impulsive male sexuality which is soothed and nurtured by a naturally caring female sexuality. The supposed naturalness of women’s caring – itself indicative of wider structural inequalities between men and women – is used to position the male client as a natural focus for these women’s caring efforts, rather than as the result of money exchanged.

The intimate relations between client and sex worker that are discursively constructed by the clients in this study suggest that male clients use emotion, intimacy and feelings to re-conceptualise the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial sexual and social relations. Clients frequently assessed the quality and desirability of commercial sex within the context of the sex worker's pleasure or enjoyment: 'I'm just looking for someone that's going to enjoy it, enjoy themselves, enjoy what they're doing' (D). By drawing upon these discourses, the men position themselves as both customer – giving them certain entitlements and expectations of the sex worker – and as an equal, and giving, partner in the relationship. Clients expect sex workers to work hard at concealing the sex-for-money relationship through displays of highly sexualised femininity, eroticism and an ethic of care: 'because whilst you know you know you are paying for it, you don't ever want to feel that you are' (G). Mutuality is a problematic concept, however, for within client discourses mutuality concerns a subjective assessment of the sex worker's pleasure and feelings. Clients asserting that these women have 'sex for fun' (M), are 'quite happy with it' (L), are 'somebody I know that was enjoying themselves' (V) and 'wanted to please me' (D) creates a set of interpretative assessments which identify the male client as an equal and non-exploitative partner in the purchase of sex. Plumridge et al (1997: 177) in their work on emotionality and clients of commercial sex found a similar discourse of mutuality, which they argued was used to "construct for them [sex workers] pleasures and desires which were consistent with and ratified their [clients] own". By constructing the pleasures and feelings of the sex workers – without, it would seem, much direct evidence from the sex workers and in contradiction to the men's voiced concerns surrounding the artifice and exploitation of the commercial sex industry – these clients create a reassuring discourse which upholds their own sense of identity

(Phillips, 2011), rather than actively engaging with the limits and experiences of performance within commercial sex.

The interweaving of mutuality and authenticity in these discourses can be read as a resistance to social and cultural narratives around forced labour and exploitation, generally found in trafficking discourses (Chapkis 2003, Doezma 2005, Kantola and Squires 2004), and the gradual stigmatization of male clients through international measures to penalise and/or rehabilitate those who bought sex (Hubbard 1998, Pitcher et al 2006, Sanders 2009, Scoular 2004). For commercial sex to be enjoyable and rewarding, men constructed it as more than a profession for the women involved; it was presented as a genuine reflection of (at least part of) the woman's inner self. Lynne Pettinger (2011: 238), using a consumerism framework to analyse customer expectations in sex work, finds that "[c]ustomers demand a sense of the worker as giving more of themselves than just doing a job, whilst also setting limits – often labelled as 'professionalism' – on how much 'self' the worker should deliver". What is being sold and bought is a "feminine performance" (Pettinger, 2011: 238) which is carefully monitored and controlled by the client. The surveillance and interpretation of the sex worker's actions, speech and body to determine the authenticity and mutuality of her sexual and emotional responses suggests that for male clients, control – and loss of control – over the sexual exchange is situated within the 'feminine performance'. When women stray too far from the expectations of the customer, this leads to loss of control over the quality and form of the sexual encounter. The limitations set within commercial sex as to the quality of 'self' which a sex worker reveals and the level of intimacy experienced are constructed as the decision and choice of the male client. The boundaries which sex workers themselves set within

commercial sex remain silent in these discourses. The following client, O., creates a discursive tension around the boundaries and limitations of intimacy and emotion:

“I’ve got a few friends on there who I wouldn’t ‘visit’ anymore. And I think it’s a while since I’ve been to visit them, but I can’t because its...you know. Better served by the *anonymity* itself. Understand?” (O)

“Possibly if I was the sort to go to parlours, saunas or flats on that strictly sort of ‘half an hour here, half an hour there’... but like I said to you in the first instance...my tastes changed, evolved - you know, I wanted a sort of *more personal*, what they call the ‘girlfriend experience’” (O)

Although O. constructs his ideal form of commercial sex as the ‘girlfriend experience’ (GFE), this seems in conflict with his earlier remarks on the need for emotional and social distance in commercial sex. The GFE is the ultimate form of emotional labour in sex work, involving a carefully constructed performance of care and intimacy designed to replicate a non-commercial relationship (Bernstein 2007a, Katsulis 2010). The movement from sex worker to ‘friend’ hinders the commercial transaction rather than facilitating it because it is discursively constructed as too personal. This suggests two important points related to the previously discussed issues around authenticity, emotion and mutuality: firstly, the limits between ‘too personal’ and ‘not personal enough’ are created by the client, meaning that sex workers may lose clients and money if they cannot maintain the correct emotional and social distance; and secondly, the performance of intimacy is bound up with ideas around consumerism

and choice. Rather than being a natural phenomenon of the commercial sex exchange, intimacy and emotion are consumer preferences which are mediated by the market.

Paying for tenderness and caring involves negotiating, for many of the male clients interviewed, an awareness of wider conditions with the commercial sex industry with their position and role as buyers of sex. While there was a high level of awareness amongst the men of the ways in which sex workers use emotional labour and acting, it was discursively constructed as ‘other’ to their own experiences. The authenticity of the women they pay for sex is never questioned, except in the case of one client A. who is deeply unsatisfied by commercial sex, while the authenticity of the commercial sex industry as a whole is repeatedly questioned by the men. The extent to which these clients engaged with discourses around caring, emotion and social warmth could be an attempt to deflect attention from their activities as ‘sex for money’ and to ‘save face’ with the interviewers, especially when the interviewer was a woman. By removing commercial sex from the market and emphasising the personal and non-financial aspects of the exchange – feelings, bonds and caring – clients are resisting negative identities in favour of self-constructed identities based on their role as “givers of pleasure” (Pettinger, 2011). Constructing the exchanges and the sex workers in such a way hides the imbalances of power that may exist in the exchange – the consequences for the sex worker of resisting the expectations and desires of the client, the influence of (unseen) third parties in the exchange and the tension between the self-imposed limits of the sex worker and the limits set by the client – and discursively avoids engaging with issues around choice and inequalities.

For many of the clients in this study, the inner life – feelings, thoughts, desires – of the sex worker is as open and available to commoditisation and objectification as the bodies of the women. The personality and displays of emotional labour of the

women are commoditised as part of the package of buying sex, while the projection of mutual sexual and personal reward onto the sex worker suggests an objectifying gaze that denies the agency of the sex worker and any dissent to the clients' idealized interpretation of commercial sex. There is an expectation on the part of these male clients that sex workers live their work, and truly *are* their work as highly sexed women, while making available to them all intimate and emotional resources. The most alarming discursive dissimilarity from other service industries was the lack of recognition given to the rights and protections of sex workers *as workers*. This leads to an interesting dilemma: while the male clients construct the women as workers and professionals, they simultaneously distance the relationship between themselves and the sex worker from commerciality. Sex workers are workers, in the discourses of the male clients, but ones who occupy a grey area between the commercial and the non-commercial. The 'limbo' position of sex workers suggests that male clients are engaging with, to a limited extent, discourses of professionalism in commercial sex but simultaneously undermining the rights and protections of the worker status.

Problematic Emotions, Problematic Identities

Emotions within the discourses of the male clients were often presented as a problematic issue for which commercial sex offered a solution. The majority of men understood commercial sex not as a form of dominance over women or as a recreational activity but as a way to cope with personal and emotional failings. This created a very ambiguous sense of identity; the men often associated their impaired or oppressed sense of self with the abnormality of their commercial sex activities, thus constructing an 'abnormal' identity of the male client. At the same time, however, the men often legitimised commercial sex as a form of work and rewarding social interaction, positioning the client within a normalised role of customer, friend or lover. This suggests that there is considerable tension around the identity of the male client which is expressed in the relationship between the subjective experience of buying sex (personal identity) and the generalised idea of who buys sex and why (group identity). In other words, the clients engage with and reveal the tensions between opposing discourses which legitimise and de-legitimise commercial sex (Sanders and Campbell, 2009). It is within these discourses that the men attempt to forge their own sense of identity and ultimately, expose the contradictions and inconsistencies in the discursive construction of purchasing sex.

Vulnerability and Safety in Client Discourses

Emotional vulnerability was expressed consistently, although not without tension and contradiction, in the interviews with male clients. This discourse invested significant emphasis on the emotional traumas and turmoil which led to the purchase of

commercial sex and thus, created a male client identity framed by the emotional burdens and vulnerabilities of everyday life. In the following interview extract, the client constructs commercial sex as a reaction to his loss of confidence in ‘normal’ social and sexual relations:

“I had no *confidence* talking to women, I didn’t know what to say and if I did start a conversation I’d always end up talking about my ex and about my relationship and that *scared them away*. Or you’d meet someone who’d been in the *same boat* and then you end up both of you *so emotionally*, you just don’t do it.” (D)

Although commonly neglected from writings on emotion, confidence is a key emotion in everyday interactions. Barbalet (1993: 232) theorises confidence as a social emotion which “arises in the subject of a relationship in which participants receive acceptance and recognition”. Using this understanding of confidence as a form of acceptance and recognition in social interactions, D.’s discourse constructs his identity as a buyer of sex around a lack of recognition and acceptance in non-commercial interactions. It is his vulnerability, as someone who is not accepted socially and who is damaged emotionally, which is being actively displayed in his explanation of his own identity as a buyer of sex. This invokes a power dynamic where the client is lacking control and power (even as he displays economic power through the purchase of sex) and is in a position of lowered status as the buyer of sex.

The lack of confidence in everyday social interactions with non-sex workers is used to construct a sense of identity which relies heavily on an essential difference between women who *are* sex workers and women who *are not* sex workers. In this explanation, it is his unacceptability to ‘normal’ women which provokes his use of

commercial sex. This differentiation between women who are sex workers and women who are not sex workers posits emotional reciprocity and social expectations as a key differentiating factor, rather than invoking a moral standpoint. This discourse, however, does reveal certain inequalities and problematic power relationships in the commercial sex transaction, which are just as marked in traditional moral discourses on the differences between ‘whores’ and ‘normal’ women. Firstly, the implicit expectation that sex workers will be neither ‘scared away’ nor empathise with his emotional situation denies sex workers the same emotional entitlements and responses as non-sex workers. The suggestion that sex workers are in control of emotions, or are even above the effects and influences of romantic love, constructs sex workers’ emotional lives within the context of commercialisation. There was a distinct silence on matters relating to the personal lives of the sex workers they visited; this silence contributed to a pervasive image of sex workers as static and fixed, primarily distinguished and bound by their ‘work’ identity as a woman who sells sex. Commercial sex is compartmentalised as a distinct sphere of life in which, it seems, the male clients are free to come and go, to occupy multiple selves and identities – husband, boyfriend, client or friend of sex workers, worker, father – while sex workers are granted no such freedom to travel across boundaries and inhabit various identities.

Commercial sex is constructed alongside the problematising of sexual-social relations in non-commercial life: “I can’t afford it, even if I wanted to I couldn’t afford it, but I’ve *changed* quite a bit since then and got quite a bit *more confidence*. I’ve got *less problems now*” (D). This client understands his use of commercial sex and eventual disengagement from commercial sex as being a matter of loss and subsequent re-gaining of control over his emotional life; in particular those emotions

which are necessary in social contexts. Simply put, men who have ‘less problems’ are constructed as less likely to purchase commercial sex; it is an activity and an identity which signifies weakness, failure and/or lack in non-commercial social and sexual relations. The connection between emotion, vulnerability and social interactions is an important factor within the discourses of these male clients. Explaining their position as a ‘buyer of sex’ through use of language such as ‘anger’ (M), ‘lack of confidence’ (D), ‘lonely’/’depressed’ (O) and ‘bashfulness’ (B), many clients expressed a sense that sex workers provided a way for them to manage potentially socially damaging and/or inappropriate emotions; emotions which could not be expressed socially without negative reactions and ultimately, rejection. For Fineman (2005: 2), “emotions are fashioned by powerful social scripts where showing what you ‘really’ feel can sometimes be risky”. Although his research focuses predominantly on emotions within organisations, this analysis is useful for understanding how emotions involve an interaction between subjective experience, public display and social norms. Buying sex, for these clients mentioned above, was therefore constructed as a way of coping with a tension between their subjective ‘feeling’ experiences and the public display – and social acceptability – of such feelings.

The problems of vulnerability for male clients were additionally constructed as an issue of physical and social safety when visiting sex workers. On the one hand, this constructed sex workers as predatory women who were liable to both physically harming the clients and preying on their emotional and sexual vulnerabilities. On the other hand, the idea of social safety was expressed in the relationship between the requirement for secrecy and the preservation of an established social identity and status. The vulnerability of male clients to female sex workers was perceived to be greater than the vulnerability of male clients to male sex workers: ‘I’d be more

anxious about getting stabbed in the back by a female prostitute than about violence from a male prostitute' (M). The gender of the sex workers emerges as significant in the explanations and experiences of vulnerability within commercial sex. That physical violence is perceived to be more likely from female sex workers and to come in a form that is more unpredictable and debilitating than male-on-male violence is suggestive of the ways in which male clients feel threatened by the particular gendered hierarchies and roles within commercial sex. The construction of female sex workers as predatory women who prey on the physical, social and emotional weaknesses of men inverts the typical associations of predatory and exploitative behaviour with male clients. This discourse is particularly revealing of the insecurities which male clients experience within commercial sex, as individuals who are engaging with an activity which is not (wholly) socially acceptable, and may be damaging to social and self-identity. This suggests that male clients feel they have little or no traditional authority on which to rely such as the police, the law or social opinion and consciously experience their exposure to physical and social repercussions of engaging with commercial sex.

The commercial sex industry was explained by many of the clients as a place in which exploitation – of both clients and sex workers – was rife: “There will always be men who want sex, and who can’t get it any other way. And there will always be women who are willing to take advantage of that. There will also be other men who are willing to take advantage of those men, um, so I mean I would say that it would be naïve to think that every prostitute was a willing prostitute. But there is always somewhere along the lines of somebody taking advantage of someone else” (G). Here, the exploitation is primarily framed as a result of the weakness of men who can only access women and sex through the commercial sex industry; as such, it is primarily

the exploitation of 'weak' men by 'stronger' women and men which drives the commercial sex industry. The predatory status of (some) female sex workers, as both capable of physical violence and of sensing and manipulating weakness in male clients, inverts traditional gender hierarchies of passive and demure femininity. Aalbers's (2005) study of the red-light district in Amsterdam found that the opportunities for traditional gender roles and characteristics to be subverted are highly prevalent in commercial sex due to the insider/outsider status of female sex workers and male clients. The 'predatory female' distorts traditional social norms and stimulates male fears and anxieties over sexual roles, yet in the context of commercial sex – in which female sex workers are more adept at navigating – provokes the emergence of the predatory female (Aalbers 2005). This suggests that male clients' fears over the predatory nature of female sex workers and their vulnerability to various forms of violence, manipulation and exploitation is reflective of both the anxieties around sexual roles, particularly when these roles are commercialised, and of a perceived failure as a 'predator' of women in addition to the anxieties of navigating a particularly obscure and unknown territory.

Commercial sex challenges both the sexual and social identity of male clients, rather than being a natural context in which to enhance or prove one's self-identity. This is not to suggest that commercial sex is not used to enhance or reinforce sexual, social or gender identity - as for example, a form of masculinity practice (Frank 2003) - but that, in this study, the men displayed a sense that they were at a disadvantage as male clients within commercial sex and utilised various strategies to overcome such vulnerability and produce a strong and positive self-identity. One such strategy was the construction of expert or insider status within the commercial sex industry. This strategy neutralised, to an extent, the various vulnerabilities experienced within

commercial sex by assuming a certain degree of knowledge and skill in negotiating the commercial sex industry, or by distancing themselves from the identity of a client through gaining access to areas of commercial sex not commonly encountered by clients:

“when you know how the system works in a country like Thailand, then it’s even easier. Unless you want to do something strange and perverse, then it’s a very easy system in Thailand because it already exists, so as long as *you know how the system works, then you just follow the rules of the system (M)*.

By knowing and following ‘the rules’, clients could make claims to certain types of knowledge which differentiated them from ‘other’ clients who were unaware of such rules and codes of conduct. Not only did this strategy provide a sense of authority on the subject of commercial sex to the male clients, it also provided practical guidance on how to avoid conflict and danger within commercial sex. The manner in which these men chose to reconcile the various discourses around commercial sex – as exploitation, as work, as a moral issue – involved bridging various parts of these discourses together, with resulting tension in their explanations and interpretations, rather than adhering to one consistent and unified framework.

Money, Morality and Identity

Many of the male clients are engaging with discourses around the professionalism of sex work but in a way which seems to add most benefit to their own identities and activities through legitimising the purchase of sex, and not necessarily legitimising the

identity and activities of the individual who sells sex. The differences between women who sell sex and women who do not was expressed as a reflection on the moral character of the male client in one interview, where the client felt that it was 'more decent to pay for sex than to sleep with someone else' (M) during a particularly troubling emotional experience related to the sudden illness of his girlfriend. This equation of moral transgression with non-commercial sexual activity reinforces the idea that sex workers are 'other' to women in general. Rather than framing commercial sex as immoral and illegal, the idea of payment has come to represent a form of legitimacy and transparency in the emotional lives of male clients, through separating the emotional interactions of everyday life and the temporal and discrete emotional interactions of commercial sex. This is not to suggest, however, that commercial sex does offer emotional clarity and boundaries for male clients, as many expressed confusion and conflict over both their own identity as a buyer of sex and the relationship between themselves and sex workers, especially if they regularly see the same sex worker. It is also important to add that during the time of the interviews (2005-2006), there was much international attention paid to the criminalising and rehabilitating of the client. Therefore, this use of payment to both separate out sex workers from other women and to legitimise the identity of the purchaser could be a form of resistance against such condemnation.

The emotional and moral boundaries which 'payment' and 'money' are being used to construct and legitimise are dangerous for sex workers where sex is exchanged in return for indirect payment, or where third parties are involved. For many of the male clients in this study, there was a great deal of tension and contradiction around the issue of payment and its various manifestations. The line between paying for sex and not paying for sex was unclear and subject to various

interpretations: “I never actually paid any of the strippers for sex. I’ve only ever gone out now to prostitutes for sex. As I say once I discovered the girls. Hmm. The strippers. There was no need to go to prostitutes. If you have sex with one of them hmm it am I find effectively for free. You paid for having lap dances all evening. Is that free?” (V). This comment demonstrates how the perception of the payment arrangement between the sex worker and the client is open to (mis)interpretation and heavily influences the interpretation by the client of their own identity. Discourses of professionalism and work in commercial sex are liable to erosion and subversion if the clients do not recognise or acknowledge the commerciality of the interaction. For the above client, the erosion of these discourses is evident in the positioning of ‘prostitutes’ against ‘strippers’ and in the type of sex that each provides; prostitutes have sex for money and strippers have sex for free. Therefore, the identity of the client in the transaction is altered from being a buyer of sex to a recipient of free sex from hyper-sexualised, hyper-visible and desirable women through the subversion of professional and commercial boundaries.

Referring specifically to the legal situation of prostitution, Elaine Jeffreys (2003: 214) suggests that “categorising prostitution as professional ‘work’ is problematic because acknowledging the diversity of existing forms of prostitution highlights the difficulty of unifying sex-work under the rubric of one specific law”. As difficult as recognising sex work under one law would be, the interview transcripts revealed the difficulties for clients in determining the boundaries and types of sex work. A major concern with such practices among male clients is the failure to recognise themselves as clients: “Actually I don’t know if I’m your perfect client” (V). Any policy or education aimed at male clients of female sex workers will fail to alter dangerous behaviour, ignorance or practices of exploitation if a significant

number of those men construct themselves as engaging in ‘free’ sex (Carline, 2011). The role that money, and specifically the forms or methods of payment in ‘buying’ sex, are crucial for understanding how male clients construct their own sense of identity within commercial sex: as an actor in a professional and commercial transaction with certain rights and responsibilities as regards the other actors in the transaction, as an individual acting in a private capacity outside of commercial sex or as semi-participant in the commercial sex industry.

The discourse of money and payment in commercial sex, while an expected outcome of such interviews in which an economic exchange is being discussed, was specifically linked in the interviews with ideas of self-identification, and not as an uncontested and simple fact of such activities. The discourse of ‘free sex’ was prominent and suggested that, in line with earlier discussions around the authenticity and intimacy expected by male clients, the boundaries between the commercial and the non-commercial are frequently transgressed and manipulated for the benefit of male desire, pleasure and ego. From the interviews, two specific forms of ‘free sex’ discourses emerged – pretending that the sex is an unpaid and non-commercial encounter or engaging in unpaid ‘free’ sex within the commercial sex industry. While the extract above from the interview with V. constructs ‘free sex’ within the commercial sex industry, the act of consciously pretending that sex is not being purchased is also a powerful strategy used by the male clients to reinforce their self-worth and distance themselves from harmful attacks to their self-identity:

“I blocked out the fact that I was paying. I personally blocked out the fact that I was putting cash down, I knew that at the end of the day I was paying, but I sort of role

played into the fact that I'd done the seduction, and now this was it, and I'm there to please as much as she is, which made me feel a lot better about what I was doing" (D)

Pretending or role-playing is closely associated with the earlier analysis of authenticity, mutuality and intimacy in commercial sex, as it performs the function of distancing and dissociating from the commercialisation of sex and from negative identities around men who 'buy' sex, as opposed to men who can get sex for 'free'.

Men who 'buy' sex are discursively constructed as cowardly and lacking in virility by several of the clients, with most asserting that buying sex is not a sign of increased virility or an enhancement of masculinity. The clients either associated a neutral status with purchasing sex ("a man uses a prostitute it means he wants sex", L; "it just shows he wants to have sex", G) or a highly negative identity (it's a sign that he's a coward and can't meet women, through "normal" means and he's a bit of a saddo, me included, A). This negative identity displayed a sense that commercial sex equalised, to an extent, the ability for men to get access to sex, caring and human warmth while simultaneously being a poor alternative to 'free sex'. V. equated paying for sex with a lack of virility, which was blatantly perceptible to women:

"Women know who is virile and sexually potent and if that's what they want they will go for the guy. If he's not then it's the poor chap whose gonna have to pay for it because he ain't get it" (V)

Virility and money are positioned as exclusive categories: the man who has virility does not need money, and the man without virility requires money. Money is a source of power and prestige, not only in its ability to purchase certain items and services,

but also in its absence. Money buys certain privileges, such as the right not to be rejected, equal access to sex, care and human warmth and the playing out of certain fantasies related to ideal partner and sexual/romantic scenarios. It is capable of purchasing a release from a vulnerable and isolating social identity but at the same time, the absence of money within sexual relations is a more powerful indicator of masculine identity. Therefore, some of the male clients in this study were aware of a hierarchy between men, and specifically between men who purchase sex and those who do not, and expressed it as an association between virility (sexual power) and money (economic power). Buying sex challenged the position within this hierarchy, although many of the men did not directly relate themselves to their ideas of men who purchase sex, suggesting that distancing was an important tool in maintaining self-identity.

Professional Sex

The issue of money within commercial sex exposes the professional and economic status of the industry, which is generally accepted and engaged with by the male clients, to further questioning around the meanings attached to professionalism by male clients. While it has been shown that money has important meanings attached to sexuality and masculinity which do not necessarily correspond to other forms of economic transactions outside of commercial sex, the 'worker' status of women within sex work is also distinct from other forms of work. The sex worker discourse, which aims to promote the "recognition of women's work,...basic human rights and....decent working conditions" (Lim, 2008: 326) for women and men who sell sex, is suggested as being partially and inconsistently applied by the male clients in this

study. Although there are benefits to men engaging with the 'sex work' discourse, such as recognising the professional status of sex workers and enhancing respect between client and sex worker (Rickards 2001, Day 2007), there are also considerable divergences over the meanings attached to professionalism and work by male clients. The acknowledgement of commercial sex as 'work' helps to promote a positive and normalised self-identity through situating commercial sex within an acknowledged and legitimate context. However, the boundaries between 'work' and 'non-work' which the male clients constructed were fragile and prone to erosion and uncertainty.

The various ways in which men chose to identify themselves in the relationship with sex workers is indicative of the power relations and inequalities which exist in commercial sex and in wider social relations between men and women. The presence of both self-affirming and self-deprecatory discourses suggests the influence of several, competing discourses around buying and selling sex. The idea of friendship in the discourses is closely interconnected with the previously discussed concepts of mutuality, authenticity and emotion. Self-identifying as a 'friend' to sex workers, even if it is true, is a validation of the mutuality and authenticity of the relationship and at once invests the client with both a socially acceptable status – friend, not client – and denies the true nature of the exchange as economic. Considering the importance given to mutuality in the discourses of these clients, and in other studies, it is not surprising that friendship also figures as a critical reference for self-identification amongst clients: friendship suggests a relationship that is reciprocal, beneficial and freely chosen. Friendship was often invoked as a way to move the discursive territory from the field of economic relations to consensual sexual and intimate relations. This technique can be seen in the interview extract with

L. who, when asked if sex workers are likely to genuinely care for their clients, denies his status as ‘client’ through reframing it as ‘friendship’:

Interviewer: Likely to genuinely care for their clients?

Subject: In my case it was very likely because I treated them as friends... (L)

The movement from ‘client’ to ‘friend’ alters the quality of the relationship: it is assumed that by replicating a non-commercial relationship within a commercial relationship that ‘authenticity’ is produced. The use of ‘in my case’ also suggests that L. feels unique in his position and not capable of speaking for male clients as a group. This denies or, at the very least, disguises the work relationship between the client and the sex worker through prioritising the friendship experienced within that relationship.

The idea that sex workers freely chose their work was also employed as a means of identifying the relationship between sex worker and client. In this case, ideas of professionalism and choice from the sex worker’s discourse were actively engaged with by the clients, rather than being negated through reference to non-professional identities. However, this discourse was often problematically employed through misuse of elements of choice, consent and voluntary prostitution. When discussing the willingness to visit a sex worker who does not speak English, D. subverts the sex worker discourse to justify his own identity and behaviour:

Subject: As long as she was happy with what she was doing.

Interviewer: But how would you know if she couldn’t speak English?

Subject: Well, you don't do you? But I suppose you can tell by the look on her face. If I felt that she wasn't happy with what she was doing, then I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't want to get her in trouble by walking out half way through, but I wouldn't do it.

Interviewer: So consent is important to you?

Subject: Consent is very important. (D)

The meaningfulness of the concepts of choice and consent are more important for the client in constructing a non-exploitative identity, rather than as a framework for actively judging the situation in which commercial sex takes place. Consent may be considered important by this client, but it is meaningless as a way to better the situation of women and girls in commercial sex. The risk with the ideas of professionalism and work in the commercial sex industry is that they are subverted and appropriated by the clients, rather than being employed to the benefit of the individuals involved in the commercial sex industry. Whether sex is considered work or non-work by clients seems to be a product of individual preferences around self-identification and a means to resist stigmatising discourses around exploitation.

Therapy and Learning in Commercial Sex

Self-expansion, self-exploration or self-improvement was discussed by several of the male clients in the context of a beneficial, therapeutic relationship between the sex

worker and client. The reluctance to construct their commercial sex activities in the context of sex and money suggests that for these men, the benefits of commercial sex extend beyond immediate physical gratification and pleasure. While the therapeutic discourse has been explored by other researchers, the concept and its use has mostly been examined from the point of view of sex workers themselves. How male clients understand their experiences of commercial sex as therapeutic is therefore important for assessing what benefits and/or disadvantages such discourses bring and for whom.

Commercial sex, and the experience of visiting sex workers, is constructed as a psychologically beneficial experience and deemed to be self-improving. The ability to connect with other people and communicate more effectively is posited as a consequence of commercial sex. For B., the therapeutic benefits of commercial sex are framed as a holistic process, extending beyond sex and sexuality:

“I feel it’s *improved my lifestyle* and I’ve become more, what’s the word, more friendly with these people, um, yeah. And so I can meet someone through, not for sex or whatever, just to have a conversation, and I think *part of me coming out in terms of living a life is through, going to sex workers, yeah*” (B)

For this male client, sex workers offer far more than sex – sex workers teach and develop their clients in basic life skills and human connection. Without dismissing the very powerful inequalities which may exist in commercial sex, this discourse of sex workers as therapists and educators suggests a validation and appreciation of sex workers’ intellect and non-sexual skills. It also proposes a student-teacher relationship between client and sex worker which undermines abolitionist feminist understandings of the abusive and violent nature of prostitution. Without further research on sex

workers' understanding of learning and therapy in commercial sex, it is impossible to assess whether the positive development and growth of their clients in social, psychological and emotional terms provides a sense of reward or achievement for sex workers. However, the appearance of such discourses in these interviews suggests that there may be an opportunity for a more positive conceptualisation of some aspects of commercial sex, in which the structures of power and domination are no more severe than in other aspects of social and professional life.

In her study of the customers of strip clubs, Frank (2003) found that these men engaged with commercial sex as a form of escapism from oppressive aspects of self and as a way to practice 'masculinity'. While there is evidence that male clients experience commercial sex as a form of freedom from social pressures, from social and sexual failures and from those aspects of self which are most constraining, it is most often framed within the interviews as a transformative experience of the self rather than a temporary avoidance of personal flaws. A sex worker can act as a guide for the self, offering the chance to 'explore other areas of sexuality that perhaps you hadn't considered yourself' (L) or to provide emotional and psychological resources through conversation, ego-boosting and affection. Thus, several of the clients interviewed in this study draw parallels between commercial sex and therapy/self-help in which the benefits of commercial sex transfer to other areas of the men's lives. Danielle Lindemann (2011), in her study of BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) demonstrates how professional dominatrices interpret their roles as therapists, in which clients are able to access and experience aspects of self through a 'therapy' of eroticism, conversation and physical touch. One aspect of this therapeutic narrative was that clients came to "work through wrongs which had been inflicted upon them – reliving traumatic experiences in order to gain control over them"

(Lindemann, 2011: 158, emphasis in original). For the client interviewed in this study, it is suggested that, while *reliving* the trauma is not evident within the discourses, regaining control over the self, emotion and traumatic experience is presented as a feature of purchasing commercial sex. Traumatic experiences, such as the breakdown of a relationship, sexual assault or severe medical conditions figure within seven of the male clients' discourses around purchasing sex while 'trauma' is explicitly mentioned by several of the clients. While it is evident that 'trauma' is discursively employed, in some instances, to justify the 'irrational' behaviour of purchasing sex, this does not negate the overall association between therapy and commercial sex. Through invoking a discourse of self-improvement, sex workers are presented as a source of positive self-value and self-identification for male clients. The validation of skills and qualities which are not explicitly sexual does create certain dilemmas, however, for the professionalism of commercial sex. The valuing of certain attributes, such as education and intelligence, exacerbates inequalities which exist within commercial sex, by for example, limiting the financial gains and opportunities of uneducated women within commercial sex and ultimately their ability to exit commercial sex if they choose. The male clients clearly expressed an understanding of commercial sex as existing in a hierarchy between lower forms such as streetwalking and certain types of saunas or massage parlours and higher forms such as escorts and independents in their own flats. The lived realities between women operating in these different areas of commercial sex are profoundly influenced by the social, cultural and economic capital which they possess and which they are able to sell to their clients (Brown, 2007). The professionalism of commercial sex, and therefore its ability to offer a therapeutic environment, is profoundly connected by the male clients to the social, cultural and economic capital of the women: "I'm very

lucky because it's a very rewarding experience and um, she's a very nice woman and she's intelligent and she's educated, and ummm, it's very therapeutic for me" (F). The class status, perceived or real, of the female sex workers determines the extent to which female sex workers are deemed to be professional, attractive women or desperate, unattractive women (Van der Veen 2001, Trautner 2005). Ultimately, the therapeutic benefits of commercial sex prove problematic for the inequalities which exist between women both inside and outside of commercial sex.

Conclusion

Commercial sex is not only about buying access to bodies and physical pleasure, although this is of course a key component of the commercial sex transaction, but is also about negotiating boundaries between accepted and unaccepted identities, emotion, intimacy and the shifting interpretations of public and private life (Monto 2000). Bernstein's (2007) concept of 'bounded authenticity' is extremely useful and relevant in disentangling the various limits and expectations of commerciality and intimacy within commercial sex. Rather than accepting that the boundaries set by men around commercial sex are an extension of patriarchy or as a purely rationalising exercise of their behaviour, how men define the boundaries of their commercial sex experiences and their identity as a client is also a product of the instability and fluidity of private and public life. The inconsistency and tension in the clients' explanations of commercial sex is a reflection of this merging and influence between public and private.

Men visit sex workers and experience commercial sex within the context of their own cultural, social, economic and emotional lives. What it means to be a 'buyer of sex' is influenced by both internal (emotional) and external (socio-political discourses) forces. The meaning of concepts such as 'work' and 'money' become contested and fragmented in the context of commercial sex, as individual clients employ their own set of interpretative meanings and social, cultural and economic capital to make sense of their position and identity within commercial sex. The meaning of sexual services in exchange for money/material goods must be situated within specific cultural meanings (Agustin 2005). Using this framework also extends the understanding of prostitution as the 'sale of sex' by revealing the cultural and

social performances which are involved in the interaction between seller and buyer (Brown 2007). What is being bought and sold through prostitution is not only sexual acts and/or services, comparable to other forms of wage labour, but involves complex dynamics of social, cultural and economic capital. This argument does not negate or deny the fact that, within commercial sex, power is wielded unevenly by the participants or that broad structural inequalities impact on who buys and who sells sex (O'Connell Davidson 1998, Phoenix 1999; 2007). It does suggest, however, that focusing solely on sex acts denies a great deal of what happens in commercial sex, and may even help to disguise certain aspects of empowerment and disempowerment.

The benefits to self and identity which are granted to male clients in the context of commercial sex are deeply intertwined with the emotional labour practices of sex workers. Since the emotional labour of sex workers, and indeed any service worker, contains the possibility for potentially harmful and dissociating effects for the self (Hochschild 1983), there is a marked inequality in the risks to self and identity of the sex worker versus the benefits to self experienced by the clients. The expectations of male clients far exceed the merely physical and sexual and make demands upon the emotional and personal characteristics of individual sex workers. The personality, intelligence and education of the women are included within the purchase of sex, suggesting that rather than being simply a matter of exercising "certain powers of sexual command" (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 3) over sex workers, the commerce of sex involves the commoditisation of non-sexual attributes of women. The privileging of certain forms of cultural and social capital re-creates within commercial sex the hierarchies of inequality outside of commercial sex. Commercial tastes and preferences of male clients are diverse and demanding. However, within this study the majority of the clients preferred high-end sex workers (escorts, call girls, saunas) as

opposed to street prostitution, and this will have affected the expectations and experiences of the clients as regards female sex workers. Therefore, one limitation of this study is the inability to adequately address the emotional and non-sexual expectations and demands placed upon women in less expensive forms of commercial sex.

Rather than being a natural arena for the display and provocation of male sexuality and authority, commercial sex is more generally constructed by the male clients in this study as a potentially dangerous and damaging context in which to express and validate their masculinity. However, that does not negate the ability of the men to use certain strategies in order to perform and validate their masculinity within the context of commercial sex. What is most important here is that commercial sex does not automatically grant to the men in this study the power and knowledge to dominate sex workers: commercial sex is a site in which power and knowledge are struggled over by the various parties. While it is recognised that sex workers display and use agency in commercial sex to guide, control and monitor the interaction (Jeffreys 2006), the lack of acknowledgement by the majority of the clients of sex workers' rights to set limits on the encounter could be, at best, a testament to the skill of the sex worker in disguising her agency or, at worst, a reflection of the male client's assumed role as the boundary-setter.

It has been shown that various devices and strategies are employed by male clients to make sense of their position within commercial sex, rather than relying upon a single or unitary framework. There is significant danger that the various discourses aimed at alleviating the worst offences against sex workers or raising awareness of negative aspects of the industry are only partly engaged with by male clients and so lose any benefits. The issue of consent, choice and professionalism were particularly

liable to erosion as the boundaries between work and non-work were differently interpreted and applied by the clients. By focusing on the emotional experiences and expectations of clients, it became clear that the boundaries between the commercial, non-commercial, economic and intimate are less well-defined than is commonly perceived. The extent to which the clients reflected upon their commercial sex activities in terms of emotions and feelings, rather than through reference to the purely physical or sexual shows that particular attention should be paid to how men use and understand emotion in commercial sex, and what consequences this has for the women and men working in the commercial sex industry.

In addition, one of the primary aims of this study was to explore the merits and limitations of secondary analysis. While there are considerable limitations on the extent to which the findings from this study can be applied to the general population of male clients of female sex workers, it has been useful in revealing certain devices, strategies and concepts which may prove beneficial in further analyses of male clients. The ability of secondary analysis to offer re-interpretations of datasets and offer alternative insights is undoubtedly the major strength of this technique. Further work on the area of male clients could benefit from the findings of this study in conceptualising a framework for understanding the emotion, feelings and interpretations of dominant discourses on commercial sex.

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