At Least For Me, It's Empowering:

The Changing Experience of Sex Work in the Digital Age

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

At Least For Me, It's Empowering:
The Changing Experience of Sex Work in the Digital Age

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This study examines how a unique group of sex workers uses the Internet to do their jobs, and how this new technology has affected different areas of their lives: how participants came to enter sex work, create and shape identities in real and digital spaces, and how they perceive and respond to on-the-job risks. Though the workers interviewed participated in different kinds of sex work that was delivered in a variety of ways, they shared a reliance on technology, and described similar processes concerning their entrance, and the management of their identity, business and security concerns.

This project moves away from the "traditional" research paradigms of legality, deviance, and public health and instead uses qualitative research methods to investigate how digital workers use new technologies to create new systems and structures to aid in entrance and address issues in their work. Data was gathered through 50 in-depth interviews with a sample of sex workers from a variety of western nations who rely on Internet technology for their work. Study participants were identified using snowball sampling methods and the interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that included questions pertaining to how they entered sex work, the daily processes of their work life, and the broader implications of sex work in both society and their personal lives.

This investigation explores the contours of digital sex work, utilizing the experiences of a range of digital providers to argue that the Internet has created

substantial changes to the organization of, incentives for, and challenges associated with sex work for those who rely on it for their work. This research joins a growing catalog of scholarship examining the changing social and technological landscape of sex work. Research on the normative aspects of sex work is rare and examining the impact of technology on the way workers construct new tools and systems to address long-standing issues is incredibly important. The dissertation offers new theoretical insights along with recommendations for policy and future opportunities to further scholarship on sex work in the digital age.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE NEW DIGITAL SEX WORK MODEL

> *There's often a terrible, cheesy, outdated image…of a woman leaning into a car, you can see her boots, you can see her fishnets, maybe see her chin, but we don't see her face and we don't hear her story —* (Grant, 2016)

There's a cultural expectation when envisioning a sex worker, but the workers I met defied this image time and time again. Edward's blue eyes reflect the glowing screen of his phone as he scrolls though his messages. Leaning back in a black leather computer chair, he flips the phone over on his desktop and rolls his eyes, sighing. "I wouldn't know how to do this job without an iPhone," he says with a thick German accent. He's sitting at his bedroom desk, with the sleeves of his black hoodie pushed halfway up his forearms as he rakes his fingers through his hair, pulling it towards the ceiling. I notice that Edward and I look strikingly similar, which was unexpected. His hair was carefully coiffed skyward to make it look like he had just woken up and a black band t-shirt peaked out from behind the silver zipper of his sweatshirt. We were both tall and thin with similar hair and clothes similar features, With the exception of his thick horn-rimmed glasses we looked as if we were attempting to pass as the other's alter ego. Edward laughs and lets out a low groan:

> Oh my god, this is such a lecture-y speech.…I don't want to make a big sweeping statement about how sex work has changed because in many ways it hasn't, but it does seem that certain populations of people, who maybe wouldn't stand on a street corner for various reasons, are now more able to dabble in forms of sex work that they otherwise wouldn't. The fact [that] I can sit at home and send out an email or text and post online, which is essentially a public forum, where I can get anybody to find me, is an incredible time saver and saves me from leaving my house and prevents a lot of potential risk associated with street-based work.…Sex workers have always been on the forefront of modern technology. They're usually first to adopt anything and use it to protect themselves, to advertise, to whatever, for safety and for business.

This study examines how some sex workers use the Internet to do their jobs, and how new technology has affected different areas of their lives: how participants came to enter sex work, how they create and shape identities in real and digital spaces, and how they perceive and respond to on-the-job risks. The digital model of sex work concerns itself with contexts rather than categories; focusing on the role of technology in the facilitation of sex work. Previous models of sex work tend to highlight covariates with involvement of sex work (drug abuse/"survival" sex work) or taxonomies (escorts/strippers/dominatrices/etc.). In contrast, the digital model of sex work highlights three crucial elements that describe the process of sex work rather than its contents.

First, an early adoption of technology to aid in information gathering, a nascent sense of community membership, and a tool for introduction and communication with both prospective clients and other providers. Second, born from this burgeoning adoption of technology is a dual sense of both strict independence and broad community membership. Workers spoke often of the importance of self-management and its accompanying agency but were also quick to note their inclusion in a sex worker community for which they had strong support.

Lastly, the digital model of sex work requires the creation of an authentic digital self. Echoing the work of both Bernstein (2007) and Belk (2013), providers strive to create a work persona that exists in digital (and often real) spaces, and the key factor of their work persona is its ability to convey authenticity. These identities are seen in the stories of providers explaining the "Girlfriend Experience," and how these experiences transcend commercial exchanges and continue into the digital realm. These three themes were present throughout the discussions with providers, their entrance, daily work

routines and the creation of work personas, their security measures, and the perception of risks associated with their work all echoed that the digital model is a new way to perceive sex work.

The workers in this study were overwhelmingly female, white and middle class with a median age of 28. As Edward notes, this group represents a traditionally understudied population of people involved in a diverse type of work. As an overarching term, "sex work" encompasses a variety of activities including, but not limited to: escorting, dominatrixing, web-camming, fetish photography, stripping, and burlesque. All of these types share a consistent theme. The exchange of value (most commonly money but including gifts and services) for some form of sexual gratification (both "in-person" and now "digital"). This is necessarily a very broad definition of sex work and includes both legal and illegal activities. However, though the work can be delivered in a variety of ways, workers who utilize the Internet described similar processes concerning their entrance, the management of their identities, business and security concerns.

This investigation explores the contours of digital sex work, utilizing the experiences of a range of digital providers to argue that the Internet has created substantial changes to the organization of, incentives for, and challenges associated with sex work for those who rely on it for their work. When participants told their stories of entrance, most recounted considering that sex work could either be a valid career choice or saw it as a solution to sustaining their quality of life. Often the workers wanted to discuss how their privilege gave them more options when they were presented with turning points in their lives (Sampson & Laub, 1993) and how the Internet played a role in both introducing and informing them on how to reduce their risks and enter sex work safely. Once participants

began to work, their realization of how most workers spent their time and effort came as a surprise. Many of the workers in the study described a job that was heavy on emotional labor (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1979), primarily consisting making clients comfortable, and generally providing a "girlfriend experience," within the confines of these domestic vignettes (Bernstein, 2007).

Workers in the study carried these same privileges into the parts of sex work that we so often hear are dangerous, namely meeting and interacting with clients. Participants often described how sex work is supposed to be dangerous, but their position in society combined with new technologies kept them safer, at least to a level most found reasonable. Workers described being able to "screen out" possible problems, regardless of the type of work people described. The use of technology put more autonomy in the hands of the workers and was credited for improving their lives and work. Taken together, these factors describe a new model of digital sex work that is substantively different from the previous indoor/outdoor dichotomy that has dominated sex work scholarship since the mid-twentieth century.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Internet technology has fundamentally altered human society. A myriad of research shows how access and usage of Internet technology is not merely giving humans more options in the ways they interact both personally and professionally, but that the Internet is a critical part of participating in modern human society (Joyce, 2015; Milman, 2013). For example, a poll conducted by the BBC found that four out of five people consider access to the Internet a fundamental human right (BBC News, 2010). This

decisive shift also has affected the lives and working conditions of many sex workers.

Scholars have noted that beginning in the 1970s, modern sex work made a gradual

movement from street level to "indoor" sex work (Bernstein, 2007; Chapkis, 1996).

Indoor sex work refers to any kind of sex work where the solicitation of services is done

away from the public (i.e. via printed ads or more recently virtual gathering places) and

services are provided behind closed doors, in private as opposed to public spaces. This

definition can include, but isn't limited to: sex workers in brothels, both managed or

shared; independent workers who work alone from their own homes or private spaces;

and dominatrices whose work can more accurately be described as "gray market"

(Pitcher, 2015; Schreter, Jewers, & Sastrawidjaja, 2007; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy,

2005). The vast majority of recent sex work literature views the inclusion of Internet

technology in a sex worker's daily business as merely an extension of the "indoor model"

(Bernstein, 2007; Jones, 2015; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005). Instead, this study

presents a new model of sex work, arguing that the use of Internet technology has not

only changed how sex workers go about their daily business, but has replaced the

traditional social structures of sex work for those who utilize it. The Internet represents

new means used to enter into sex work, advertise services, communicate with clientele,

mediate personal and professional identities, build community with other workers, and

suggest best practices for security. This is a fundamentally different approach to the

selling of sexual gratification.

Considering Internet technology as just a new facet of the existing "indoor" sex

work paradigm may be short-sighted. Accordingly, I move beyond considering usage of

Internet technology simply as a means for facilitating indoor sex work and present it as a

criterion for admission into a wholly new realm of sex work that offers its occupants increased agency and access to new social structures to address the population's needs and concerns. Though current research has begun to discuss the important role Internet technology plays in the evolution of sex work (Panchanadeswaran, Unnithan, Chacko, Brazda, & Kuruppu, 2017), its effects could easily be described as a "tacit cultural theme" (Spradley, 1979), since its adoption has been folded so seamlessly into normative culture. The heavy amount of social stigma that accompanies sex work (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Hammond, 2014; Koken, 2012; Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016; Swendeman, et al., 2015) makes the adoption of these new technologies a key feature in the creation of a new model of sex work where technology is an integral factor to the entrance, facilitation and security of providers.

1.3. STUDY OBJECTIVES

The current social and legal climate surrounding sex work in a variety of cultures has necessitated the creation and perpetuation of a new Internet-based work model. Data for this study were collected from a variety of workers providing a range of sexual services, with the common theme of utilizing technology to do so. I conducted the research in order to investigate different ways technology has influenced the ways sexual service providers work and communicate in both professional and personal settings.

There is evidence that entrance into sex work has dramatically changed, at least for some. Prior research has focused on the influence of intimate partners (Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007), drug abuse (Clarke, Clarke, Roe-Sepowitz, & Fey, 2012), trafficking (Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2017), or sex workers' attempts to

escape negative factors in their own lives and backgrounds (Silbert & Pines., 1982). By contrast, this study will focus on the new role the Internet is playing in information sharing between potential workers and their entrance into the field. Of course, people's individual journeys are complex with a variety of influences, but the use of the Internet as an information-sharing tool is a new and important method of facilitating entrance into sex work and providing a safe environment to conduct business.

The management of social identities, both personal and professional, is a rarer research topic among sex workers. This may result from a long history of sex work research focused primarily on the margins of the industry and among the most desperate of workers: runaways, throwaways, and drug users. More recent work on indoor sex work demonstrates that, like any other workers, sex workers have rich, complex lives and that work-life balance is important to their stability and safety. Previous research into the different roles and identities workers utilize showed a form of "bounded authenticity" wherein the exchanges with clients that took place were not insincere or impersonal, but had very specific limits on time and access to the various parts of workers' lives (Bernstein, 2007). Workers compartmentalize these different aspects of their lives for various reasons, but protection both on a physical (Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016) and emotional (Abe, 2011) level are some of the primary motivations scholars have investigated. This study will examine how digital workers use Internet technology to choose how much (if any) of their various professional and personal to compartmentalize, the effectiveness of these strategies, and what new concerns are couched in the increased connectivity the Internet provides.

Security, and more specifically sex workers' exposure to the risk of violence, has been thoroughly researched in the past half century. Similar to entrance into sex work, scholars have examined the risk of violence and personal security from various perspectives. Specifically, these scholars have examined violence risk factors and their relationship to the legal status of sex work, police enforcement strategies (Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005), pimps and traffickers (Comte, 2014) and even spatial awareness and its relationship to high-risk situations (Orchard, Vale, Macphail, Wender, & Oiamo, 2016). This study will distinguish itself from previous analyses by examining how the new Internet-based model is a preventative model, tempering risks of violence by establishing new screening methods and broader information sharing among sex work community members.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Using a sample of a wide variety of digital sex workers from several different western countries, this research will investigate four crucial ways this unique group applies technology to different facets of their work, while considering how their social positions and contexts shape their access to and experience of sex work.

- First, how did participants enter sex work and what role, if any, did the Internet play in their entrance process?
- Second, what role does the Internet play in the construction of work identities and the extension of emotional labor into a digital sphere?

- Third, how do workers perceive risk compared to the overarching cultural expectation of sex worker risk? And what role does the Internet play, if any, in identifying and addressing the perceived risks of workers?

- Lastly, how do workers address security concerns, given the contexts of racial and social privileges and utilization of new technologies?

1.5. RESEARCH METHODS

While there is a large body of extant research on sex work, this project moves away from the "traditional" arguments of legality, deviance, and public health and instead focuses on work processes of providers by using qualitative research methods to investigates how they use new technologies to create new systems and structures to aid in entrance and address issues in their work. Data was gathered through 50 in-depth interviews with a sample of sex workers from a number of English-speaking nations, all of whom rely on Internet technology for their work. I identified study participants using snowball sampling methods and conducted the interviews using a semi-structured interview guide that included questions pertaining to how they entered sex work, the daily processes of their work life, and the broader implications of sex work in both society and their personal lives. I explain the research methods in detail in Chapter 3.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research joins a growing catalog of scholarship examining the changing social and technological landscape of sex work. By and large, sex work research has focused on vulnerable and marginalized populations, examining their interaction with the

criminal justice system, or looking at public health and harm reduction policies. Research on the normative aspects of sex work has been somewhat scant, and examining the impact of technology on the way workers construct new tools and systems to address long-standing issues is valuable in order to develop future-facing models.

The white, middle-class workers interview described very different work processes than have previously been studied, largely because of the introduction of the Internet to the work paradigm. The introduction of this new Internet-based model indicates that people enter sex work for a variety of reasons and use technology to facilitate work identities and personas. In keeping with Goffman's (1956) classic work on identity, workers play a variety of roles in their everyday lives. Understanding how the use of Internet technology gives workers options for moderating the interaction between their work and personal identities is key to understanding the complex relationship sex workers have with the Internet. Part of the role of work identities and personas is to offer workers a level of anonymity when interacting with clients to help ensure their own safety and security.

This new Internet model of sex work provides participants with tools to learn the best ways to provide for their own security through new systems of information gathering. Workers interact with online communities that offer safe havens to new workers and experienced professionals alike. These communities offer information and advice free of persistent social alienation and stigmatization. Workers as a group recognize limited access to conventional social resources because of both legality and stigma, adopt new technology to circumvent traditional social problems, and either prevent such problems or fashion a new informal/subcultural response.

1.7. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

When participants discuss their work, they use several argots and acronyms specific to their subculture. Understanding the definitions of these terms is crucial to understanding the world sex workers inhabit. Even the term "sex worker" is often misrepresented in broader culture to only include workers who have physical contact with clients. Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has utilized a very broad definition for sex work specifically in order to create an inclusive term that encompasses the wide variety of activities involved in sex work.

- *Sex Work.* "Sex work is the provision of sexual services for money or goods" (Overs, 2002, p. 2).
- *Sex Worker/Provider. "*Sex workers are women, men, and [transgender] people who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, and who consciously define those activities as income generating even if they do not consider sex work as their occupation." (Overs, 2002, p. 2).
- *Oppression Paradigm.* The view that sex work is an expression of patriarchal gender relationships and male domination. By its very existence, sex work both predicates and reinforces socio-structural inequalities both instrumentally and symbolically (Weitzer, 2011).
- *Empowerment Paradigm.* This view highlights both the human agency involved in sex work as well as focusing on sex work as a type of work that is equivalent to other service work, such as physical or psychological therapy. It emphasizes that workers engage in sex work for a variety of reasons, including personal choice, satisfaction, and "a vision of sex freed from the constraints of love, commitment,

and convention." (Chapkis, 1996; Weitzer, 2011).

- *Polymorphous Paradigm.* This view "[i]dentifies the constellation of occupational arrangements, power relationships, and participants' experiences….[R]ather than painting prostitution with a broad brush, [it] can identify those structural arrangements that have negative effects and bolster those associated with more positive outcomes" (Weitzer, 2011).

- *Culture:* There have been numerous definitions of culture throughout the social sciences, all focusing on different aspects of the various subtle semantic features of culture. Tylor's (1871) definition is the oldest and most pervasive: "[The] complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [humans] as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of [human] kind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action" (p. 1). Harris (1968) chose to focus on how these cultural definitions transmit into behavior: "The culture concept comes down to behavior patterns associated with particular groups of people, that is to 'customs,' or to a people's 'way of life'" (p. 16). For the purposes of this study, Spradley (1979) focuses on the perception and interpretation of cultural knowledge: "The acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior" (p. 5).

- *Indoor Sex Work.* Any kind of sex work where solicitation and the conducting of business is out of public view, as opposed to "outdoor sex work." This definition includes workers who conduct business in brothels (official or makeshift),

independent and shared residences, as well as strippers and dominatrices whose services may potentially be defined as "sexual conduct." (Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005, p. 9).

- *Outdoor/Street-Level Sex Work:* Work where all or part of the transaction between client and provider happens in a public space. Outdoor sex work is not advertised, but rather the area is known to be frequented by workers and clients (Tampep, 2017, p. 1).

- *Digital Sex Work (DSW):* A more elusive term that refers to work that includes communication, advertisement, security, and/or content creation involving access to and usage of the Internet to help clients and providers interact (Jones, 2015).

- *Sext:* Erotic text communications on either messaging apps or mobile devices.

- *Vanilla:* A multi-use term that refers to elements within normative society and often (but not always) opposed to sex work and broader erotic culture. A "vanilla job" is socially legitimate work outside of sex work. "Vanilla sex" refers to traditional monogamous sex with no particularly exciting or interesting elements.

- *Girlfriend Experience (GFE):* Refers to encounters that include features of non-commercial relationships, mimicking a "conventional" dating relationship. Bernstein (2007) argues that these relationships provide "bounded authenticity" within an "emotionally bounded erotic exchange" (p. 197; Milrod & Monto, 2017).

- *Bareback Blowjob (BBBJ):* Fellatio without any fluid barrier. A common service referenced by workers as an example of a contentious point in business. Often

clients desire this particular service, but workers must decide whether it is
something they are willing to offer.

- *Webcam Performers:* Workers who utilize "hosting sites" that provide public
  chatrooms wherein often a tipping system operates. "Here, payment is voluntary,
  and performers are tipped for performing sexual and non-sexual acts…. In private
  chat rooms, performers are paid by the minute for a private show. Here, the
  customer can make requests for specific sexual acts to be performed. Unlike the
  public chat rooms, these performances tend to be highly pornographic. In both
  public and private shows, performances can be highly interactive. Performers and
  customers are able to communicate with each other using keyboard, speech and
  two-way cameras" (Stuart, 2016, p.2).

- *BDSM/Dominatrix:* Stands for "Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, and Masochism."
  Dominatrices, also called "mistresses," are workers who participate as the
  "dominant" partners in a variety of sadomasochistic and fetishistic scenarios in
  exchange for payment. Clients are often referred to as "submissives," "subs," or
  "slaves." "Professional dominatrices also refer to their interactions with their
  clients as 'sessions.' In contrast to commercial sessions, unpaid BDSM practices
  are referred to as 'lifestyle practices'" (Lindemann, 2013, p. 170).

- *Fetish Modeling:* Models provide content (photographs, video, live "scenes") to
  individual fetishists or specific groups who rely on specific fetishized objects or
  scenarios to achieve arousal and gratification. Previous research has suggested
  that models act primarily as facilitators by providing fetish-specific content even

though in some cases the models do not find the material particularly arousing

and/or gratifying (O'Donnell, 1999).

- *Blacklist/Review Sites:* Two digital resources used often by workers. These are websites, usually with a subscription fee, that either report the vital information of dangerous or troublesome clients (blacklist sites), or websites that have profiles for both workers and providers in which each can be rated based upon the quality of the interaction (review sites).

- *Time Wasters:* Potential clients who appear viable upon first interaction only to be deemed unsuitable when they fail to schedule or appear at an appointment, attempt to elicit free services, or refuse to cease contact once they have been rejected. Time wasters consume worker resources with no remuneration.

1.8. LIMITATIONS

This study provides an important look at a unique group of sex workers. It should

be noted that the generalizability of this research is somewhat limited because of the

small sample size and concerns about potential biases that can result from snowball

sampling (van Meter, 1990). Contrary to the majority of extant research, the sample

compiled for this study is overwhelmingly white and middle class, with a median age of

28. Therefore, it is difficult to say if these observations would also apply to those who do

not fall into those strict demographic parameters. Research on middle class sex workers is

rare, and they present a group of people whose privileged social positions create a

striking contrast to the existing research and an uncommon lens through which to view

issues around entrance, identity, risks and security. The social positioning of the sample

does highlight a limitation: differentiating advantages created by technology as compared to those gained via privilege. However, the analysis chapters tended to focus on the processes of providers and their close relationship to technology. Though workers in this sample may have been more willing to take risks involving sex work because of privilege, most of them attributed the specific techniques that made sex work viable to technology.

Furthermore, the majority of sample participants are women. Though this is consistent with the majority of sex worker research, the life experiences of both transgender and male sex workers should not be discounted; they represent a hidden subpopulation in the broader veiled world of sexual commerce. Nonetheless, Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that generalizability is not the most suitable metric for evaluating research of this type. They instead propose the metric of *transferability*, which requires detailed description in order to apply conclusions to other times, settings, situations and people. This study provides a detailed analysis of a unique type of sex work that can be compared across cases and is an important stepping-stone to broader applicability. The current investigation emphasizes the importance of Internet technology and the new advantages and vulnerabilities it can create, a topic that warrants future study and bolsters this work's applicability.

1.9. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

In the following chapter (Chapter 2), I will present the extant literature on sex work and its division into four distinct theoretical and historical paradigms that reflect both the technological and social advancements of the prevailing culture that have driven

previous scholarship. This includes: two early paradigms (oppression and empowerment) and two more recent paradigms, including an integrated approach conceived by Weitzer (2011) and an atheoretical approach to sex worker research focused on public health. Each paradigm coincides with technological advancements of their times that frame how both society and scholarship view sex work in the present day. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the research methods and discusses the study setting, including the participants' ability to find and utilize Internet-based sex worker resources.

The Internet was an indispensable tool in the data collection for this study. The vast majority of participants were interviewed over web-based video chat programs and their ability to screen my identity, schedule the interview, and give answers to questions in real time from different locations across the globe is a prominent feature of the research setting. Chapter 3 also describes in detail the methodological framework of the research, including a description of the Internet as a unique study setting, the challenges of gaining entry into a hidden and marginalized population, and a discussion on the grounded theory analysis across the four themes of entrance, workplace identity, risks and security. Chapters 4 through 7 present the study findings for these four themes. Chapter 4 examines entrance into sex work and specifically the racial and cultural contexts and turning points that surround participants' decisions, and the use of the Internet to learn specific techniques for entrance. Chapter 5 explores the role of emotional labor in shaping identity, and the role the Internet plays in constructing bounded intimacy with clients. Chapter 6 describes the security process of screening, wherein workers gather information online about prospective clients to assess their safety and suitability. Chapter 7 investigates how workers perceive risk and the role privilege plays in

contrasting risks with the broader cultural view of the dangers of sex work. Chapter 8 will

conclude with the theoretical implications of the research, along with recommendations

for policy and future opportunities to further scholarship.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Lalun is a member of the most ancient profession in the world. - (Kipling, 1898, p. 1).

Kipling's often misquoted opening lines from his short story *On the City Wall* have become a familiar trope when discussing sex work (Lister, 2017). "The world's oldest profession" is part of the vocabulary of sex work research, but rarely is the passage that follows considered: "In the West, people say rude things about Lalun's profession, and write lectures about it, and distribute the lectures to young persons in order that Morality may be preserved" (Kipling, 1898, p. 1). Sex work, and by extension its research, cannot be separated from the society inhabited by sex workers and researchers, nor the culture that surrounds them.

Most research on sex work falls broadly into four paradigms that roughly coincide with specific historical periods. Each has a unique view of the cultural and scholarly framework that is used to make sense of the emergence and persistence of sex work in society. Traditionally, research has used an oppression paradigm that focuses on the coercions and exploitation of a patriarchal society. Later, the empowerment paradigm emerged as a counterpoint. Here, researchers and activists claim workers can choose to do sex work freely and that choice is an act of defiance against said patriarchal society. Most recently, two additional paradigms have surfaced. The first, the polymorphous paradigm conceived by Weitzer (2007; 2010; 2011) suggests researchers narrow their gaze to account for individualistic issues across the sex work subculture. The final paradigm is a type of "non-theoretical" paradigm that chooses not to place any deviant or normative labels on sex work and instead attempts to examine health risks, working

conditions, and situational factors from a theoretical, most often public health, perspective.

To say these four historic paradigms represent the entire evolution of sex work would be reductive. Sex work has never been a monolith and when both culture and scholarship focus on specific aspects of the work, it is a declaration of society's predominant view, not a description of reality per se. To say that this sample of contemporary workers who use the Internet represent a progression from street level work to their current position would deny the history of privileged classes engaging in sex work. Courtesans and "kept women" throughout history have used race, class and technology to aid in their work (Dalby, 1995). Instead, sex work should be considered as a social exchange, which includes a variety of workers from different backgrounds, the varying levels of public and private displays, and the early adoption of technologies, rather than a categorization of their type of work.

Instead, paradigms should be understood as an attempt to place certain kinds of sex work within the cultural contexts of its time and place. Kuhn (1962) notes that though recognizing paradigms as frames for the production of knowledge is important, they do not necessarily result in a greater truth. "We may…have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth" (p.170). Instead, the four paradigms of sex work must be better understood as lenses that focus on what society, in its time and place, deems worthy of study and how.

2.2. THE FOUR PARADIGMS

Discussing the various paradigms used to frame sex work requires a clear understanding of how these paradigms come into existence. Significant differences in fundamental terminology and methodological presuppositions can lead to drastically different conclusions about strikingly similar situations. In his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn presents the idea of paradigms. Paradigms are the framing devices used to attract and retain "an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity… [and are] sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve" (1962, p.10). This initial definition, while sufficient to explain why different researchers align themselves with similar ideas, does not explain how a paradigm differs from a scientific community and how the complexity of different paradigms can elicit a variety of conclusions to similar research questions. Kuhn's initial definition was met with the criticism that it was difficult to differentiate a paradigm from a scientific community of study with shared definitions and methods. In response, in 1974 he sought to hone his concept of paradigms to include more concrete parameters.

Though closely related to scientific communities, paradigms contain three crucial elements that help frame scientific inquiry. Kuhn labeled these elements the "disciplinary matrix," which when combined form a paradigm. The disciplinary matrix includes: *symbolic generalizations* (expressions, terms, and components of the discipline), *models* (examples, heuristics, and more simply, methodologies to guide inquiry) and *exemplars* (concrete solutions to identified problems within the discipline) (Kuhn, 1974). Each of the four sex work paradigms discussed in this chapter can be better understood through

this lens of a disciplinary matrix. Each paradigm uses different terminologies to define the issues of sex work, a variety of appropriate methodologies to make observations, and an array of solutions to address perceived problems.

Most of the participants in this study detailed experiences that are very different from the overarching cultural narratives about sex work. The "traditional" narrative that sex work falls along a series of strict dichotomies: wholly oppressive or empowering; collective or individualistic; deterministic or agentic, was replaced by descriptions of complex dualities that showed sex work could be all of these things, and none of them simultaneously, all facilitated by the use of technology. In order to understand this research study, there must be a keen awareness of the way society has historically viewed sex work - often too narrowly within the framework of scientific paradigms - so that the counterpoint of the new digital model of sex work can be fully contextualized.

2.3. THE OPPRESSION PARADIGM

The essence of oppression is that one is defined from the outside by those who define themselves as superior by criteria of their own choice. — (Dworkin, 1979, p. 149)

2.3.1. HISTORY

The earliest practice of social science research around sex work began in the mid-1800s, with the early versions of social workers attempting to protect women from men's sexual aggression because society had no place for women who had "fallen from grace" (Boyer, 1992; Rothman, 1980; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). These earliest researchers rejected the liberal ideas of sexual freedom in lieu of religious dogma. The earliest research precluded the voices of sex workers and obfuscated the possibility of discussion and analysis of the agency and choice of engaging in sex work (Sloan & Wahab, 2000),

instead favoring the immutability of prostitution's moral corruption. In Clarkson's early examination of the history of prostitution, his first sentence describes prostitution as an important problem for modern society (1939, p. 296). Whereas Sanger, in his extensive global survey, bluntly begins with the premise that prostitution is an "evil…so notorious that none can possibly gainsay it" (1858, p. 17). Historic research into sex work was entrenched in its own cultural conceptions of the meaning and morality of sex. When Spanish Conquistadors translated the Aztec word 'ahuienime' as 'prostitute' or 'whore' (Campbell 1985, Lister 2017), the translation mischaracterized the ahuienime as sinful people, rather than as "bringers of joy" as the Aztecs saw them (Lister, 2017).

In these earliest attempts at research, the prescribed models were short on empiricism, but this did not keep the scholars of the time from recognizing the importance of investigating sex work. Sanger notes: "The day has arrived when the shroud must be removed; when the public safety imperiously demands an investigation into the matter" (1858, p. 18). However, even he notes the social climate of the time period and its relationship to the accurate communication of scholarship. Simply put, the earliest research into sex work was limited by the polite social standards of the time, "the world decided it an outrage against propriety to inquire into a vice which many secretly practice, but all publicly condemn" (Sanger, 1858, p. 21). Because of the limitations of propriety, these early works are limited to historical surveys or official responses from the men who deal with prostitutes in some officious manner (i.e. police officers, physicians, charity workers) (Clarkson, 1939; Lister, 2017; Sanger, 1858).

Historic research into sex work began by polarizing the discussions into concepts of individual/social and agency/determinism. The moral panic of white slavery in the late

1800s was used readily and frequently to depict the cultural transmission of sex work. The prevailing narrative was that the women who entered and continued in sex work were being trafficked against their will. Sex slavery at the turn of the 20th century was aided by the advent of the automobile, being perhaps the first parallel between advancements in modern technology and the proliferation of sex work. The passage of the Mann Act in 1910 hoped to ensure the protection of white women from sexual and commercial exploitation by making it illegal to transport women across state lines for the purposes of prostitution or debauchery.

Because the Mann Act was a federal law it had to be bolstered by similar state-level laws to ensure the presumed safety of workers and clients. These state-level laws that followed the Mann Act were the first policy efforts to frame prostitution as a public health issue. These laws received considerable pushback from American feminists who replicated the activism of the British feminist Josephine Butler, who had seen considerable success fighting the mandated medical examinations for proposed sex workers in Britain (Bindel, 2017; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Cree, 1995; Pheterson, 1989; Roberts, 1992; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Butler and her American counterparts argued that these compulsory medical examinations maintained a double standard that held sex workers but not clients culpable for disease transmission (Hobson, 1990; Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

By the beginning of the 20th century a second wave of anti-prostitution activists had appeared. However, rather than viewing prostitutes as unwitting victims of white slavery, sex work was viewed as a "social evil" (Addams, 1912; Sloan & Wahab, 2000), where the influence of society made women unable to rescue themselves. In this new

symbolic generalization of sex work the determinism of society was so pervasive that prostitution was seen as a social fact, not unlike Durkheim's studies on suicide, and sex work would eventually be phased out as society became increasingly moral. Addams represents one of the first important framers of the cultural transmission of sex work as a social entity, not merely as a personal moral failing or victimization of male sexual aggression (Addams, 1912; Durkheim, 2005; Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

Following World War I social workers moved from being loosely associated with Christian and church-based outreach and charity programs to become more bureaucratic by centralizing management around state and local government. Though religious charity workers and state social workers could often be at odds over ideological differences, the process of providing aid to sex workers was basically the same. Social workers used therapy and case work, whereas evangelicals favored religion. However, it's important to note that both groups focused on the individual, preferring to attempt to eliminate sex work one woman at a time (Boyer, 1978; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). This individual but disempowering approach would dominate the discourse on sex work for the next 40 years. The research of this time was furthered almost exclusively by psychiatrists, who were attempting to explain what kind of personality and character traits in individuals led to participation in sex work (Hobson, 1987; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). It is at this point that we can already see the different dichotomies that make up the symbolic generalizations of the sex work paradigms.

It was during the protests of the 1960s and 1970s that sex work re-emerged as a social and political cause and the oppression paradigm used its roots in historic research to become the predominant lens through which to view modern sex work. In 1979, Barry

took up the mantle of Addams (1912) and refocused the symbolic generalizations of sex work away from individual characteristics and their association with psychological and personality traits. Barry instead focused on the economic exploitation of women as the main social influence in participation in "female sexual slavery" and the inexorable link between the overarching patriarchal structures and sex work perpetuation (Barry, 1984; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Decker, 1979; MacKinnon, 1985; Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

2.3.2. SEX WORK AS OPPRESSION

As sex work research moved into the mid-twentieth century, prominent radical feminists led the discussion on sex work and its relationship to broader society (Barry, 1984; Farley, 2004; MacKinnon, 1985; Pateman, 1988; Weitzer, 2011; Wynter, 1987). The oppression paradigm is grounded in the idea that any objectification of women, either through speech or action, is to be proscribed. The paradigm's symbolic generalizations shifted slightly to focus public discourse and research on the sociological and economic effects of sex work and its assumed exploitation while remaining firmly planted in the notion that sex work is a social malady. Abolitionists oppose the "lies" that sex work can be work; that there is room for choice; that there are substantive differences between trafficking, "outdoor," and "indoor" sex work; that sex work is a victimless crime; or paradoxically, that it is a crime perpetrated by women (Wynter, 1987). The technological advancements of the mid-twentieth century also readily illustrated these objectifications. Commercial improvements in film and video saw an increase in the production and distribution of pornography, which brought the specter of sex work off the street and into the homes of citizens (Barss, 2010).

Abolitionists argue that the objectification of women reinforces the patriarchy's oppression of women through two primary mechanisms associated with sex work. First, they argue, objectification normalizes sexual abuses early and often, which reinforces the concept that women are sexual objects to be enjoyed by men. Second, it maintains women in conditions of poverty (Comte, 2014). Only through the rejection of all objectification can we build a society where all genders and sexualities are deemed equal subjects and not objects to be used by men in a dominant patriarchal system. Abolitionists assert that sex work is rife with abuses introduced to women early in their "careers" via pimps and procurers (Comte, 2014), that sex work is better understood as domestic violence than work (Farley, 2004), and that it is ostensibly paid rape (Raymond, 1995) or sexual commerce (including trafficking and pornography) that meets the legal criteria for torture (Farley, 2004; Weitzer, 2012).

"Prostitution is rape that's paid for" is a phrase coined by Janice Raymond in an editorial for the *Los Angeles Times* (1995). The phrase is grounded in the idea that sex work is an exchange of power. This exchange is most often from men to women, occasionally men to other men, but always in one direction; flowing from rights and privileges granted to men in a patriarchal system downwards to those being oppressed by this system. In this scheme women are reduced to merely their sex, which can be bought and sold, in turn dehumanizing them (Barry 1984; Comte, 2014; Dworkin 1979, 1993; Jeffreys, 2004; MacKinnon 1985).

The concept of a fundamental economic inequality at the heart of the patriarchy is a crucial point of the oppression paradigm. Abolitionists reject that "women freely choose prostitution from a whole array of economic alternatives that exist under civil

equity," (Sloan & Wahab, 2000; Wynter, 1987, p. 269). Instead, they insist that in the United States women live under an ever-present civil inequality that deterministically shapes choices, especially when it comes to work done out of desperation. The patriarchy is based heavily on the tenets of capitalism: in a capitalist system, workers are merely extensions of their means of production and become increasingly alienated and unable to refuse labor, becoming inexorably tied to their job to survive. This concept is recognizable to anyone with a familiarity of Marxist philosophy. In this conception both wage laborers and sex workers are commoditized (Overall, 1992; Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

In Wynter's (1987) writing on WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged)[1], she notes that men have promoted the idea that women often seek out sex work as an economic alternative to less desirable lower paying labor, but inherent in this idea are the initial social conditions that exist to ensure inequality and women's vulnerability to prostitution. Wynter argues that the same inherent social preconceptions that produce biased conclusions about why women do not report rape, or why battered women stay with abusive spouses, are one in the same with the rationale for why women turn to, or are coerced into, sex work. Though men may argue that women should not be denied the opportunity to earn a remunerative wage, it is the job of feminists to stand up and condemn sexual exploitation and instead focus on the origin of economic inequality, which is gendered in nature. These inequalities arise from both the political left and the right. The right upholds male hierarchies by defending the subordination of women in the form of marriage, whereas the left is guilty of the same support through the institutions of prostitution and pornography (Wynter, 1987).

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[1] WHISPER became the organization "Breaking Free" in 1996.

Pateman's (1988) influential work *The Sexual Contract* lays the philosophical groundwork for the modern abolitionist movement while skillfully articulating the oppression paradigm's symbolic generalizations. She states that men's "right to access" is a fundamental function of the "sexual contract" in a patriarchal society and that prostitution is an overt expression of this right. In Pateman's view, society is predicated upon the well-known social contract, but that this contract establishes benefits, both as signatories and beneficiaries, only to men. Therefore, the sale of female bodies is both a tacit confirmation and public affirmation of the existence of the sexual contract. Therefore, the mere existence of sex work in any and in all forms is a fundamental harm to women and any efforts to improve the safety, health, satisfaction, or agency of people in the sex work industry is futile since it will not address the gender inequality inherent in a patriarchal system (Pateman, 1988; Weitzer, 2011). Furthermore, since societal inequalities are manifest in all forms of sexual commerce, the very concept of "sound prostitution" (a term coined by Ericsson in 1980 to describe an ethically viable form of sex work) must be rejected. By defining sex work in this broader philosophical sense, the language and terminology associated with sex work must be changed to convey the victimization, dehumanization, commodification, and fetishization of women, in an ontological sense, across all forms and functions of sex work (Dworkin, 1997; Farley, 2004). In the oppression paradigm, it becomes appropriate to cast sex workers as "sex slaves" or "prostituted women," reifying the social foundations of victimization and disavowing the personal agency of workers. It is something that happens to women (Raymond, 2004).

Following the reshaping of the symbolic generalizations of the oppression

paradigm, the methods of researching sex work were also reframed. Though much like

the symbolic generalizations these research methods were simply a refocusing of the

existing historical paradigm. Similar to the early research by Addams, Clarkson, and

Sanger, current sex workers were left out of the research population in lieu of previous

workers who had exited sex work and were identified, either personally or scholastically,

as "victims." Tellingly, when Margo St. James, founder of COYOTE (Call Off Your Old

Tired Ethics; the earliest pro-prostitution advocacy group), requested to debate influential

abolitionist Kathleen Barry at a conference on human trafficking in 1983, she was

informed that Barry believed it would be "inappropriate to discuss sexual slavery with

prostitute women" (Grant, 2014). This response is not dissimilar to Sanger's initial

concerns over "propriety." The exclusion of active sex workers in abolitionist research

and advocacy is still a prevalent feature, the rationale being that sex workers in the midst

of working cannot fully grasp the depths of their exploitation:

> When I was in prostitution I would always say, 'I'm fine I love what I do'. I had
> to, or I would have gone mad….It is only when we get out, if we are lucky
> enough to get out alive, we can admit the hell, the horror of what was happening
> to us (Bindel, 2017, p. 7).

In Barry's foundational modern abolitionist study *Female Sexual Slavery*, she spent four

years interviewing victims and drew several parallels between human trafficking and sex

work. From a theoretical perspective, Barry ardently contends that there is no difference

between sex trafficking and prostitution: "I found that street pimp strategies and goals do

not differ significantly from those of international procurers" (Barry, 1984, p. 7), and that

the differences between both were merely semantic in the form of crossing international

boundaries. The modes by which Barry identified potential research subjects and verified

their stories are laudable, going to great lengths to confirm the authenticity of the interviews she was performing. Nonetheless, in the research models prescribed by the oppression paradigm the omission of active sex workers from the sample population, in lieu of theorizing on social or legal implications, was not only acceptable, but ideal (Barry, 1984; Bindel, 2017; Dempsey, 2010; Farley, 2004).

Ultimately, Barry concluded that to research "female sexual slavery," a new frame of reference must be utilized to understand the concept of economy and its relationship to sexual domination. Mirroring Pateman's (1988) theory, Barry found that economic exploitation sits at the center of the oppression of women, as its foundations are rooted in an unjust patriarchal system. Prostitution cannot be a successful economic alternative for impoverished women because pimps retain all of the money earned by prostitutes. Furthermore, prostitution is seen as the burden of poor women, yet Barry contends most pimps recruit runaways from middle-class homes. Also, women of color are disproportionately trapped in prostitution despite the fact that pimps recruit based on availability and customer demand. Finally, she argues that pimping originates in the ghetto despite that most men of color from the "ghetto" do not become pimps, not all pimps are men of color, and she concludes that "exploitation abuse and enslavement cannot be justified by someone's economic conditions" (Barry, 1984, p. 10).

Contemporary academics who ascribe to the oppression paradigm adopt that aging critical theory of feminism that views all sex work as abuse that upholds patriarchal gender roles and is exploitative in all of its arrangements (Bindel, 2017; Farley, 2004; Pateman, 1988; Weitzer, 2010). Once the oppression paradigm's symbolic generalizations and models are adopted, exemplars must be carefully constructed to

directly address the specific problems of sex work in society. The predominant

oppression paradigm exemplar aims to eliminate sex work entirely for the good of the

workers and society as a whole. Abolition scholars argue that as equality increases in the

west (and the United States specifically) growths in the sex industry are not because of

increased opportunity or voluntary sex workers' choices, but as a way to reify men's

superior position in society and nullify gains made by women (Comte, 2014; Jeffreys,

2004).

Farley contends that sex workers who see their work as empowering are playing

into the hands of their oppressors: "[S]ex workers are not subverting the conditions of

patriarchy, but are reinforcing them and, without intending to, colluding with their own

oppression and sexual objectification" (Smith, 2017, p. 346). The eradication of sex work

would be a blow to the overarching patriarchal social system and increase the value of

women in society since they would no longer be viewed as sex objects manipulated by

gendered power dynamics (Barry 1984, 1996; Comte, 2014; Dworkin 1979, 1993; Farley,

2004; MacKinnon 1985). Clearly, this goal is more difficult in practice than in theory,

and thus abolitionists overwhelmingly prefer what is called the so-called "Nordic model"

when asked for policy recommendations.

The "Nordic model" arose from a flurry of sex work legislation in Norway and

Sweden, beginning in the late 1990's. In 1998, Sweden became the first country to

criminalize the purchase of sex by customers as compared to the criminalization of

selling sex by providers. In subsequent years many countries have followed suit in

targeting clients, rather than workers. Legislatively the law came with a packet of other

concerns such as widening the definition of rape, increasing access to social services for

victims of domestic abuse, and an increase in severity in punishments for acts of genital

mutilation and other forms of sexual violence (Bernstein, 2007). However, even this

attempt at a more equitable legal response to sex work contains conspicuous misogyny in

the text of the bill, stating: "it is not reasonable to punish the person who sells a sexual

service. In the majority of cases at least, this person is a weaker partner who is exploited

by those who want only to satisfy their drives" (Bernstein, 2007, p. 149).

Within a decade Norway adopted legislation similar to Sweden's (Dempsey,

2010). Comparable laws were proposed in New Zealand in 2013 when the debates over

the existing 2003 legalization laws took place. Abolitionists argued that anything short of

full criminalization of all aspects of sex work simply enabled pimps and brothel owners

to gain legitimacy while preying on women. There was a petition to replace existing sex

work laws with the Nordic model. Abolition activists testified that the existing laws did

not work as intended, causing decreased rights and loss of power to women (Raymond,

2018). However, these efforts were countered by a collective of New Zealand prostitutes

(NZPC), who were concerned that criminalization would further stigmatize workers and

place them in added danger. This group of empowerment activists were interested in

policy decisions that protected the health of workers and reduced stigma, and voiced

concerns that these Nordic models were simply the same social controls in new

packaging (Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018).

2.4. THE EMPOWERMENT PARADIGM

To say that prostitution is intrinsically immoral is in a way to refuse to give any arguments. The moralist simply "senses" or "sees" its immorality and this terminates rational discussion at the point where it should begin — (Ericsson, 1980, p. 339)

Ericsson's "Charges Against Prostitution: A Philosophical Assessment" (1980), in the journal *Ethics,* attempts to make the distinction that many of the concerns with sex work are based on perceived morality. In order for empowerment paradigm proponents to counter the claims made by the oppression paradigm, the core concepts, preferred methodologies, and propose solutions must be redefined to not only address the perceptions of the researchers, activists, and theorists but to challenge societal norms about sexuality, gender, morality and most importantly, choice.

Similar to the oppression paradigm, the empowerment paradigm also recognizes an overarching and oppressive patriarchy. However, the empowerment paradigm sees sex work as an affront to this system , positing that women are striking a blow and choosing to upend power structures with their own affirmations of female sexuality. Weitzer (2011) asserts that the empowerment paradigm contains three common themes. First, empowerment research highlights the elements that qualify sex work as work. Second is the increased focus on human agency when workers choose to take part in sex work. Finally, empowerment research regularly emphasizes the potential for validation and empowerment of workers brought about by autonomy and choice.

2.4.1. SEX WORK AS CHOICE

By 1973, COYOTE was working feverishly to reframe the conversation around prostitution, which had traditionally carried with it a negative stigma of sin, crime, and illicit sex, and instead explored new terminology and concepts, categorizing sex as work, choice, and a civil rights issue (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Jenness, 1990; Weitzer, 1991). Soon, other groups began to form across the country, such as FLOP (Friends and Lovers of Prostitutes), HIRE (Hooking Is Real Employment), and PUMA (Prostitute

Union of Massachusetts Association) (Jenness, 2009). Empowerment activists of the time

rejected the word "prostitute" with its commensurate implications of shame, immorality,

and exclusion, and instead introduced the term "sex worker" to convey the idea that the

selling of sex was no better or worse than any other form of labor (Bernstein, 2007;

Kempadoo & Jo, 1998; Pheterson, 1996). Carol Leigh[2] introduced the term in the early

1980s. Leigh was attending a conference on prostitution. During the proceedings the

panelists used the term "sex use industry," which made Leigh uncomfortable, who stated,

"How could I sit amid other women as a political equal when I was being objectified like

that, described only as something used, obscuring my role as actor and agent in the

transaction?" (Leigh, 1997, p. 230). Leigh suggested the term sex worker, as it

"acknowledges the work we do rather than defines us by our status" (Leigh, 1997, p. 230;

Lister, 2017). The embracing of the term "sex work" marked the beginning of a

movement.

The empowerment paradigm contends that sex work is a re-appropriation of

(mostly) female sexuality, giving workers the power to do with their bodies as they

please (Chapkis, 1996; Delacoste, 2018; Jenness, 1990; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Weitzer,

2011). This new empowerment paradigm is rooted in Hobbesian contrarian theory,

predicating that choice is the crucial aspect to agency, and deterministic forces, though

limiting or increasing, are not the crucial factors in the social contract (Ericsson, 1980;

Hobbes, 1651). Based on this idea, this paradigm would argue that sex work is not

inherently exploitative, it is merely the lack of choice and the reduction of agency that

could make it morally questionable. Therefore, it would be easy to draw parallels to other

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[2] During her time as an empowerment activist Leigh was known as "The Scarlet Harlot."

kinds of service work, such as physical therapy, massage, or counseling; as long as agency is retained the work could be organized in such a way for the mutual benefit of everyone involved (Weitzer, 2011). Empowerment paradigm researchers symbolically generalize sex work as work first, separating it from its historical patriarchal exploitations or moral deviations. By contrast, abolitionists would claim that though the delivery mechanism for sex work may change, the underlying patriarchal system is what drives the market and therefore is immoral, or at the very least exploitative (MacKinnon, 1985). Despite the early attempts by empowerment activists and academics, the issue of stigma has remained, both within culture and scholarship. Even when empowerment themes are prevalent in research, the social stigma associated with sex work can creep into the research findings, such as the ideas that sex work is coercive or has pervasive connections to human trafficking (Swendeman et al., 2015; Bernstein, 2010; Chapkis, 2013; Doezema, 2010; Weitzer, 2007). McCarthy et. al (2014), claim that the empowerment paradigm has more to do with the agency of the individuals involved in sex work, rather than deterministic social forces. For example, late-stage adolescent experiences shape transitions into adulthood, and people with low education, few work skills, or minimal life experience may be amenable to entering into the field of sex work, when compared to highly trained peers or those with more "human capital" (Delacoste & Alexander, 1987; Maher, 1997; Rosen & Venkatesh, 2008). However, this paradigm attempts to embrace that people choose sex work as they choose any career, weighing utilitarian costs and benefits and choosing the most appropriate fit.

The modern oppression paradigm research had the advantage of history and a long tradition of symbolic generalizations defining sex work as an innate social problem.

Because of this, the inevitable reactionary movement of the empowerment paradigm began by defining itself using the momentum of the civil rights movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Labeling theory made a prominent impact on social science research paradigms and was adopted by academics to explain how institutions enact social control and shape identity and behavior (Bernstein, 2007). The focus of these early empirical investigations into sex work still focused mainly on the female prostitute, who represented a deviation from normative social behavior (Bernstein, 2007; Cohen, 1980; Hirschi, 1972). However, the beginnings of a sociological, as opposed to the oppression paradigm's moral, analysis of sex work began to manifest in these early empirical studies. Davis framed prostitution as an example of "internalization of a deviant self-conception" in her 1965 study of women institutionalized for prostitution offenses, centering her analysis on labeling theory mobilized via symbolic interaction (Bernstein, 2007; Davis, 1971). This shift in theory marked a demonstrable change in the conception of sex work. Labeling and symbolic interactionism saw social action as "reflexive, purposive, and creative response to objective social conditions" (Bernstein, 2007; Sumner, 1994, p. 42). Empowerment activists moved to eliminate, or at least reduce, overt moralizing and shift the discussion to the work of sex work, such as Chapkis' investigation of sex work as emotional labor (1997), Queen's inquiry into how sex work fits into overall sexuality (1997), or Sloan and Wahab's research into the relationship between adjacent fields like social work and other service industries (2000; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005).

In this paradigm, rather than sexuality being the sole province of men and the accompanying power being male prescribes, sex is experiential and, even when those

experiences are outside the "norm," they are empowering to women who are taking part in the exploration of their own sexuality (Comte, 2014). Both paradigms agree that within a patriarchal system women's sexual role is that of procreation and service to male desires. However, empowerment scholars and activists claim any venturing outside of that role is met with punishment in a patriarchal system, and therefore any expression outside of this traditional role is seen as a "powerful emancipator" (Bell, 1995; Chapkis, 1996; Comte, 2014; Queen, 1997).

2.4.2. SEX RADICAL FEMINISM

Empowerment theorists agree with many of the tenets set down by radical feminist oppression theorists: women as a group are more likely to be poor, underpaid, overworked; they are the recipients of male sexual violence, yet state and federal policies abound to regulate women's bodies and not the inverse; their sexual activity is both criminalized and informally stigmatized outside of heteronormativity (Chapkis, 1996). However, empowerment theorists attempt to differentiate their viewpoint by challenging that sex in all of its meanings and functions is not solely defined by patriarchal authority. Sex, instead, must be recognized as a "cultural tactic" in an atmosphere of conflicts fighting for legitimacy, echoing the assertions of de Certeau that in culture all actions are political (Certeau & Mayol, 1990; Chapkis, 1996). Chapkis defines this version of feminism as "Sex Radical Feminism" in her work *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor,* which encompasses a symbolic generalization that sex and sexual activity is context dependent (Califia, 1988; Chapkis, 1996), and perceived meanings can be interpreted by an overarching culture, a subculture, or the context in which the acts are happening (Califia, 1988; Chapkis, 1996; Hebdige, 1979). This is substantially different

from the more broad sweeping "sexual libertarianism," a universally positive view of female sexuality presented as the foil to abolitionists, insisting that sex and sexuality are not based in oppression, but the source of women's greatest power (Chapkis, 1996; Paglia, 2011). Instead, Sex Radical Feminism reorients sex from a fixed social or cultural value (either positive via libertarianism or negative via abolitionism) to a dynamic choice focused on individuals (Chapkis, 1996; Seidman, 1992). Moreover, echoing the work of the prominent third-wave feminist Califia (1988), sex and sexuality should be rooted in the consent of those involved, rather than broad proclamations of their cultural harms (Califia, 1988; Chapkis, 1996).

As the symbolic generalizations surrounding sex work as a cultural phenomenon began to transform, so did the model methodologies used to explore the topic in both scholarly and activist circles. Discussions on the importance of agency, consent and a broader focus on the positive aspects of sexual activity and pleasure appeared to be missing from extant scholarship (Doezema, 2013; Smith, 2017). Positive features of sex work and its liberating aspects, such as fleeing economic suffering or domestic abuse, are often the focus of empowerment scholarship (Augustin, 1988; Weitzer, 2009). This led to a spate of new autoethnographic writings in the form of "in the life" publications by sex workers themselves, emphasizing individual experience (Kempadoo & Jo, 1998; Overall, 1992; Weitzer, 2011). In *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face*, Bell begins by noting the false dichotomy between these two ostensibly separate groups. Evident in the writings of sex workers is a palpable stigmatization, wherein they feel pressured both personally and socially to conform to idealized feminist categorizations that exclude sex workers. Instead, sex workers, when given a seat at the

table, implore unity between groups, aptly claiming "feminism is incomplete without us" (Bell, 1987, p. 7; Delacoste, 2018; Nagle, 1997).

Importantly, during the development of the empowerment paradigm, a substantial portion of the autoethnographic work was done by advocates, less so in the scholarly realm. This distinction is important because it mirrors the similar ideological purity of the oppression paradigm. These positions are often reflexive of a sociopolitical perspective on sex work rather than the personal choices involved in it. In the oppression paradigm sex work is seen as a bulwark of the patriarchy, whereas empowerment advocates view it as a repudiation of it. Instead, academics are more likely to focus on individuals and populations that have received positive outcomes from close proximity to sex work (Weitzer, 2011). For example, male sex workers have reported an enhanced sense of identity from sex work or increased personal pleasure as a result of participating in sex work (Abbot, 2010), and gay culture often views pornography in a more positive light, claiming it is one of the few places being gay is conveyed positively (Stychin, 1991; Thomas J. , 2010). New avenues of communication opened because of advances in technology have aided in the normalization of gay male sex work by broadening the market and increasing the diversity of providers via the Internet. MacPhail, Scott, and Callander (2015) were able to sample over 250 profiles from six of Australia's most popular gay male sex advertisement websites. The research found, broadly, that the language surrounding gay male sex and the purchasing of sex had shifted away from descriptors like "crime" and "deviance," and instead was reflecting a more progressive social movement towards the normalization of both.

Scholarship on pornography both produced and consumed by women finds the producers in this sphere are driven by a desire to challenge patriarchal ideals of gender and sexuality and attempt to empower both sex workers and their audience (Bakehorn, 2010). Lastly, in a recent study of sex work facilitated by Internet use, or "digital sex work", workers found increased independence and autonomy and the desire to participate in cyber-activism. Digital sex workers also created and participated in digital social networks to disseminate information on safety, security, and other informal social resources (Pajnik, Kambouri, Renault, & Šori, 2016). However, currently autoethnographic sex work writing has become so ubiquitous that some activists are requesting would-be non-sex worker researchers to refrain from studying sex workers all together, asserting that sex workers are such a varied and diverse group that there are an adequate number of worker/researchers to produce beneficial sex work research (Mann, 2013).

Once the empowerment paradigm achieves redefining its symbolic generalizations, and uses accompanying model methodologies to explore the positive and empowering aspects of sex work, exemplars must be proposed to aid in reducing stigma and improving the public perception of sex work. The most prominent policy suggestion by empowerment advocates is that of decriminalization (Chapkis, 1996; Comte, 2014). However, it is important to note the important difference between legalization and decriminalization. Decriminalization implies the removal of criminal sanction, whereas legalization would require regulation by a government entity (Chapkis, 1996; Comte, 2014; Weitzer, 1991). Empowerment activists focus on the argument that negative stigma and criminalization create deleterious work conditions for sex workers and argue

decriminalization is the necessary "first step" in reducing stigma and improving the quality of workers' lives. (Comte, 2014; Ditmore, 2007; Jenness, 1990) However, the majority of public policy makers are resistant to the idea of decriminalization in lieu of some form of regulation, citing policies that accompany other types of service work (Decker, 1979; Kaplan, 1976; Weitzer, 1991).

2.5. THE POLYMORPHOUS PARADIGM

> *Besides the money aspect, I guess I was curious about sex work. In the way that most people are, but also because ever since I was a teen I had read feminist writers like Dworkin and Mackinnon and the way they wrote about sex work had an enormous impact on me. Was it really as horrible as they said?* — (Calloway, 2011, p. 3)

In 2011, author Marie Calloway released an online short story chronicling an apathetic affair she had with an older writer. Her subsequent book *what purpose did i serve in your life* (2013) recounted a short stint in sex work. In subsequent interviews, Calloway would claim to find the entire endeavor to be rather boring, that sex work is largely neither sex nor work. Calloway's disaffected demeanor can seem flippant, but ultimately what rings true is that she was not drawn to sex work to be empowered nor did she reject it because it was exploitative. She had her own reasons for both entering and exiting.

The polymorphous paradigm seeks to narrow the symbolic generalizations used to empirically define sex work to focus more on specific subgroups, while employing a variety of model methodologies to gather valid and reliable data and offer a diverse collection of exemplars to suggest solutions to various perceived problems. In order to fully grasp the meaning and depth of a new digital model of sex work, the duality of workers as both individuals and broader cultural members must be understood. Whereas

the previous paradigms have framed the research unidimensionally by focusing on sex work as a monolith, current paradigms must focus on individual factors and measurable outcomes, while often lacking attention on collective experiences of sex workers.

2.5.1. SEX AS A VARIETY OF WORK

The polymorphous paradigm stands opposed to both the oppression and empowerment paradigms, claiming that broad sweeping, essentialist viewpoints do not represent the full depth and breadth of all the variations in time, place, and style encompassed by sex work (Weitzer, 2007; 2011). Previously, debates that exclude the people who make up the sex work industry were dichotomized into "coercion" and "choice" arguments (Sanders, Connelly, & King, 2016). Rather, structural determinants and agency intermingle to create complex circumstances that inform decisions to engage in sex work (Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018; McCarthy, Benoit, & Jansson, 2014). The polymorphous paradigm proposes that research should cover the extent of sex work varieties.

The polymorphous paradigm recognizes that sex work is comprised of various "occupational arrangements, power relationships, and participants' experiences" (Weitzer, 2011 p. 16). Sex work is not a monolith and often the cultural discussion surrounding sex work in the news media, political debates, and public discussion simply acts to reify the dichotomous nature of the two pre-existing paradigms. However, there is a growing subset of scholarship that is dedicated to understanding how sex work is structured and experienced by workers, clients, and others (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Weitzer, 2011), which argues that concepts like "victimization, exploitation, agency, job

satisfaction, self-esteem, and other individual dimensions should be treated as variables (not constants)" (Weitzer, 2011, p. 18).

Sex work research is often focused on women of low socioeconomic status and is often compared to other menial or low paying exploitative jobs, such as nannies or maids. Much of this work is the only available option for marginalized populations of women, such as immigrants and other women of color (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). Sex work can be incredibly adaptive, requiring frequent exposure to new and different circumstances. In light of this, it can include a collection of entry and re-entry experiences. Sex workers become versed in new and different types of sex work as they progress through their life course (Orchard, Farr, Macphail, Wender, & Young, 2012). New types of sex work would accompany their re-entry experiences and a myriad of factors would inform their choice to re-enter, oscillating through different types of work at different stages in life. Introductory research proposes it is this very adaptive ability that has aided sex workers in the digital age to explore new intersections of technology and sexual commerce (Jones, 2015). Once the symbolic generalizations of sex work are understood to include a vast array of activities, relationships, people, and interconnected sociological factors, it must be recognized that a variety of model methodologies must be employed to reliably and validly assess the extent and diversity of sex work.

2.5.2. PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography is any printed or visual material that explicitly describes or portrays sexual activity. The definition is broad, and famously the United States Supreme Court struggled to find a strict definition for it with Justice Stewart claiming, "I know it when I see it" (Jacobellis v. Ohio, 1964). One of the easiest ways to recognize the mirrored

advancements in technology and sex work is through pornography. New technologies introduced in society consistently have an erotic counterpart (Barss, 2010). The earliest printed literature included depictions of sex and sexuality and the first forays into photography included displays of overt eroticism (Evans, 2013). And when technology provides these new avenues for sex work, there are always groups of people willing to capitalize on them.

Abbot's (2010) scholarship on motivations for pursuing a career in pornography included 50 in-depth interviews with actors and actresses and found that initial motivations for entrance, such as quick money or "being naughty," quickly fell away. Fame, growing accustomed to the income, or membership in a stigmatized group can sustain an actor's career. Gender differences also appear in the research, finding men experience less stigma and more opportunity to move to tangentially "legitimate" work (such as editing or directing); women, on the contrary, were more likely to have previous experience in some form of adult entertainment, finding it easier to move between, but not out, of sex work. Interestingly, though entrance and exit points to sex work are often examined for underlying causal explanations few studies have examined why workers remain in the sex industry (Bowen, et al., 2011; Swendeman, et al., 2015). Work by Swendeman et al. (2015) attempts to unravel the complex system of structural factors that—when combined with individual level factors such as coercion, agency, empowerment, and access to resources—influence engagement with sex work. The research indicated that "economic, social, and relationship factors…shape pathways into and remaining in sex work through increased resources, agency, and achievements" (p. 1019). This is a prime example of research framing "sex work as work," since the very

reasons people get into different varieties of sex work seem to be the ones that keep them in sex work, much like any other occupation.

Thomas (2010) evaluated extensive literature and analyzed content to explore the history, production, and stylistic evolution of gay male pornography since the 1980s. Thomas found that porn within the gay community has achieved a respectable position, often reflecting the realities of gay life. One film in particular, *Show Your Pride* (Larue, 1997)*,* effortlessly alternated between scenes from community pride events and hardcore sex scenes, embodying the ease with which some gay communities accept and embrace pornography as a normative part of culture. Contrasting Thomas, Bakehorn (2010) used limited participant observation by working as a production assistant on the majority of film sites she observed for her exploration of women-made pornography, finding that the majority of interviewees approached their work in women-made pornography as a form of activism, paying attention to the representation of women and people of color in their work, as compared to mainstream pornography. Most interestingly, Bakehorn's study finds an important middle ground between the oppression and empowerment paradigms, concluding that pornography, when handled properly, can be both empowering and a form of activism, while still remaining critical of the shortcomings of the mainstream adult industry.

Lastly, in the 2009 overview of the state of empirical research concerning the Internet's impact on human sexuality, Döring found that there was still much we do not know about how and why people consume Internet pornography. Though a vast array of studies has investigated Internet pornography, few have studied the criteria for habits of consistent use, desistance, variety, or preference. Similar to early studies on sex work,

the initial studies on the effects of online pornography tended to focus on negative

outcomes, such as addiction, possession of illegal media, or the impact of poor role

modeling. However, recently researchers have begun to acknowledge positive aspects

from consuming online pornography, "such as increased pleasure, self-acceptance,

inclusion of handicapped people, improved communication between sexual partners, in

addition to the widening of traditional gender roles and sexual scripts. [Yet these] have

been the subject of only a few empirical or theoretical studies so far" (Döring, 2009, p.

1094).

2.5.3. ESCORTING

Escorting is what most people think of when they imagine sex work. It is the in-

person interaction between provider and client. In the majority of instances this includes

some form of sexual intercourse, but occasionally it is just the opportunity for clients to

spend time with a provider in person. This includes the initial explorations into sex work

as an academic topic focused primarily on street level survival style sex work. The

historical writings on "prostitutes", from their community purity standpoints, effortlessly

moved into contemporary scholarship by focusing on the relationship between drug abuse

and sex work (Høigård & Finstad, 1992; Maher & Daly, 1996; Maher, Dunlap, Johnson,

& Hamid, 1996; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005). This indoor/outdoor dichotomy is

merely an extension of the previous research paradigms. Outdoor sex work emphasizes

the social determinants that can coerce someone into sex work, whereas research on

indoor sex work is more likely to highlight the choice to improve economic conditions

and upward mobility (Bernstein, 2007; Weitzer, 2007).

Lever and Dolnick (2010) attempt to shine a light on the indoor/outdoor dichotomy by combining quantitative data from a Los Angeles women's health risk study that combines a probability sample of 998 street sex workers with qualitative data based on interviews with 83 indoor sex workers to examine the relationship between emotional labor and variety of sex work. They found that indoor sex workers were "more likely to establish an ongoing relationship with regular clients," illustrating the need for a better semantic understanding of the different varieties of sex work and methodologies to study them. Similarly, McCarthy, Benoit, and Jansson (2014) specifically reinforce the polymorphous paradigm in their quantitative comparative study examining predictors of entrance into the sex work as compared to two other low-income occupations. The study sampled 595 workers employed in three different occupations, utilizing a multinomial logit analysis to find that deterministic factors play a crucial role to the range of outcomes available in adult life, lending credence to the polymorphous paradigm. Researchers have also attempted to break out of the tradition of only focusing on female sex workers. Research by Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, and Halkitis (2004) explored the stigma experienced by male escort-style sex workers who advertise on the Internet. In conjunction with the theories developed by Goffman (1963), the research found workers use passing and covering as coping mechanisms in conjunction with ways of handling stigma, such as normalizing sex work in gay communities or "occupational framing."

Because much of sex work is widely criminalized, physical safety from violence on the part of both clients and police officers has been examined by Dalla, Xia, and Kennedy (2003) who reveal the victimization patterns of women who work on the street level and the coping behavior of this particularly vulnerable population. By examining in-

depth interviews, the research revealed that though these women had an increased occurrence of victimization, a pattern of informal social support mechanisms had been constructed to help cope with the trauma of client violence risks and could be placed on a continuum where different strategies can be employed to minimize risk (Sanders, 2004).

Similarly, policy implications that could either encourage or discourage violence is reflected in the research of Brents and Hausbeck (2005). Though violence against sex workers who work at street level is often a topic of discussion, violence also happens in other settings. Brents and Hausbeck look at three types of violence that can occur in legalized brothels in Nevada—interpersonal violence against sex workers, violence against community order, and sexually transmitted infection as violence—and the policy implications of the legality of sex work in Nevada. Their research concludes that legalization brings about a level of public scrutiny, regulation, and bureaucratization that ultimately discourages violence and community disorder, while decreasing the risk of disease outbreaks among all people involved in the supply and demand of sex work.

2.5.4. DIGITAL SEX WORK

Most often when current research discusses the concept of digital sex work it is limited to providers who provide digital media to clients. This includes digital video, images, or real-time audio/visual interactions, most commonly referred to as "camming." However, the present research project suggests that digital sex work be defined as any sex work that uses technology as an integral step in the process. This can include: providers who advertise in-person services online or communicate with prospective clients and regulars via text, email and chat programs. The Internet now plays a crucial role in the business of sex, reshaping it and creating a new set of questions that must be

addressed in order to better understand sex work (Jones, 2001; Döring, 2009). It increases

exposure to client bases while decreasing the likelihood of victimization or violence

(Tewksbury & Lapsey, 2018). With the proliferation in technological access, broad

varieties of sex workers have been able to coalesce, bolstered by the security of

anonymity garnered by digital meeting places, and to create a network of information that

has resulted in new procedures to improve security, strengthen commercial viability, and

modify existing sexual identities, both personal and professional, through digital

communications with clients, peers, and personal relationships (Thukral, Ditmore, &

Murphy, 2005). More broadly, the Internet's ability to share information, form new

communities, and shape identity has made it a crucial part of the experience of being

human, so much so that the possibility of Internet access as a human right is being widely

and seriously considered (BBC News, 2010; Joyce, 2015).

One of the strengths of researching the relationship between sex work and the

Internet is the abundance of data that the Internet provides. Sanders, Connelly, and King

(2016) were able to sample from a population of roughly 2500 sex workers in a variety of

categories from the United Kingdom due to the existence of an online incident reporting

system specifically designed for sex workers. They discovered that most participated in

"independent escorting," with the majority of the sample reporting positive descriptors to

describe their work. Though respondents appreciated the Internet's ability to facilitate

increases in security, there were mixed results regarding their ability to remove

information from the Internet once it had been released and their concerns about the

proliferation of digital threats and abuses. Lastly, the research notes that just as the

Internet appears to abate some concerns of workers, the new platform creates new issues that will require further study.

This abundance of data also extends to information on current and prospective clients. Horswill and Weitzer (2018) analyzed content from the frequently asked questions section of "The Erotic Review," an online repository containing reviews of providers and escorts. The research collected 283 discussion threads to better understand the socialization of new clients in the areas of "communication; screening; location and scheduling; money; privacy and secrecy; safety and scams; health practices; law enforcement; and sex and attraction" (p. 3). Finding that in accordance with classic learning theory, new clients learned the "techniques … motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes" of their specific subculture (Sutherland, 1947, p. 6). New clients were encouraged to use the resources available to them via the online message boards, recognize that their apprehensions and anxieties would decrease with greater experience, and learn techniques to maximize their safety and privacy.

In a similar manner, Capiola, Griffith, Balotti, Turner and Sharrah (2014) quantitatively analyzed 2,925 female provider profiles from a popular advertisement website to assess whether sexual orientation and other demographic characteristics could predict the amount a provider would charge to visit a client, termed their "in-call rate." The results suggest that advertising a bisexual orientation is related to higher in-call rates. The researchers explain that there could be a variety of reasons for this relationship. First, people who identify as bisexual are often perceived to be more promiscuous and this perceived promiscuity could be ideal when male clients are seeking a short-term interaction. Second, a provider who is bisexual may provide some form of fantasy

fulfillment for heteronormative clients. Lastly, there may be more utilitarian reason why

bisexual providers have higher in-call rates. The economic notion of scarcity, the

perception that bisexual providers are in fact a sexual minority may increase the amount

of money they charge for services.

Using data provided by the Internet is a relatively new research methodology that

explores the quickly evolving relationship between sex work and its connection to

emotional labor, stigma, and access to resources. There have already been empirical

explorations on "sugar babying" (Motyl, 2013), web-camming (Sanders, Connelly, &

King, 2016) and fetish modelling (Ray, 2005). However, Jones (2015) notes that though

research into the relationship between the Internet and sex work is a growing area of

interest, most researchers focus on the facilitation of sex work via technology, rather than

the series of complex relationships between technology and sex work. This, then, is

where the instant study builds on and expands the current state of research.

> "the diversity and complexity of sex work online; the rise of individualized erotic
> labor; how local contexts shape migration into online sex work; issues related to
> danger and privacy; the reactions by law enforcement to online sex work; the
> racialization of erotic labor; and further use of intersectional analysis to study the
> experiences of people who sell sex online" (Jones, 2015, p. 567).

2.5.5. TRAFFICKING

Trafficking is an exceedingly difficult topic to study, as the subpopulation is the

most hidden and the semantic definitions of what constitutes "sex trafficking" can be

elusive (Grant, 2014; Twis & Shelton, 2018; Weitzer, 2013). Western media often

confuses sex trafficking and other forms of sex work with very little nuance (Weitzer,

2017) and using a one-dimensional paradigm to frame sex trafficking is detrimental to the

understanding of the complexity of the issue. Often, numbers and values are conflated

and the scale of the issue can be difficult to assess (Grant, 2014). Further, rescue organizations often frame victim-survivor narratives as one-dimensional emotional pleas that can create a form of secondary exploitation (Cojocaru, 2016). Trafficking is a popular topic for abolitionists, because it encapsulates their ideological definition of sex work in a grim undeniable reality, but the blunt instrument of activism can obfuscate the nuance of empirical discovery.

Weitzer (2013) specifically addresses the need for evidence-based research about sex trafficking (see also Chin & Finckenauer, 2012). Instead, the landscape surrounding sex trafficking research is filled with methodological difficulties and unsubstantiated claims. There is a dearth of historical empirical research, which makes it difficult to measure changes over time, since the data is "simply not available for drawing macro-level conclusions" (Weitzer, 2013, p. 1348). Further complicating the issue are unreliable "official" numbers on people being trafficked specifically into the United States, with estimates as high as "hundreds of thousands" to meta-analyses putting the estimates closer to 3,817 to 22,320, while still admitting "[t]here is enormous uncertainty about the national scope of the problem" (Farrell, et al., 2009; Hickle, 2017; Twis & Shelton, 2018).

Taken in their entirety these studies represent a small portion of the various ways that researchers are attempting to empirically investigate the diversity of sex work. The polymorphous paradigm, with its more precise yet inclusive symbolic generalizations of sex work helps to limit broad generalizations, while providing a more accurate picture of the "constellation of occupational arrangements, power relationships, and participants' experiences" (Weitzer, 2011, p. 16). A range of model methodologies are used to gather

and analyze reliable and valid data based on the needs of research questions. As sex work

research has evolved, researchers have recognized the array of sex work styles and have

attempted to suggest exemplars and solutions that address their specific research

population and not perpetuate the cultural ontology of sex work.

2.6. THE PUBLIC HEALTH PARADIGM

> *[Drug addicted sex workers] don't choose to make a living this way. I can go*
> *work in a massage parlor, or for an escort service, but they can only do what*
> *they're doing. For them, drugs is their career, and not prostitution* — (Bernstein,
> 2007, p. 49).

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1990s, researchers began to eschew stigmas and

ideological labels, both positive and negative, in search of answers to concrete issues.

Rather than expend efforts creating theoretical explanations for the sources and

persistence of sex work, these researchers focused on the physical and material concerns

of the sex worker communities. They focused their efforts mainly on the relatively

concrete issues of HIV/STI transmission (Smith, 2017), personal mental and

psychological health, and information sharing mechanisms. In the public health

paradigm, sex work is symbolically generalized in the same way as any other

employment demographic. This is a dramatic shift away from broad moralizations

presented throughout the history of sex work research, the public health paradigm

recognizes sex work as a social reality and approaches it from a harm reduction

framework (Abel, 2014; Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018).

2.6.1. HIV/STI

To begin to assess the relationship between HIV/STI rates and sex work, public

health researchers have strong semantic definitions of all of the various factors that

contribute to a predicted relationship. Not only is it important to understand what constitutes "sex work" or "high-risk behavior," even cultural and social contexts must be understood to assess sex work from a harm reduction standpoint. A few countries where sex work is legal (Australia, Germany, and New Zealand, e.g.) allow for access to health and social services or provide a semblance of economic security for sex workers. Conversely, in places where sex work is deeply stigmatized or outright illegal sex work can be used as a survival technique and stigma can limit access to vital social resources. Most countries do not exist on either side of these extremes, but somewhere in the middle, making generalizations about individual harm reduction policies difficult (Rekart, 2005).

Though sex workers are frequently the focus of HIV/STI public-health campaigns, there is contradictory evidence that workers have higher rates of both HIV contraction and transmission. Rekart (2005) shows strong evidence that street level sex workers show an increased risk of injection drug use and rates of HIV/STI. However, these studies focus mainly on specific location and varieties of sex work (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). In several public health studies where the sex worker population is examined more comprehensively, reducing the selection bias of drug use and treatment, sex workers have lower rates of HIV/STI than the general population. The crucial mediating variable that lends credence to the public discourse on sex workers infecting the "general population" is repeatedly shown to be drug use (Campbell, 1991; Rieder & Ruppelt, 1988; Sacks, 1996; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Because of this association the sex worker community has often been labeled a "bridge" population, where sexually transmitted diseases make their way into the general population

(Lindemann, 2013; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005). However, there is scholarship to support the idea that sex workers, concerned with their personal health more than that of their clients, can act as educators encouraging safer sex practices and normalizing condom use as part of the culture (Chapkis, 1996; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005). For example, in the mid-1990s, sex workers organized and led "John schools" in response to the AIDS epidemic, to educate both clients and the public on safer sex practices (Bernstein, 2007; CHapkis, 1996; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Finally, the idea that sex workers are a monolith continues to be inaccurate. Sex work comprises a vast array of people and behaviors, and workers have multiple roles in their neighborhoods, virtual and physical, family, mainstream employment, social institutions, and community organizations that modify their relationships to public health issues (Kempadoo & Jo, 1998; Nagle, 1997; Thukral, Ditmore, & Murphy, 2005).

This same interconnected system of structural and personal factors also affects the decisions made during work, and not just the overarching decisions to engage in sex work overall. For example, Bailey & Figueroa (2016) examined how sex work offered an opportunity to improve financial situations for women in the Caribbean during periods of harsh economic conditions, but found that workers would often choose to engage in unsafe sex practices even when there was a heightened risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS if the combination of "risk perception, relationship intimacy, perceived control and sex work environment, combine to [decide] to practice unprotected sex or not"(p. 918).

Unfortunately, stigma can play a crucial role in public health initiatives to reduce HIV transmission because sex workers will rarely disclose their occupation (Boyer, Chapman, & Marshal, 1993; Sloan & Wahab, 2000; Weiner, 1996). Ironically, many

workers withhold this information because revealing it could deny them access to much-needed social services other than HIV prevention (Sloan & Wahab, 2000; Weiner, 1996). Comte (2014) points out that the history of sex worker research is skewed in the direction of easily accessible or visible populations, and as these populations change so does the foci of the scholarship. The majority of this research focused on street-level workers, or those caught up in the criminal justice system. Though the research results for these populations are valuable, they are not necessarily generalizable to sex workers as a whole. Sadly, it is these very research results that contribute to the cultural narrative on sex work and its connection to stigma, deviance, and social degeneration (Pheterson, 1996).

2.6.2. STIGMA

A litany of research has identified stigma as one of the main concerns of sex workers (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018; Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016; Shdaimah & Leon, 2018; Weitzer, 2017). Stigma as identified by Goffman as:

> blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior. (1963, p. 14)

An increasing amount of research is focused on the outcomes associated with criminalization and stigmatization of sex work and how it shapes the working conditions, health, and access to resources for workers (Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016). There have been several examples of stigma intersecting sex work in the public health sphere. Abusive language, breaches of confidentiality, humiliation, and outright

denial of care in public health spaces (Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018). These instances of stigma have a profound effect on the mental health of sex workers, moving public health officials and policymakers further away from their goal of safeguarding public health. When workers feel they are only viewed as a vector of public health and HIV transmission, this further ostracizes the workers, driving them underground and negating targeted public-health policy initiatives (Shdaimah & Leon, 2018).

Stigma can be associated with lack of opportunity, especially among street-based workers. However, many workers have noted that they are able to emphasize personal agency when balancing the effects of stigma (Koken J. , 2011; Sallmann, 2010; Shdaimah & Leon, 2018). "In fact, many sex workers are torn between the feeling of pride they have regarding their work and the feeling of guilt that dictates to them that they should not be doing such work" (Comte 2014 p. 206). When the research lens shifts to focus on Western middle-class women participating in indoor/independent sex work, most workers report they freely chose to work and have never been forced by a pimp or third party (e.g., Bernstein 2007; Bradley, 2007; Chapkis 1997; Comte, 2014; Downs, James, & Cowan, 2006; O'Doherty, 2011; Oerton & Phoenix, 2001; Sanders, 2004). A focus on middle-class sex workers sheds light on the use of who uses the Internet and how their social position can influence their perception of risks, rewards and the adoption of technological innovation.

Research on middle-class Western workers has emphasized the positive aspects of sex work, including the ability to "make money faster, enjoy more free time, and be self-employed" (Comte, 2014, p. 2015). Though outside forces can be minimized in these situations, external structural issues still remain. Sex work carries with it a deeply rooted

social stigma, the activities involved in sex work are illegal, cutting off access to vital social services such as police protections and education. Beyond social limitations, sex work stigma can also have deep personal drawbacks, such as having to keep secrets from friends and family and diminished self-esteem (Bruckert, 2002; Sanders 2004).

Negative stigma towards sex workers seems to permeate every level of social interaction. Workers across cultures, nations, and socioeconomic statuses all name stigma as a major concern (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018; Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016; Shdaimah & Leon, 2018; Weitzer, 2017). Importantly, stigma can also affect identity. Chosen careers affect personal identity and people construct communities, information sharing, and social networks around both chosen and unchosen groups, and a stigmatized career choice can affect the personal identity of the individual who has made that choice. (Turner, 1982). Prior research and the instant study suggest that sex workers in the digital age have used Internet technology to negate stigma, increase community, and reaffirm a positive identity.

2.6.3. PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND IDENTITY

Sociological concerns over disease transmission or stigma can have a profound effect on the mental health of sex workers. Research has examined how women workers shape their identities based on cultural, political, and religious constructs of "femininity" (Smith, 2017; Lucas, 2005). Additionally, scholarship has looked at the relationship between the stigma associated with sex work and how it affects perceived identities and self-esteem of workers, and the specific coping mechanisms to manage the presentation of self. The emotional labor of keeping work and personal identities separate from people not "in the know" can be burdensome (Benoit C. , et al., 2017; Tomura, 2009). Often

workers will justify perceived deviant behavior by associating it with more conventional ideological goals, both to manage the effects of stigma and rationalize emotional labor. Shdaimah and Leon found that workers tended to reframe behaviors to better fit mainstream values, such as being a sex worker to provide for children (2018).

Though physical threats to the health of sex workers are more recognizable, emotional risks weigh just as heavily on the lives of people involved in sex work (Sanders, 2004). Living with the uncertainty of disease outbreaks and violence can have a deleterious effect on the mental health of some sex workers (Mimiaga, Reisner, Tinsley, Mayer, & Safren, 2009). Though this aspect of sex work has, until recently, been underrepresented in the literature, recent research such as Shdaimah & Leon's 2018 study represent an important move forward in understanding the variety of ways sex workers manage complex social interactions with few options from conventional social institutions. Further study on the role Internet support groups and anonymous digital gathering places play on access to mental health services and community support could augment the current trend in caring for the mental health of sex workers (Sanders, Connelly, & King, 2016). The instant study represents one of the few pieces of scholarship that notes the perceptions of risks of workers who readily use Internet resources, finding that "traditional" concerns around violence are often overshadowed by concerns over the strain of the added component of emotional labor in sex work (Hochschild, 1979) and how digital communication has intensified these interactions resulting in increased risks.

The issues surrounding psychological health and identity have shifted dramatically in the last few years with the proliferation of the Internet

(Panchanadeswaran, Unnithan, Chacko, Brazda, & Kuruppu, 2017; Sanders, Connelly, & King, 2016). Bernstein's work (2007) identifies a transitional moment in the history of sex work, wherein sexual commerce adopts a new form of technology and transforms itself to mitigate concerns over security and commerce. Bernstein's research catalogues some of the first burgeoning instances of the use of the Internet to ensure safety, not from troublesome clients, but from police interaction. Sex work saw a major schism between the providers who had access to technology and could move their business from the public "outdoor" sphere to the private "indoor" sphere, away from police foot patrols increasingly concerned with "public order." "With the advent of the Internet, solicitation of sexual companionship via advertisements has allowed escorts to maintain greater control of their occupation and clientele" (Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004, p. 5). Access to technology has only increased in the preceding decades (Motyl, 2013). However, this increase in security and agency has unforeseen consequences for the nature of personal and professional sexual identity (Bernstein, 2001; Döring, 2009). Furthermore, Arvidsson points out that though the Internet is incredibly useful for exchanging information, its real value is in the quality and authenticity of perceived relationships (Arvidsson, 2005).

The concept of an "authentic" interaction between client and provider introduces interesting questions surrounding personal identity. Recent scholars have observed that the early proliferation of technology fundamentally altered the nature of the commercial exchange between worker and client (Bernstein, 2001). Bernstein's (2007) "bounded authenticity" describes how within this movement, clients were no longer looking for sexual mechanics but were seeking a specific "girlfriend experience" that emulates a

legitimate relationship. This transformation of the relationship between worker and client can have an effect on personal perceived sexual identity, through even its acceptance (Hoang, 2011; Milrod & Monto, 2012) or rejection of a sexual identity connected with their work in sexual commerce (Sanders, 2005; Brewis & Linstead, 2000). Clients are already using new modes of technology to rate and assess the value and performance of sex workers, and often "authenticity" is a crucial metric (Holt & Blevins, 2007).

Participation in sexual commerce can result in stigmatization that can lead to social exclusion. This social exclusion can have a detrimental effect on an individual's perceived self-worth and autonomy. Even in efforts to mitigate these stigmas, policy-based conversations often lead to "othering" and can further erode a person's perceived identity (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). Finally, even counterfeit intimacy can result in interpersonal bonds that both parties involved must negotiate and manage (Milrod & Monto, 2012).

Sex workers manage exemplars that protect mental health in two specific ways—First, they form strong information sharing communities and in the public's capacity for facilitating effective harm reduction strategies. Workers have begun to acknowledge risks by establishing activist organizations and unionization (Gall, 2007). Harm reduction initiatives that happen at the policy level, aimed at benefiting sex workers as a whole, represent the macrosociological approach to risk reduction. These initiatives can take the shape of decriminalization campaigns, community-based child protective organizations, and educational programs (Rekart, 2005).

2.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the historic and current research surrounding sex work and its theoretical foundations. The research can be categorized into four existing paradigms, each with a distinct stance toward the cultural and scholarly frameworks that explain the emergence and persistence of sex work. Historically, research on sex work and sex workers has used an oppression paradigm to frame behaviors as overwhelmingly negative. Early scholarship was dichotomized into either deleterious social characteristics that push women towards sex work, framing them as unwitting victims, or the causal effect sex work has on the moral decay of both the worker and the broader community. Later, the oppression paradigm would be used to reframe modern research identifying workers as pervasive victims of patriarchal society.

Second, the empowerment paradigm developed in contrast to the oppression, to increase the focus on worker agency and a reframing of sex work as an act of revolution against patriarchal society. Empowerment paradigm framed choice of clients, prices, and activities as the defining characteristic of sex work. This paradigm minimized negative consequences that result from outside factors such as the legalization and stigmatization, while rejecting static definitions of sex work as harmful in lieu of a more dynamic interpretation of sexual commerce.

As detailed above, two additional paradigms have surfaced in the last few decades: the polymorphous paradigm and the public health paradigm. The first, authored by Weitzer (2007) argues that sex work contains a variety of activities and therefore a broad paradigm must be used to understand the diversity of behaviors that incorporate the large category of sex work. This more inclusive paradigm would focus on the interplay

between external sociological factors and internal agency factors to explain the complex

relationship between sex work, the worker, and broader society. The public health

paradigm eschews theoretical explanations for the emergence, persistence, illegalization,

and stigmatization of sex work in lieu of the acceptance of sex work as a social fact and

attempts to address it from a harm reduction perspective.

The scholarly focus on specific aspects of sex work throughout history is a

reflection of the attitudes and viewpoints of the prevailing culture at the time. Each

paradigm discussed, though following a general historical trajectory, is still used by many

researchers and advocates today. Rather than an evolution of social views on sex work,

each paradigm represents a set of key definitions, methods that support those definitions,

and proposed solutions to persistent problems. These various sex work research

paradigms reflect how society, and the researchers, view gender, sexuality, morality and

technology. These value judgements have a dramatic effect on the results of research and

can cause different researchers examining similar situations to come to dramatically

different conclusions. Part of the issue with research on these sensitive topics is the

struggle for objectivity while either refuting or fortifying the truth of its time. This duality

led famed psychoanalyst Helen Deutsch to assert, "after all, the ultimate goal of research

is not objectivity, but truth" (1944, p. 1). Often research on sex work can be both an

attempt to reveal empirical evidence while affirming the truth of the researcher.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas — (Whorf, 1956, p. 212)

This chapter describes the research method used for this study. The first section will argue that a qualitative approach is appropriate for addressing the questions of interest raised by this new digital model of sex work. Using the Internet for entrance, management of professional and personal identity, and security in sex work is a new and unique social phenomena and sex workers represent a marginalized and hidden population. Qualitative research has a provenance of investigating new and hidden phenomena in society and will prove to be well-suited to explore this new model. Next, I provide a detailed description of the unique study setting of this research and an account of my admission into the sex worker community. This research was conducted both in person and via Internet gathering places where sex workers share information about best practices and solicit help and advice from a variety of sources. The subsequent sections will describe the research design, sampling methods, and data collection, and will conclude with the analysis techniques used and the limitations of the research design.

3.2. CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods emphasize depth of understanding and the deeper meanings comprised in human experience. As a methodology, qualitative research has a myriad of tools at its disposal to produces new theoretical explanations for social phenomena and uses inductive reasoning to bolster its conclusions (Babbie, 2015). Qualitative research uses tools like interviews, archival research, and ethnography not to

merely study people, but to learn from them (Spradley, 1979). It is a powerful tool to help describe culture, and importantly, has a long history in criminology and more specifically researching feminist and gender issues (Miller, 2005).

Qualitative research is particularly well suited for exploring parts of our culture that are understudied or hidden (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This aligns well with the purpose of this study: to examine how sex workers are reshaping the boundaries of sexual commerce by utilizing new access to Internet technology. This access is changing the culture of sex work in four important ways. First, how is the use of Internet technology changing entrance into sex work and its relationship to the agency of workers? How are these concepts related to personal worker contexts such as race and class privilege? Second, how are workers using the Internet to navigate the types of services they offer, the emotional labor of increased connection and communication with clients, and the management of their personal and professional identities both online and in the "real world"? Third, how do new technologies help define best practices for safety and security? And finally, how do workers recognize risks based on the use of new technology and their personal contexts? Sexual commerce has always found ways to utilize new technologies for its own benefit (Barrs, 2010; Jones, 2015). Clients, providers and intermediaries are commonly early adopters of new technologies in an attempt to find ways to increase or secure business. Sex work is both adaptive and responsive and the digital model of sex work focuses on how workers use new technology to best suit their business. The adoption of the Internet as a place to gain entry into sex work, manage personal and professional identifies, and organize business safely is the next in a long series of technological innovations.

Research questions dictate research methodology (Burgess, 2002). This research project focused on a culturally hidden population and the questions asked are concerned with the *how* (describing the way sex workers see, hear, speak, think, and act) (Spradley, 1979), which is central to qualitative research and eschews the discrete variables of *why's* and *how many's*, which tend to be the focus of quantitative work (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). These methods are important for understanding underlying processes and contexts that drive subcultural changes.

Qualitative research is essential for studying sex workers specifically because the lives and business of sex workers cannot be separated from their overall position in society. In-depth qualitative interviews are essential to understand the ways sex workers use access to Internet technology to navigate entrance into the sex worker community, identify appropriate behavior systems, and address situational strains. For example, given my interest in understanding sex workers' relationships to friends, family, and communities, both online and in the real world, and in the culture at large, this methodological strategy provides a particularly useful means for doing so. Furthermore, qualitative research gives us the opportunity to examine how these various factors coalesce to better explain why workers choose various processes to address issues specific to the business of selling sex.

Research on sex workers is often sustained by quantitative questions. Concerns over the amount of money and the age of workers tend to dominate policy discussions on sex work (Weitzer, 2012). However, these quantitative approaches to studying such a complex and nuanced social issue can often result in obfuscating real solutions. Two

frequently cited "facts" surrounding the debate on sex work are both quantitative in nature and incredibly misleading.

Sex work opponents often claim the average age for entrance into sex work is 12-14 years old and that the average yearly global income for sex trafficking is $5-7 billion (Grant, 2014; Weitzer, 2011). The 12-14 age of entrance figure is widely referenced (though frequently without citation) and comes from a report by Estes and Weiner (2001). Their research was an extensive 17-city study of Canada, the United States and Mexico looking at the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Among their sample of 288 children, the age of entrance ranged from 12-14 years. However, this figure is meant to describe their particular sample population, not to be a generalizable finding representative of all sex workers. As detailed above, basic demographic facts about sex workers are all but impossible to uncover because of the hidden nature of the population, and this often-used "sound bite" from an unrelated study can have a deleterious effect on both public and scholarly considerations of sex work.

Similarly, the amount of money that is produced from sex work is as equally elusive. Jahic and Finckenauer looked at the $5-7 billion figure and found similar issues. The amount comes from a very broad estimation of the number of illegal immigrants arrested in Europe annually. That number is multiplied by five, under the pretext that one in five illegal immigrants is apprehended. Then they further estimate that a certain percentage (roughly 15-30) procure the services of smugglers and pay between $2,000-$5,000 a piece. Once these numbers, and estimations of asylum seekers, are combined the result is roughly $1 billion, which is then expanded worldwide for the $5-7 billion figure (2005). Obviously, this number was meant to estimate all of human trafficking but is

frequently attributed to sex trafficking. Similar to age of entry, there is simply not enough available data to make quantitative inferences about the various demographics of sex workers.

Finding reliable quantitative data on sex work can be exceedingly difficult, simply because it is a cultural taboo and hidden from the public eye. This leads to one of the most enduring difficulties in sex work research: sampling. Sampling bias can be present when examining hidden populations (Heckathorn, 1997; 2002). Sampling sex worker populations can be particularly difficult as obtaining authoritative population estimates is challenging when researchers only have access to a small subset of the larger population (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; Rissel, et al., 2017).

Furthermore, I offer one additional benefit of my sampling techniques - the dynamic information that can be gleaned through open-ended interview questioning. Hendricks and Blanken (1992) argue that quantitative methodology is insufficient to uncover new and unique phenomenon in society because of its reliance on closed questions, which limit the depth and scope of data collected. Most notably for my purposes, hidden segments of the population are concealed in such studies precisely because they do not avail themselves to broader social measurements. These groups have often been referred to as "floating populations" because of their "horizontal and vertical socio-geographic mobility" (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997, p. 791), which prevents broader conventional methods based in community or institutional sampling from accounting for them.

Here, the qualitative methodology for this study will help illuminate the changing landscape of the sex industry by providing detailed accounts of the processes by which

sex workers with access to Internet technology navigate their personal and professional lives by examining their individual perceptions and experiences. In-depth semi-structured interviews are the primary data collection method for this research project. This is advantageous because it allows the workers to speak for themselves, emphasize the points they find important, and finally, steer the conversation to include the issues in the current landscape of digital sex work that the workers themselves find most salient. For example, the initial intent of the interviews was to ask workers to describe their daily work routines, and from the outset most workers chose to highlight the important part technology played in those routines, from advertising, to communicating with clients and improving security. These discoveries would have been missed if another methodology had been chosen. Much of the relationship between this subsection of sex workers and technology is what Spradley (1979) refers to as "tacit" knowledge. A native takes fundamental knowledge about their culture for granted and a researcher must be able to recognize these connections within the language and descriptions offered in the interview. However, due to the qualitative methodology used in this study, this knowledge was often brought to the forefront of the conversations in "explicit" ways when workers were asked to describe their use of technology in detail.

3.2.1. SEX WORK AND THE WORKPLACE FRAME

Coined by Carol Leigh, the term "sex work" became the parlance of advocates in 1987 (Leigh, 1997). This change in terminology was an important movement away from the stigma of terms like "whore" and "prostitute" (Grant, 2014). Changing terminology is arguably the first crucial step in changing perception (Whorf, 1956), therefore the act of researching sex work is an affirmation of its terminology and perceptions. Previous and

current research on sex work often investigates its connection with deviant behaviors, in essence reifying the deviant label associated with it. In order for self-selected sex work to truly be conceived of as work, it must be treated methodologically as any other type of work. Research rarely connects the choice of more "conventional" careers with previous domestic abuses, substance abuses, or mental illness (Rekart, 2005). In short, no one asks librarians what previous trauma led to reading books. In this regard, an appropriate place to begin discussing a methodology for researching sex work would be the workplace ethnography. Though the hidden nature, stigmatization, and legal status of sex work preclude the level of in-depth involvement a workplace ethnography necessitates, the experiences of workers and their construction of virtual social group membership is still a relevant frame of reference to begin to understand this research.

Ethnography has always had a special relationship with criminology. One of the first and most influential ethnographies was Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant* (1918) examining the generational differences in delinquency amongst first and second-generation immigrants in Chicago. Early qualitative research focused on the realities of individuals by using intensive fieldwork over long periods of time. Data was collected via autobiographical accounts of participants, field journals, participant observation, interviews, and official records. For example, an ethnography by Rexford Hershey examined in detail the workers of the Pennsylvania Railroad system by gathering personal accounts, participant observation while working for the company, and official materials like meeting minutes and company policies (Zickar & Carter, 2010). Clifford Shaw's (1930) intensive personal ethnography of a "youthful criminal" in *The Jack Roller* is a painstaking autobiographical account of a deviant youth composited by Shaw

and offering separate chapters analyzing the relevant crucial events in the young man's life.

Observation sits at the heart of many qualitative research methodologies. However, this poses a problem when qualitative researchers are attempting to investigate behaviors and contexts that are hidden from the public eye (Woodley & Lockard, 2016; Zickar & Carter, 2010). As a result, researchers have sought more fitting data collection solutions (Zickar & Carter, 2010), including with the rise of the Internet as a virtual social community. "[O]nline ethnography, netnography, or webnography" (Puri, 2007) have arisen as alternatives to traditional ethnographic methodologies. However, these new methods still rely on some style of participant or non-participant observation in the virtual realm via exchanges on Internet forums, social networks, chat rooms, and the like (Zickar & Carter, 2010) and are substantively different than content analysis or other data collection methods.

Interaction is crucial to understand the complex relationships and contextual meanings, and content analysis is less able to provide that interaction. Though digital ethnographic techniques are more convenient, conducted from the relative comfort of a laptop computer, the same level of commitment to in-depth interaction is still required (Zickar & Carter, 2010). Studying sex workers that use access to the Internet as a crucial component of work still remains difficult for researchers. Much of the work begins online and continues in the real world, and from a research standpoint this obviously makes both participant and nonparticipant observation inappropriate. However, semi structured in-depth interviews with workers can act as a rich and appropriate data collection method to investigate the experiences of sex workers as workers.

Also, both qualitative research and specifically workplace ethnography have a rich

history in feminist theory and research (Hodson, 2004; Miller, 2005), generating insights

about the differences in men and women's work life experiences and situations.

Interestingly, there is much overlap between feminist inquiry into what Hagan and

McCarthy (1998) call the "foreground" of crime and the situations, social processes and

analysis of both subjects. Obviously, sex work encompasses both of the topics of

criminology and work, each of which can and have been viewed through the lens of

feminist theory. When researching from a feminist perspective, issues of compliance,

status degradation, and effort that would normally go unnoticed in a male centered study

are more likely to be highlighted (Groves & Chang, 1999; Hodson, 2004). In summary,

research using in-depth semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the situations and

experiences of women in the workplace and in criminological situations is a well-

established methodology that is appropriate for this research (Holder, Jackson, &

Ponterotto, 2015; Laidler & Hunt, 1997; Lewis & Orford, 2005; Miller, 2001).

3.3. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

In his comparison of quantitative and qualitative sampling methodologies, van Meter

(1990) describes the concept of "ascending" and "descending" methodologies.

Descending methodologies are adapted to study accessible large populations

quantitatively. In essence, these utilize standardized questionnaires, representative

population samples, and are typically used to draw statistical inferences and inform large-

scale social policy. However, this type of sampling methodology is not helpful when

"top-down" data collection is not possible (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). By comparison,

ascending methodologies are sampling methods specifically tailored to study distinctive social groups. Data collection is most often selective, with snowball sampling, ethnographic monographs, and intensive life history case studies indicative of ascending methodology (van Meter, 1990). Though ascending sampling methodologies lack easy generalizability and can be beset with practical issues not shared by their quantitative counterpart (Heckathorn, 1997; Lofland & Lofland, 1995), ascending methodologies' strength lies in their adaptability and depth of understanding of the theoretical social process.

3.3.1. SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The target population for this study was self-identified sex workers who use Internet technology. In order to be included in the study, sample participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Be 18 or older.

2. Self-identify as a "sex worker."

3. Use the Internet in some facet of their work.

The study participants (N=50) were identified using a snowball sampling technique with four main points of entry. Two entry points utilized one local sex worker and one activist on the east coast with separate friend/acquaintance/work networks. The second two entry points were digital, in the form of social media posts to a virtual sex worker community, the first by me and the second by the moderator of the virtual community. Multiple entry points were used in an attempt to increase diversity and minimize bias that may occur in the selection of the initial participants (Heckathorn, 2011; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Because this particular subgroup of sex workers comprises a hidden

population, the purposeful snowball sampling technique was an appropriate choice to access the sample population (Handcock & Gile, 2011; Heckathorn, 1997). Heckathorn notes that hidden populations have two discrete qualities. First, there is no sampling frame from which to draw any inference on the size, parameters, and characteristics of the population. Second, hidden populations often include stigmatized or marginalized groups, and therefore security and privacy concerns result in barriers to entry (Heckathorn, 1997; 2002; 2011). As a group, sex workers qualify as a hidden population since sex workers often participate in illegal activity and also are stigmatized by the predominant culture (Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2018; Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004; Koken J. , 2011; Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005).

3.3.2. GAINING ENTRY

In the fall of 2013, I was contacted by an acquaintance to meet for cocktails. "Roxy" met me for drinks at a local Mexican restaurant, and during our meeting she had several questions about my current career in criminology. She inquired about things like length of jail time for certain offenses or the level of concern police have with vice crimes. But eventually she revealed that she had started escorting and had concerns both about her personal security and sex work's overall legality. At the time, I didn't know much about sex work but as a dutiful researcher told her I would do my best to help her find answers. During dinner she recounted stories that were drastically different from what I presumed sex work would be like. She talked about learning to run her business with a friend and fellow worker, screening clients to find the best ones that fit, and playing the role of a "girlfriend" to her regulars. She also shared stories from of other

workers she knew and offered to introduce me to them. At this point, I told her that though I would be interested in talking with them, but I would prefer to speak to my advisor and meet with her contacts after a proper research study had been set up.

In the spring of 2014, after the submission and acceptance of an IRB proposal, Roxy supplied her business partner with my contact information; this business partner consequently became the second study participant in the first wave of the sample. These two initials participants were able to provide the first snowball entry point garnering two additional referrals that met the above criteria for participation in the study, bringing the initial total to four. I quickly discovered a second snowball entry point after initial data collection began in the form of a colleague who had contacts in the Philadelphia sex worker community. She provided three contacts who all recommended several additional workers, contributing a total of eleven additional interviews and bringing the total to fifteen.

Most of my initial contact with study participants was via email, where individuals were given my contact information and, once communication was established, I informed them of the purpose of the study and provided copies of the consent form, the audio recording consent form, and the interview questionnaire. Following this initial contact, most often I answered basic questions, occasionally provided further proof of my credentials, and we set an interview date. Interviews were conducted either in person or over a video conferencing software. Interviews were semi-structured and dealt with a variety of topics relevant to workers' experiences, starting with entrance and work routines, followed by health and safety concerns, and concluding

with perceptions of sex work as a cultural and social phenomenon.[3] My initial contact

with these three "in-person" gatekeepers ultimately garnered 30 percent (N=15) of the

overall sample.

The remaining 70 percent (N=35) of study participants were acquired via social

media and subsequent referrals, starting on the website Reddit. Reddit is "an

American social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website"

(Wikipedia, 2019). The site's main function is to provide users with a custom "front page

of the Internet" that is presented to them based on the subscribed interests of the user.

Once a profile is created a user can subscribe to a variety of subreddits or "subs." These

are topic specific pages that feature user-generated and submitted content on the topic of

interest. For example, if a user is interested in Batman comic books, existential literature,

and Tex-Mex cooking, they subscribe to these three pages and whenever the user visits

the site, they are greeted with new content based upon these criteria and generated via

other members. Users can also interact with the content provided on the "subs" by either

"up-voting" or "down-voting" the various posts based on perceived quality. Up-voted

content will be shown first when users initially arrive at the page. Down-voted content

moves further down the queue and will often never be seen. This voting system attempts

to ensure that users will see an ever-changing variety of high-quality content.

Furthermore, almost all posts can be commented upon, leading to a wide assortment of

conversations about the content and its parent topic.

Each sub has a moderator, or series of moderators, to ensure community standards

are upheld. Moderators have a limited amount of power but can remove inappropriate

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[3] The interview guide is provided in Appendix C.

posts and ban users who break the rules. Moderators are also able to highlight content they find to be important with what is known as a "sticky post." A sticky post ensures content will remain at the top of the page regardless of being up or down voted until a moderator removes it. The most common form of sticky post is content the moderators find to be important information for everyone who visits the sub. These can include reminders to read and adhere to community standards, make community members aware of time sensitive content, or may point users to other pages that might have more useful information on a relevant topic.

Reddit has an assortment of "subs" for sex workers. The most popular is simply titled "sex workers" and is a page where workers can post interesting content on the topic of sex work, including news articles, media, and most importantly, user questions and inquiries for the community to discuss. As of the writing of this chapter, the Reddit sex worker page has over 44,000 subscribers, though when the data was being collected the number of subscribers was a small fraction of that. And, it must be noted that not all subscribers are sex workers. Subscribers can be anyone with Internet access, a Reddit profile, and a curious interest in sex work. For example, I subscribe to the sex worker subreddit. A select few subs require subscribers to prove they are sex workers before the moderators will approve their subscription. This is meant to make the sub more useful for workers by ensuring all participants have experience in sex work and aren't populating the sub merely out of curiosity or some ulterior motive.

I have been a member of Reddit for the past six years. On April 13, 2014 I made my first of three requests for interview participants on Reddit's sex worker page. Initially, I was going to create a new profile and subscribe only to the sex worker sub. However, I

quickly realized that a brand-new account on Reddit is often looked upon with suspicion. Also, the text of my original inquiry included no credentials, no link to my IRB protocols, and no offer of compensation. Interestingly, though my request was rightfully met with skepticism, I was not banned by the moderators, and a few people (N=4, 8 percent) agreed to an interview. The top comment in the discussion section of my post asked for more credible information. After realizing my naïveté, I edited the post to include my credentials as a Rutgers graduate researcher and a link to my approved IRB in full.

I posted a similar request, with proof of identity and credentials, on July 13th, 2016. This second attempt to solicit interviews via Reddit was markedly less successful. This is because the post was "down-voted" early on. As mentioned above, content that is not up-voted moves further down the queue into obscurity. In my initial attempt in 2014, I received a handful of up-votes and in a sub with only a few thousand subscribers, this was enough to maintain the post's position on the "front page" of the sub for a short amount of time, which caught the attention of a handful of workers who agreed to be interviewed. Unfortunately, the second attempt did not receive enough initial up-votes to keep the post visible.

My third post on Reddit's sex worker sub, on November 26th, 2016 was quite successful. This time I took a different approach by messaging the moderator of the sub and asking her if she could help me connect directly with members to interview for the study. Interestingly, the moderator said that one of the main reasons she was willing to help was because I had such a long history on the site already. She was able to inspect my profile and see the various other subs where I would post content and comments, and she said that my online activity didn't set off any "red flags." Because of this, she was willing

to make a sticky post that would remain at the top of the sex worker sub for one month in December of 2016. A sticky post by a moderator carried more credibility than a single user generated post. Also, the moderator "vouching" for me helped circumvent some of the community's suspicions. This post made it possible for me to make contact with over a dozen additional sex workers (N=16, 32 percent), which helped complete data collection for the sample.

Not all interviews were a result of contacting sex workers via Reddit. Some workers (N=15) volunteered via other sex worker support pages on the Internet or through referrals via contacts made during the Reddit posts. Many workers subscribe to support pages on Facebook and Quora or follow prominent workers on Twitter and Instagram. Workers who spoke with me and had a positive experience would often post my contact information either to their personal social media accounts or these support group pages. Using the Internet for information sharing is a prominent feature of this new "digital model," and this was even evident while I was attempting to seek interviews. In total, the four initial entry points garnered the sample of 50 self-identified sex workers between the spring of 2014 and fall of 2016.

3.4. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The study sample includes women, men, and transgender people; people of color and whites; a multitude of sexual orientations, and individuals of a variety of ages. As detailed above, sex workers can be difficult to reach through conventional sampling techniques, so a purposive snowball technique was optimal given the difficulty of identifying an overall sex worker population with access to Internet technology from

which to sample. Also, this technique provided me with flexibility in targeting these

hidden varieties of sex workers within the overall sex worker subpopulation.

Furthermore, because the snowball process I employed included participants nominating

other participants, the likelihood of observing intra-group work associations and

information sharing systems was increased.

3.4.1. AGE

The average age of participants was 28.64, with a median of 28 and a range of 18

and 46. Several interviewees affirmed that this was their true age by explaining that they

often misrepresent their age in business advertisements to attract preferred clients.

Workers on both ends of the range claimed to skew their age higher (if younger) and

younger (if older) because they "get too many weird calls" from clients looking for older

or younger workers respectively.

3.4.2. GENDER

The overwhelming majority of the sample identified their gender as female

(N=45); this includes two interviewees who responded with "trans-female." Three

participants identified their gender as male, and of those one added the qualifier of being

non-gendered. Two participants identified as being non-gender with an inclination

towards what they termed "femme."

3.4.3. RACE/ETHNICITY

Similar to gender, the majority of the sample identified as white or some

combination (N=43), with two identifying as Jewish and white, one as Native American

and white, and one as Asian and white. Three interviewees indicated they were Asian,

and one as Chinese. The snowball sample garnered one participant each who identified as African American, Hispanic and Jewish American.

3.4.4. SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The majority of the sample (N=19) identified as bisexual when given the opportunity to describe their sexual orientation, with three including bisexual as part of a pair of identities (two straight/bisexual, one pansexual or bisexual). Workers who identified as queer made up the second-largest category (N=9), followed by workers who identified as straight (N=8), which includes the two participants self-described as both straight and bisexual, who explained they were "pretty much straight" and "leaning towards straight," and one identifying as "unfortunately straight" because they missed out on "more opportunities." Pansexual and heteroflexible identities account for 10 percent (N=5) and 6 percent (N=3) of the sample, respectively. The remaining four self-described categories were each identified by one person (homoflexible, fluid, anything goes, and does not apply).

3.4.5. KIND OF SEX WORK

Escorts make up the majority of the sample (N=31), followed by webcam performers (N=17). Fetish models and BDSM workers account for four participants each. In addition, two burlesque performers participated in the study and one worker who also counted her production work in pornography as part of her sex work career. One participant had taken part in street level sex work, but she was among the 13 participants who named a combination of work styles: webcam/escort (N=5), webcam/fetish (N=4), webcam/BDSM (N=1), webcam/production (N=1), webcam/burlesque (N=1), and escort/street (N=1).

3.4.6. UNCOLLECTED DEMOGRAPHICS

During the development of the interview guide, I consulted three informants to assess the "cultural sensitivity" (Coker, Huang, & Kashubeck-West, 2009) of the questions asked during the interview. I was told that workers are very resilient, but certain subjects may make them uncomfortable. Questions regarding specific amounts of income should be avoided. Similarly, questions about educational backgrounds, family history, and previous abuses were rejected from the interview guide. The rationale for the removal of these questions was twofold. First, much of the extant research on sex work attempts to causally relate sex work to deviant behaviors or indicators of low socioeconomic status (such as low levels of education or a history of domestic abuse). If information on these relationships is desired, there is extant research to explore. Secondly, and more importantly, if sex work is to be examined as work, previous qualitative inquiry into employment and careers does not customarily attempt to connect choice of employment to deviant behavior or histories of victimization. Given that the goals of this research are to understand how sex workers do their jobs and how they do those jobs is affected by their relationship to usage of Internet technology, most of these questions are irrelevant. This technique seemed to be validated when one interviewee thanked me for not asking questions about previous abuses and not "digging around" to find out why she had decided to become a sex worker.

3.5. STUDY SETTING

The focus of this research is on how sex workers have adopted Internet technology to enter sex work, construct and manage their work persona or identity, and

increase their security via digital information gathering. In its short history, the Internet has become an ideal example of Spradley's (1979) concept of implicit knowledge. The Internet has so seamlessly integrated itself into society that often its use is incorporated into our behaviors without expressed description. These new technologies were adopted early and widely because of their effectiveness. In her book *Social Movements and their Technologies*, Milan (2013) uses the mythology of Prometheus and his emancipation of fire to describe the liberating effects of technology on populations. This "stealing the fire" to describe new technological advancement and its adoption by groups of pioneers encapsulates the adoption of Internet technology by the forerunners of digital sexual commerce. But the question of who gets to use this technology looms large.

Privilege is a largely invisible construct, but can shed some light on issues of resources, including how groups of people use the Internet to gain knowledge and solve problems. Both the US Census Bureau (2018) and the United Nations (2016) report that developed nations have higher rates of high-speed Internet usage than developing nations and within those developed nations, whites, both as households and individuals, use the Internet at higher rates (Pew Research, 2018). In 2000, half of all Americans used the Internet. That number has increased to nine in ten Americans in recent years (Pew Research, 2018). When these figures are examined across race/ethnicity, however, there is an appreciable difference between consistently high rates of usage by whites and steadily growing rates by people of color. The digital divide between races has steadily closed in the last decade, with 87% of African Americans using the internet in 2018 up from 38% in 2000. The Pew research indicates that the same trajectory is mirrored in Latinx Americans (2018). But though percentages of Internet usage have consistently

increased in the last decade, no group has displaced whites as having the highest percentage of Internet users.

Part of the social construction of race inexorably ties racial status to economic status and by extension, class status. Rates of Internet usage by socio-economic status (SES) also mirror those of racial differences (Pew Research, 2018). Previously, in the year 2000, 34% of individual adults who made under $30,000 a year used the Internet, contrasting with 81% of people who made over $75,000.

Similar to the racial digital divide, the gap has shrunken over time. In 2018 81% of low SES people used the Internet and a striking 98% of those in the high SES category. Though this digital divide is closing, again, it's worth noting that no group has higher usage than those in the over $75,000 category. Furthermore, these figures represent an extended familiarity with Internet technology for those in the privileged groups, and increased usage also lends itself to increased expertise. For example, many of the providers in the study liked to describe themselves as "savvy" when it came to technology rather than simply capable or proficient. Importantly, a high level of exposure and expertise in a given skill set opens more opportunities to use that skill set to solve a problem and what simply looks like increased usage could be an indicator of increased opportunity.

The Internet embodies the benefits of a robust investment in public information infrastructure. The "birth" of the Internet can be traced to the early 1960's when the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) fixated on the idea of sharing vital research information between laboratories at UCLA and Stanford (Leiner, et al., 2012). One central idea that undergirded the concept of the Internet was that different

networks (either technological, geographical or social) can be separately designed and interface with the whole in a self-prescribed way. This, in turn, encourages a high level of autonomy by individual users and networks (Leiner, et al., 2012). This concept is crucial for this research because this high level of autonomy and customizability is precisely how and why sex workers became such early adopters of Internet technology (Bernstein, 2007).

By the mid 1990s the Internet found its way into the homes of many everyday citizens. This recent access to the Internet was accompanied by access to new and increasingly available audio and video technology that aided in non-experts being able to become self-made writers and producers of original content (Milan, 2013). Leiner and his colleagues note that the reason the Internet has had such an immense impact on human society is because of its ability to adapt and thrive with these new technological advancements. These authors predicted that in just a few short years the Internet would usher in a new paradigm of "nomadic computing and communications" (2012). Based on the limited existing research, this nomadic paradigm is evident in the lives and businesses of sex workers who use mobile Internet technology to attract new clients, heighten personal security, and interact with on-line communities (Panchanadeswaran, Unnithan, Chacko, Brazda, & Kuruppu, 2017).

A crucial point of this new "digital model," as my study introduces, is that digital workers recognize the dominance of Internet-based techniques over the culturally perceived "indoor/outdoor" models of sex work and their corresponding norms. Workers in the study frequently compared their digital workplace routines to the broader cultural knowledge of sex work, often outside the scope of their own personal experiences. This

speaks to the digital model's dualistic quality of being responsive on the individual level while acknowledging the struggles of the broader sex worker community. Sex workers create new ways of doing business simply because those new methods are more advantageous than traditional models, reducing the risk of detection and increasing both anonymity and autonomy.

The participants in this study all live in countries that are considered to be "Western nations" (including: Australia, America, Canada, England, France, Germany, and South Africa), but their common setting is access to Internet technology. Despite being a primarily white female sample, study participants came from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Yet it is this access and usage of Internet technology that coalesces them into a relevant social group

3.5.1. THE CHALLENGE OF ACCESSING HIDDEN POPULATIONS

Qualitative research presents specific challenges when attempting to gain access to an unknown or hidden population (Heckathorn, 1997; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The worldwide community of sex workers is, understandably so, often secretive and protective of its members. An "outed" worker can face stigmatization (Wong, Holroyd, & Bingham, 2011), shunning (Bowen R. , 2015), arrest (Benoit C. , et al., 2016), or even violence (Penfold, Hunter, Campbell, & Barham, 2004). In order to be welcomed into the online international sex worker community I had to establish rapport with a few key members to gain trust and a positive reputation within the community. Interestingly, in retrospect, while gaining entry I was often subject to the same security protocols that any new client interaction would necessitate. On several occasions, interviewees informed me that prior to agreeing to be part of the study they had "Googled" me, checked my social

media presence, investigated online membership profiles for any posts that made them wary or uncomfortable, or checked my employment status directly with Rutgers University to ensure that I was performing legitimate research for acceptable reasons.

As noted above, purposive or snowball sampling techniques are the qualitative sampling method of choice for the majority of criminological research on hidden populations. For example, studying active offenders, delinquent youth, or ex-offenders requires creative methods to locate research participants (Miller, 2005). Immersion into a subculture can successfully generate new contacts (Wright & Decker, 1997), as well as identifying participants via social control institutions and agencies (Maruna, 2007; Miller, 2001). But as the phenomenon being studied increases in sensitivity, danger, or stigmatization, the likelihood of participants hiding their involvement increases the difficulty of sampling, revealing the value of a purposive snowball sampling method.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In this study I used semi-structured interviews to learn about the experiences and attitudes of sex workers. The first draft of the interview guide was created in the spring of 2014. The interview guide originated by referencing recent explorations into workplace ethnography (Hodson, 2004), in an attempt to better understand the concerns of the sex worker community from the perspective of sex work as work. The initial draft was then discussed with Roxy, her business partner, and a local Philadelphia activist to ensure questions were pertinent and appropriate. These three informants offered several changes to the initial interview guide that were implemented before the first interview took place. Questions concerning family background and previous abuse were removed in an effort

to keep the interviews from being too invasive while avoiding making assumptions about the causal and covariate relationship between sex work and deviant behaviors. This also echoes the recommendation of Coker, Hsin-Hsin, and Kashubeck-West (2009), who argue it is important that "researchers should use culturally sensitive research methods"(p. 162) when interviewing hidden and marginalized groups (Woodley & Lockard, 2016).

Second, an offer for some form of compensation was removed because gatekeepers felt that anything less than a worker's normal hourly rate would be seen as both insufficient and insulting. However, in 2016, when the moderator of the sex worker subreddit offered to help recruit more participants she suggested that compensation could be offered if it was paired with an opportunity for workers to donate the money to charity. The moderator suggested that this option might help encourage additional workers to volunteer. Compensation was added back in via an IRB addendum and workers were given the option to be compensated in one of three ways: 1. A flat fee of $100 for their time participating in the interview; 2. The same amount of money donated to a charity of their choice; or 3. An opportunity for the money to be returned to the "interview pool" so that more interviews could be paid for. The overwhelming majority chose to donate the money to charity, offering to donate to Planned Parenthood, Women's Medical Fund, Legal Momentum (Women's Legal and Education Fund), End the Backlog, The Standing Rock Protests, The Domestic Abuse Hotline, The Alzheimer's Fund, various local women's shelters, and various animal rescue organizations.

At the outset of every interview each interviewee was asked to create a pseudonym based on a letter from the alphabet that I provided. This ensured that the

pseudonym was randomly selected and could not be traced back to the participant. Most interactions began with informal questions from the participant about the nature of the study and my path to sex work as a research topic. I would strive to answer these questions as openly and honestly as possible and found that participants were often put at ease by my candor. Also, providing specific details about my life both personally and as a scholar aided in building trust. Each interview began with the collection of demographic characteristics and a general question about the area where they currently live. This was intended to establish rapport and denote the informal nature of the conversation.

Following this, the interview was broken into three general segments. First, interviewees were asked about their entrance into sex work and the specifics of their day-to-day business operation, including a walk-through of their most recent client interaction and a few recollections of memorable client experiences. Second, workers were asked about health and safety protocols and information sharing mechanisms, as well as broader structural institutional interactions, such as the criminal justice system or healthcare providers. Third, workers were asked to expound on their personal and professional relationships, and the wider social perceptions and impacts of sex work as an industry. Lastly, interviewees were given the opportunity to speak to any topics that were not covered in the interview or to inquire about any additional information from me (see Appendix A for the full interview guide). Occasionally, I would be asked for additional personal information such as sexual proclivities, previous experience with sex workers, or sexual orientation. In these situations, I found radical honesty to be the most appropriate response, as it appeared to continue to build trust both within the interview

and the community at large and to alleviate any lingering doubts about any possible

ulterior motives.

The vast majority of interviews were cordial and lighthearted, with a few small

exceptions. For example, one dominatrix consistently mistook my inquisitive nature for

naïveté, becoming impatient when I would ask for the definition of terms that arose. That

being said, the interview was still exceedingly fruitful, and in the end, she wished me

luck on my "school project."

All interviews were conducted either in person or via a video chat program (such

as Skype, FaceTime, or G-chat). The interviews conducted in person comprise the

minority of the sample (N=6), with three taking place in my living room, one at a

restaurant, one in the interviewee's home, and one at a coffee shop. The majority of

interviews took place virtually, using a video chat program (N=44). Overall,

interviewees who met virtually conducted the interview in their own home, in a

comfortable space, most often their living room or bedroom. Only one interviewee

requested an increased security measure of having her face obscured during the video

interview. In order to conform to the requirements of the IRB, she simply put masking

tape over her web camera and the interview took place with her being able to see me

while I only saw a black screen. In several instances daily routines could interrupt the

interview process, but the casual and free-flowing nature of the unstructured interviews

always ensured an easy transition back to the salient topic, and I was always sure to

reiterate the last question discussed before the interruption.

Two questions during the interview process made several interviewees

uncomfortable. However, rather than eliminate them, letting workers speak to their level

of discomfort produced rich and detailed data. Often, after the question was answered the conversation would turn to why that question is included, and whether the interviewee found it to be informative to their experience as a worker. The first question appears early in the interview asking the interviewee to describe in detail their last encounter with a client. Some participants wondered if I was fishing for lewd content or anecdotes. However, the intent was merely to get as much detail as possible about how workers interact with their clients, rather than how they think/feel about their clients or work. Thoughts and feelings, though valuable, are referential, whereas behaviors and actions are experiential. Because detailed observation or participation in this setting is impossible, a detailed description of events can help illuminate both the manifest and latent content of their work experiences. Furthermore, even in a confidential interview, discussion can be constrained by the confines of civilized conversation, leaving interviewees restrained in their level of detailed description (Jordan & Dalal, 2006). Interestingly, most often interviewees chose to highlight structural details, such as safety protocols or methods of communication, then quickly but frankly narrate the events of their last client meeting.

The second question was concerning to several interviewees for a very different reason than propriety. In the later section of the interview, when discussing the topic of sex work as a broader social and cultural issue, interviewees are asked about their hierarchical place on the "ladder" of sex work. Most interviewees answered this question similar to the classic sociological inquiry about "class" where, with a wide variety, most basically identify in the middle (Pew Research Center, 2008). But some study participants took offense, claiming that they didn't like the idea of being "higher up" or

"better" than their fellow sex workers. Most often the interviewees who found the question distasteful took this opportunity to extol the virtues of solidarity in the global sex worker community. Remarkably, though it was not originally included for this purpose, this question became an interesting example of a quasi "breaching experiment" (Garfinkel, 1967), wherein interviewees would recognize the question as unsuitable and use the opportunity to refute it.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

The initial step in analyzing the data collected was to transcribe the interviews. Spradley suggests transcribing interviews verbatim in order to ensure accuracy (1979). Interviews were transcribed in one of three ways: by me, by undergraduate students added to the research protocol in the fall of 2016, or by the transcription website rev.com. Any interviews transcribed by a third-party were free from all identifiers and double checked for accuracy against the original recordings. As noted previously, all interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Also, participants were instructed to never use anyone's full name, avoid names altogether when possible, and try to be general about locations. On occasion, interviewees would mention the first name of a friend or acquaintance or divulge a city or town, but in no instances were any full names or specific locations recorded. Later, any general broad identifiers were removed from the final transcriptions and never revealed during analysis.

For this research, a grounded theory approach as described by Charmaz (2006) was utilized to analyze the interviews and subsequent fieldnotes. The grounded theory approach utilizes inductive reasoning to construct theory from data rather than deduce the

validity of existing theory through rigorous testing (Babbie, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In short, the grounded theory approach is a tool for developing theory by approaching data with no preconceived notions, allowing theory to emerge through an empirical inductive method.

Charmaz (2006) notes that a grounded theory approach is particularly well-suited for data gathered via intensive qualitative interviewing. This is because both the method of data collection and analysis are open-ended yet direct, allowing for themes to emerge within the confines of the topic being discussed, but not limited to it. Because of this emergent yet flexible technique, themes are likely to emerge during the interview process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stress that the researcher be simultaneously involved in both the collection and analysis of data for this very reason, so the researcher can recognize emergent themes and pursue them during the interview process (Charmaz, 2006). The interview guide for this research was initially based on previous workplace ethnography that explores daily work habits. During the preliminary phase of data collection for this research, sex work's new and vital relationship to the Internet quickly emerged as a theme. Despite the study being about digital sex work, the complexity of this relationship was not initially planned for; the semi-structured format of the interviews allows this topic to be explored in each and every subsequent interview, with technology's comprehensive and adaptable uses being central to each worker's stories and experiences.

The grounded theory approach concentrates on the practice of coding. Essentially, "categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data…codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to

begin an analytic accounting of them" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43).

Coding happened in two phases: initial and focused. Initial coding moves slowly through the data line by line in an attempt to conceptualize the themes and categories of the research data. This step of the coding process is concerned with four questions: 1. "What is this data a study of?" 2. "What does the data suggest? Pronounce?" 3. "From whose point of view?" 4. "What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate?" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). As per this approach, initial coding stuck close to the data and looked at actions rather than feelings, concepts, or perceptions, allowing new concepts to emerge while not being hindered by preconceived notions.

Charmaz urges new researchers to recognize initial codes as "provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data" (2006, p. 49). Provisional codes prompted me to remain open to other possibilities that the data may present. Comparative codes helped my initial research confirm or disconfirm new concepts discovered in the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasize a "constant comparison," wherein data is compared both within and between research levels and participants. For example, I compared the definitions of native terms between one interviewee and another, and whether that definition changed across time within individual interviews. Only coding that is grounded in the data reliably and validly reflects the concerns, processes, and contexts of the research sample.

Following initial coding, I engaged in focused coding, which is the second phase of the grounded theory approach. Focused coding uses "the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data…[requiring] decisions about which initial codes make the most analytics sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Though focused coding is less nuanced than the

first step of initial coding, it is the part of the analysis where concepts begin to emerge as either endemic to the group or specific to the individual.

The initial coding for this research produced numerous themes consistent across the interviews. Stories of entrance, techniques for developing and managing work identities and personas, and concerns over risks and security were discussed by most participants. The common topic that tied many of these themes together was the use of technology to facilitate how digital sex workers do their work. The focused coding phase of the analysis concentrated on this issue of process. Each theme had a progression of steps that workers described, which identified the most common ways workers approached these issues. Though the specifics of these steps could vary, they represented a common practice that workers used to address the various issues. Each process across the four most prominent themes is discussed in its own subsequent analysis chapter.

3.8. LIMITATIONS

The rigor of social science research is often judged by its ability to conform to four classic requirements: validity, both internal and external; reliability; and objectivity. However, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), these four criteria, though appropriate for quantitative research, run counter to the aims and objectives of qualitative research. Instead, they propose four parallel requirements to judge the integrity of qualitative inquiry: *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *conformability*. Each of these assesses a criterion mirrored in the four quantitative requirements (Krefting, 1991).

3.8.1. TRUTH VALUE

In quantitative research, internal validity indicates research that is logically sound, uses accurate instrument measurements, and avoids confounding factors or explanations. In qualitative research the parallel measurement of truth value is *credibility* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It represents the confidence the researcher has in the design of the research, the participants, and the contexts where the research takes place. Furthermore, credibility speaks to the authenticity of the participant-oriented experience: "A qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that people who also share that experience would immediately recognize the descriptions" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216).

In this study, participants often agreed on the ways self-selected sex work is entered into, how personal and professional identities play a role in their day-to-day work and social life, and how clients are screened and crucial information is shared. However, the credibility of this research could be threatened since there is no way to verify the experiences of study participants. They participated in a wide variety of sex work activities, so credibility could become an issue when such a wide net is cast that the narratives and observations of the research create data with wide parameters. Lincoln and Guba name truth value as the most crucial criterion for assessing qualitative scholarship. Several studies using the same methodology and drawing similar conclusions could increase the credibility of this study; as could sharing findings with community members to see if the research "got it right."

3.8.2. APPLICABILITY

External validity speaks to the generalizability of quantitative research. In short, how applicable is this research to other settings or groups? Quantitative research minimizes threats to external validity by striving for representativeness within their sampling procedures. However, in qualitative research a representative sample is not an aim. Because of the nature of qualitative research, purposive sampling is used to gain a more in-depth understanding of a group or context. Often, generalizability is dismissed as not applicable to qualitative research (Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). This, alternatively, can be seen as a strength since qualitative research is investigating unique situations in a naturalistic setting and would therefore be less applicable to dissimilar situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that *transferability* is a more fitting criterion to measure applicability in qualitative research. Findings that are able to fit into situations outside the context of the study via some amount of similarity indicates a study with good applicability. Research that describes unique situations with enough detail to allow comparison has sufficiently addressed applicability.

In many cases, applicability can only be judged in future studies by the standard of whether both studies contain enough detailed description to be cross-referenced (Krefting, 1991). The present study will go into great detail to describe the work histories, routines, and relationships of self-identified sex workers who use the Internet. Similar to credibility, the individuals in the sample vary in their locations, culture, and styles of sex work. This could hinder the ability for the collected data to be transferable to other studies. However, the fact that the use of the Internet is a crucial factor in the descriptive data collected seems to offer promise that future studies concerned with how and why sex workers use the Internet could benefit from the data collected in the study.

In addition, some of the study findings, such as the relationship between emotional labor and Internet-reliant work, may also be transferable to other digital workplace ethnographies.

3.8.3. CONSISTENCY

Consistency refers to whether a repeated inquiry would replicate similar data given similar participants or contexts. In quantitative research reliability is a crucial metric for the quality of an experiment (Sandelowski, 1986). "Inherent in the goal of reliability is the value of repeatability, that replication of the testing procedures does not alter the findings" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). Qualitative scholars perform research in naturalized settings that defy the expressed goal of repeated experiments. The essence of qualitative research is to learn from informants, recognizing that capturing the variation of lived experiences is the goal of qualitative research, not its replication (Krefting, 1991). Therefore, qualitative research should not be judged on the criterion of reliable replication, but on its *dependability*.

Dependability involves tracking variation within and between identified sources. These variations might come in the form of increased understanding from the researcher, changes in the study participant's attitudes and beliefs, or variation in the study's context. Importantly, qualitative researchers often do not investigate average experiences, instead looking to non-normative situations and experiences (Krefting, 1991; Maruna, 2007). For quantitative researchers an outlier represents an anomaly, whereas for qualitative researchers, people whose stories are on the edge of the spectrum represent important information about the limits of the study's analytic parameters.

The research participants for this study differ in a few key ways. Age, sexual orientation, and type of sex work are just a few of the key features that vary from person-to-person. This research sample dependably represents an array of experiences and techniques using the Internet for a multitude of purposes, from the most benign to the extreme. No participant's experience exactly mirrored another, however the experiences of interviewees dependably represented substantive and important variations in the narrative of being a self-identified digital sex worker.

Furthermore, a contemporary issue concerning the consistency and dependability of the collection of qualitative data is the technology used for communication. Occasionally, technical difficulties hindered communication between me and the interviewee. Weak Internet signal occasionally caused some of the recorded conversation to be inaudible. In most instances, I merely restated questions or study participants restated answers, but in one interview technical limitations led to a reduction in the quality of the interview. Because of the clandestine nature of sex work, it was not possible to conduct further follow-ups with this specific interviewee, but the interview was still completed, and ample data was collected.

3.8.4. NEUTRALITY

The last criterion for rigorous research is neutrality, research that is free from bias both methodologically and analytically (Sandelowski, 1986). Neutrality is concerned with the findings being a reflection of the informant and the contexts of the research (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Quantitative research seeks to be objective (i.e., neutral) via the criteria of reliability and validity. Furthermore, quantitative research is concerned with the objective distance of the researcher and participants through methods

such as randomization and instrumentation (Krefting, 1991). These safeguards hope to ensure a lack of influence over the research, either by the researcher or the study participant. Paradoxically, qualitative research attempts to decrease the amount of distance between the researcher and the study participant in the hopes of increasing the neutrality of the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest this will result in what they deem *confirmability*. Once a qualitative researcher can determine the presence of truth value and applicability, this should result in the researcher's ability to judge the confirmability of data.

Finally, even when a qualitative research design results in confirmability via objectivity to the data, the distance between researcher and participant can produce a biased sampling method or analysis that could threaten the viability of a study. All research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is a human activity and is subject to the shortcomings of all human activity. Researchers have unrecognized and unidentified biases, and there is no known way to fully eliminate them (Norris, 1997). The initial sampling of the gatekeepers for this study were not drawn randomly, leaving the entirety of the sample open to network bias. Second, "volunteerism" (Erickson, 1979; Heckathorn, 2002) is a problem wherein more cooperative individuals would agree to participate in the research. This seems likely because often sex workers mitigate their "openness" based on the perceived intensity of stigma (Weitzer, 2017). This research uses a form of chain referral, including recruitment by previous study participants, meaning referrals are made not randomly, increasing the likelihood that recruits have pre-existing social ties. This opens the door for a homophily bias (Erickson, 1979;

Heckathorn, 2002), where current recruits could invariably impact the characteristics of each subsequent recruit.

3.8.5. REFLEXIVITY

Many of the limitations above are addressed with attention to the concept of "reflexivity" (Macdonald, 2001). Reflexivity involves the critical attempt to understand and account for the role the researcher plays as the conduit through which meanings are interpreted. Social science research has a long tradition of striving for objectivity, but over a century of research has often produced unobserved white, male, heterosexual, cisgender bias masquerading as objectivity (England, 1994). More recent methodological discussions have aptly noted that the subjectivity of the researcher should be viewed as an instrument rather than an obstacle. Newton cleverly holds up a mirror to the issue of the researcher subjectivity when trading jokes with other academics: "A [researcher] and [their] informant are talking; finally the informant says, 'Okay, enough about you, now let's talk about me'" (2006, p. 170).

The concept of reflexivity is often represented simply as the subjectivity of the research, but Ardener (1975) applied it to broader concepts, specifically in feminist research. Ardner notes that the majority of research on women is centered in the paradigm of a patriarchal society. He encourages researchers, both male and female, to subjectively interpret all aspects of the research experience and not to limit oneself merely to the personal reflection. The reactivity of the sex worker community to the presence of a researcher plays a role in the interpretation of events on both a personal and communal level. But Berger (2015) notes that reflexivity shouldn't be seen as a limitation of qualitative research, but instead should be embraced, to aid in understanding the data

through the researcher's own personal lens that can aid in a fruitful "co-construction" of data between the researcher and participants.

Berger (2015) notes that reflexivity can impact research in three important ways. First, access to the "field" can either be limited or increased based upon whether community members believe the researcher is either a sympathetic or suitable person to be performing the research. In my particular case this was a double-edged sword: workers roundly affirmed that they believed I was sensitive to the issues workers face, and was therefore an appropriate person to be performing the research, but this also leads to the second of Berger's impacts, the nature of the researcher-researched relationship. As a man researching a largely female population, some workers may have been reluctant to speak to me because of my gender. However, no workers ever explicitly expressed any discomfort with such gender dynamics during the interviews. Many workers also explained that they felt comfortable around men and part of their job was creating a comfortable environment suitable for sharing intimate thoughts and feelings, so they were simply using a skill set they'd already developed. Berger (2015, p. 220) notes that the last impact may be the most crucial because it shapes the way the researcher gathers, interprets and shares information during the study:

> Finally, the worldview and background of the researcher affects the way in which he or she constructs the world, uses language, poses questions, and chooses the lens for filtering the information gathered from participants and making meaning of it, and thus may shape the findings and conclusions of the study.

As a white, cis-gendered man who has never been a sex worker, there are some concepts that, though I can inquire about, I can never reach a full understanding. Participants in the study come from a variety of backgrounds and they interpret their own

experiences through the lenses of their individual lives. An important aspect of reflexivity is knowing that part of empirical inquiry is striving to understand that the perceptions of the researched are a crucial aspect of what is being collected. For example, one worker told a story of a client "abducting" her, and I immediately perceived this to be the recounting of a traumatic experience. Yet when I asked if she was comfortable providing more details, she laughed and told me how exciting it was and that it was something she had been wanting to try. My initial "worldview" was that workers should be respected, but from my own perception, protection was part of respect. It wasn't until I discussed the idea of risk and safety with a worker that I realized my perception of safety was vastly different from those I was talking to, and not trusting workers' ability to make their own choices was a form of disrespect.

England (1994) aptly describes that reflexivity is an act of introspection. It is the rejection of objectivity as a goal in favor of self-discovery that can fuel new breakthroughs. Rather than reflexivity being an awareness of what must be negated during research, instead the researcher should be an integral part of the process. Of course, this approach can create new challenges and the researcher must be ever mindful of the consequences of the reflexive "I" when approaching empirical interactions. However, the strength of a reflexive co-creation is that, ideally, the analyses and conclusions reached will be accessible and applicable to a range of people, rather than framed solely by the attempted objective overarching paradigm of the researcher or the cloistered world of those being researched.

3.9. CONCLUSION

This research utilizes data from 50 self-identified sex workers who utilize Internet technology. Though the sample is largely female and white, study participants came from a variety of backgrounds, ages, genders, sexual orientations, races/ethnicities, and perform a variety of sexual commerce jobs. The sample was located using a purposive snowball sampling technique with four main points of entry, utilizing my personal social connections, business networks of the initial contacts, and Internet gathering sites used by workers for the exchange of information. The data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews that were performed either in person or with the use of a video communication software. Interviewees fully consented to take part in the research and I took steps to ensure their confidentiality. I analyzed the collected data using a grounded theory approach to develop and describe the situations, contexts, and processes sex workers encounter in their professional and personal lives. Finally, though research into a hidden population comes with certain challenges that increase the limitations of any study, this study strives to meet the requirements of *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *conformability* to produce rigorous qualitative research that strives for a reflexive co-creation of knowledge on the world these workers inhabit.

CHAPTER 4: ENTRANCE

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Kelly squared her shoulders and tucked her chin to her chest, her eyes narrowed giving her a serious look, "I'm going to be totally honest, so sometimes it's not going to sound very nice." She was stern, but a slight hint of a southern accent softened her delivery. She wanted to make sure I didn't have any preconceived notions before we started. She was well read on sex worker scholarship and was suspicious of researchers because she felt they often had an agenda that drowned out the voices of workers, "I was 19. I was really high on Xanax and another girl basically pimped me out when I was blackout high. Then to process that, deal with it, I kept doing it after in a weird way." As she spoke, she'd often run her fingers through her auburn hair. "One thing led to another and then I got more used to the idea of it being an actual job part of my life instead of just something that I did…to have bills met." I asked how that transition was made from being "pimped out" to a "job." She paused for a moment and then said, "I would say probably when it got to the point of realizing that I did have other work options, that they weren't paying me enough money to really live life, that's when I decided that it was a job and I was choosing it."

Reframing the work as a choice was an important step for Kelly, but it was also accompanied by the themes other workers discussed in their entrance stories. Workers overwhelmingly noted[4] the use of the Internet to both enter sex work and use it to

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[4] A note on descriptive amounts: I will be using much of Miller's (2008) terminology when describing the prevalence of themes within the data. Phrases like "nearly all/universal/etc." describe an observation that all but a small minority of participants share. "Overwhelmingly" refers to more than three-quarters but not all of the sample, whereas "the vast majority" refers to roughly three quarters of the sample. The term "most" or "the majority" is used to represent half, and "many" describes a sizeable minority of between a quarter and a third. Both "several" and "a few" will refer to a small number of participants, usually over two (see Miller, 2008, p. 235-236). However, it is important to note, that relevant concepts in qualitative work should not be judged by quantitative metrics and a theme expressed by a minority of participants is no less "significant" than one expressed by the majority (Small, 2009).

maintain their business. This use is accompanied by the cultural contexts that shape how technology is used to solve problems, gather information and increase the choices of workers. Kelly notes the difference between before and after her use of the Internet to solidify the reframing of sex work into her job:

> Before I was just falling into things. When opportunities presented themselves or when I met a guy who had money and we'd develop sort of sugar daddy-type relationships …Then 2010 is when another friend of mine [said], "Oh, you should, you know, start getting on some of the sites online and stuff," and it was so organized and so easy to do. Then from there it wasn't hard to learn how to screen and start scheduling my days and it seemed more like a job.

Kelly's story is unique, like all of those in the study, but the details of her entrance stood out against the other participants. The key component to her movement from sex work she considered exploitative to what she considers her job is a stark contrast not of the work itself, but the contexts that allow choice to subvert exploitations and technology to enable agency. Chapkis (1997) emphasized that sexuality, sexual contact and by extension sex work is contextual. Though participants in the study performed a variety of kinds of sex work at different levels of contact, frequency and intensity, the key conceptual concern for this analysis is not the method by which service is delivered, but the perceived choice and agency of workers. When participants discussed their entrance, their stories varied in the details of how and why they began, but a consistent theme was the cultural contexts that facilitate the use of the Internet to gather knowledge on how sex work can be used to solve problems and sustain their careers.

Entrance into sex work happens in a variety of ways. Previous research has often focused on single determinant elements like drug addiction or previous abuse (Silbert and Pines, 1982). However, most participants in this study described their entrance in very different terms. Workers frequently spoke of their choice to enter and the different factors

that affected their decision. The goal of this chapter is to examine participants' pathways into sex work by investigating the cultural contexts and situations that precipitated workers' entrance.

The participants in the study typically had previous knowledge of sex work as a cultural phenomenon and recognized it as a means of solving problems, such as earning money or maintaining a certain quality of life. Furthermore, they all - by virtue of participation in the study - had access to Internet technology and used it readily.

Three persistent themes emerged organically in worker narratives of entrance: cultural and racial privilege, a turning point that accompanied identifying sex work as a legitimate form of work, and a period of gaining information prior to entrance. Often workers chose to begin our interviews by recounting how they got into sex work and describe the contexts and situations that accompanied their initial ingress. Rather than describe their first client interaction or the first instance of advertisement, most interviewees chose to begin the discussion of their entrance by describing how their lives looked just prior to beginning sex work. Issues of race, class and privilege—though rarely spoken of explicitly—were a foundational factor in worker's decision to enter.

The second theme to emerge was participants' response to turning points (Sampson & Laub, 1993) that precipitated their entrance. Workers often spoke of the need for money, either to solve immediate problems or maintain quality of life. Some workers were also concerned about autonomy, free time, value and empowerment. Finally, many participants described a period of gaining knowledge prior to entrance. Most directly noted the use of the Internet to gather information on best practices for security, advertisement, risks and finances. However, gaining knowledge was not only limited to

the Internet. There were a few instances in which, as prospective workers, study participants described accessing social ties to friends, partners, or acquaintances to become better informed. That said, use of the Internet to prepare themselves for entrance was nearly universal among the sample.

Though these three themes emerged through a process comparison between participants' stories (Gibbs, 2007), the individual entrance narratives were as complex and distinct as the participants in the study. Each category described did not emerge as a discrete aspect of their entrance process, but instead was a thread in the rich tapestry of personal narratives. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the processes described by the majority of the participants differ greatly from previous scholarship on sex work entrée, both in their description of a decisive agentic process and a lack of coercive negative determinants like drugs or abuse. By and large, workers who participated in the study were both white and middle-class. Accordingly, these contexts of privilege can frame workers' decisions to enter sex work. Only one participant, Kelly, recounted an entrance process that was causally tied to both drugs and coercion, but her decision to share her story was to shine a light on the difference between entering sex work through exploitation and entering through choice.

4.2. RACIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Edward looked frazzled. His shock of blonde hair shot in every direction. He leaned back in the chair and stuffed his fists into the pockets of his black hooded sweatshirt. "Is there a point where I'm supposed to say how privileged I am? I forgot that…. Am I supposed to say I realize I'm privileged? I'm a white dude. There're some

sex workers who sometimes don't have the choice. I'll express that I'm aware of that."

Later, his gaze dropped from behind his thick horn-rimmed glasses and he pursed his lips.

"It sucks, and it's complicated…I'm white, I'm already on a high ladder outside of the

industry. One can assume I'm fairly high-ish on the ladder within the 'whorarchy' other

than I make less money than almost literally everyone."

The way Edward addresses issues of race/ethnicity and class as a sex worker speaks

to how many of the providers in the study expressed these concerns. Edward realized

well after describing his entrance that his personal privilege played a role in his decision

making, but like the majority of workers, these contexts were largely unspoken in his

original story. Race and class play a crucial role in people's ability to utilize resources

and make decisions, but the implicit nature of race and class can make those factors

difficult to disentangle (McIntosh, 1988) The majority of study participants came from

white, middle-class backgrounds and when they noted the role that structural factors

played during their work it was often what Spradley (1979) calls "tacit" knowledge.

Participants didn't explicitly note a comparison between their own class and race and that

of others, instead they used language that referenced these differences in more opaque

ways.

Cultural contexts can be difficult to qualify. Words like "privilege" and "status" are

often bandied about, and when people speak of the resources that these privileges

accompany, money invariably becomes a proxy for status. However, in the initial

example Edward notes that despite making less money than almost all of his counterparts,

he enjoys high amounts of privilege. This suggests that the cultural contexts that

accompany privilege in sex work are more than just monetary. In her famous essay on

privilege, McIntosh (1988) described white privilege as a weightless, invisible backpack of which the wearer is meant to be oblivious. She continues that most young people are taught that racism is an undesirable trait and racism can be easily recognized in the overt acts of placing one person above another based on immutable traits such as skin color. However, once racism is linked to malignant intent and divorced from unseen structural privileges, whites can go about their lives secure in their lack of oppression.

Charles W. Mills (1997) calls this being a "beneficiary" in his work, *The Racial Contract*. Mills espouses the idea of an unspoken contract that exists among all whites, which regulates interactions between those within the group and those outside, a "differential privileging of whites as a group with respects to nonwhites as a group….[A]ll whites are beneficiaries of the Contract, though some whites are not signatories to it" (Mills, 1997, p. 22). The main idea in both instances is that white privilege is an invisible construct both "elusive and fugitive," and "the pressure to avoid it [is] great, for in facing it [one has] to give up the myth of meritocracy" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 33). Privilege, in essence, increases the choices for those in the promoted group.

This increase in choice is often connected to the benefits of increased resources. Though access and usage of Internet technology is becoming more ubiquitous, when new technologies emerge, they're most often bestowed on privileged groups first (see the discussion of the Internet as study setting discussed in Chapter 3). As the Internet has spread throughout western societies it is the wealthy white middle and upper class that has consistently used these resources the most.

It is the availability of these resources, racial, financial, and technological, that aid some workers in viewing entrance differently than the prevailing cultural narrative on

worker entrance as a step out of desperation or manipulation. The risks of entrance would be perceived differently by someone who has other choices afforded to them because of resources (Levine & Rubinstein, 2013), even if those resources are at the structural level of race and class. Kelly echoes many of the workers in the study when she points out: "I did have other work options…that's when I decided that it was a job and I was choosing it." When the majority of workers in the study say that they would not consider doing this job without the Internet, there is a latent story about not doing this job without the "invisible backpack" stuffed with the various advantages, resources and safety that their race and class provide.

Though individual racial and class contexts play a largely unspoken role in our lives, some participants wanted to point out their personal experience as the overarching theme in their stories. Most of the workers in this study shared demographic qualities and came from similar middle-class backgrounds but were careful to note that they only spoke for themselves. Vivian jokes: "I'm white. Is see-through an option?" – when describing her race, whereas Deanna wanted to make sure her race and class were considered in all aspects of her life. She noted early in the interview, "There's definitely a privilege to being a white, middle-class sex worker." If workers mentioned privilege, either overtly or tacitly, it was in these broad sweeping statements intended to establish a contextual lens through which their stories were meant to be understood. Rarely did a worker acknowledge specific ways that privilege played a role in their work, and when discussing entrance most began their stories with their situational contexts and only later reflected on their relative position of privilege via race and class within society.

As McIntosh notes, privilege can go largely unrecognized and few workers in the sample spoke overtly of their privilege, either racial or class-based, but many recognized it in a variety of ways in terms of how it accompanied different aspects of their lives and work.

When discussing entrance and her own personal background, Liz noted that she is a beneficiary of many social resources that are not available to everyone. A 32-year-old graduate student and escort, Liz spoke in hushed, reserved tones."I'm well educated, I'm from a good background, I do have other options. I could be doing other things." Liz' prim appearance complimented her scholarly demeanor, she was thin and wore her hair in a high, tight bun. Her words were carefully chosen and precise: "I did come into it kind of out of need, but it was never really my only option. You know, I've never felt like I have to do this to get by. I'm doing it largely because I really enjoy it." The idea of a choice to be involved in sex work is a benefit Liz understood as resulting from being well-educated and from a good background - features that can be attributed to privilege.

Privilege has tangible benefits and when participants would discuss privilege it was often in terms of the outcomes or results of privilege rather than overtly describing privilege as a cultural phenomenon. Hope, a 28-year-old biracial white and Native American writer and dominatrix turned escort, was deeply concerned with security. Hope entered sex work by moving from being a member of the BDSM[5] community to having members offer to pay for services. Once she was ready to move into escorting, she had a website built and implemented new security protocols. When discussing issues of privilege and how they relate to starting a business and the use of technology, she wanted

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[5] BDSM is an acronym which stands for bondage, discipline, (or dominance) and sadomasochism (or submission).

to draw a connection between her personal characteristics and the benefits that accompany them:

> For me, it's [the] people who don't have those means and who are advertising on [unsecure websites], and who are not screening, and who are not using physical protection, and it's because of certain privileges… Having the education that I do and having the access to healthcare that I do, and the physical genetics that I do. Like, being a conventionally attractive, white, young, cis, fem, woman who has a bunch of beautiful dresses…I'm able to charge certain rates and do certain things, like insist on safety precautions and still have clients.

Hope articulated that it was not solely the access or usage of the Internet that was a result of privilege, but the quality of those resources and the positive outcomes they provide. The website that Hope constructed and the brand she built were a benefit of her privilege combined with the technology she utilized. Hope felt that her business was safer—not only because of her use of the Internet—but because her privilege pushed her higher up on a continuum that helped facilitate desirable outcomes.

When workers discussed privilege, they often did so by contextualizing it in reference to its beneficial outcomes. Alyson, for example, discussed how similar circumstance had different outcomes for her compared to her African American friends, both during and away from work. Alyson spoke quickly and had an easy laugh when recounting stories, but her tone shifted to be more serious when discussing the outcomes of privilege:

> I'm definitely aware of the fact that I have privilege that keeps me protected from things like police. I have girlfriends…that I work with [who] are both Black. They've both been arrested. They both get treated differently when we're out and about, even if we're not working. They get shouted at. It's things that you don't see when you're just walking around by yourself. I don't like to be an advocate or a spokesperson for anyone, because I just speak for myself. I'm definitely aware that I am speaking from a place of relative privilege, which I can't really do anything about, but I can acknowledge [it] I guess.

Privilege not only has tangible benefits, but also shields the wearer from negative

consequences. Alyson affirmed the invisibility of these privileges and spoke to the

frustration of receiving individual benefit from a default group membership. This plays

into a theme that most workers spoke to at some point during their interviews: the duality

of group membership while acknowledging individual circumstance. Alyson expressed

the complexity of benefiting from being a member of a privileged group and a

marginalized group simultaneously, yet laments her inability to do anything about it other

than acknowledge its existence. The frustrations of and benefits from the complexity of

privilege was a theme that workers spoke to but would often take the form of discussing

privilege in abstract, rather than concrete, terms.

Mills (1997) explores the idea of abstraction as a form of privilege in and of itself.

The ability to elevate problems, struggles and issues to the level of hypotheticals is a

benefit of sitting in a position of privilege. Though workers more rarely discussed the

specific ways in which privilege had an effect on their work lives, the majority of

participants that spoke on privilege discussed it more opaquely and regretted how such a

complex set of factors could often make it difficult to navigate paradoxical issues

surrounding sex work.

Lucy, a 27-year-old cammer with a smile that pushed her eyes closed every time

she laughed, was more than happy to describe her work in bright, colorful detail. She

never shied away from a topic, but the concept of privilege was frustrating for her

because it wasn't as simple as a group of variables combining to give more resources,

money, or opportunity to one group above another:

> There's even some sex workers who are like 'You're taking away jobs from the
> underprivileged by being a privileged white girl doing this.'…and at the same

time, they're like, 'End the stigma!' And I'm like 'What the fuck? You are the stigma!" She poked an index finger at the center of her thick framed glasses and shifted on her black leather sofa: "Like only underprivileged women of color can be sex workers? …You're like, what the fuck is coming from people's heads?"

This frustration was frequently observed when discussions of privilege reached abstract levels, because though workers were willing to recognize the existence of privilege many of them felt there was little they could do about it, essentially making it a non-issue. Many workers who discussed privilege used words like "recognize" and "awareness" when discussing its effects. They understood that their racial and class privilege had far reaching implications but weren't always sure what to do about it other than acknowledge its existence. Olivia, a 21-year-old escort, had a thick French accent that fell on each syllable, giving each phrase a heavy significance:

> I would never feel more important than [other workers] or worthier or anything like that. In the past, I would have kind of denied my power. And I'm meeting people [who have] to accept jobs that are less paid, more dangerous….They made me realize that I do have power, and it's important not to deny it, and therefore to use it. So just being aware of this I think is important.

By calling her privilege important, Olivia highlighted that even recognition of these contexts was vital. She doesn't deny her privilege and describes the same duality Alyson and other workers described. Being a privileged member of a stigmatized group makes it difficult for workers to take definitive action due to the complexity of these issues. Olivia spoke with a detached curiosity that highlighted the effect these broad social issues had on how she viewed herself and her life choices, but acknowledged that though these issues were important to raise, the implications of them were "messy":

> Obviously, you learn a lot about social stigmas, issues regarding gender and sexuality and feminism and things like that. Because you're in this really compromised place where you [are] both deciding to own your body and deciding what to do with it. But on the other hand, you are self-objectifying, which [is]

completely opposite. So, I think being in this very messy place helps you ask yourself a lot of interesting questions.

The complexity of racial and class status was not lost on participants. Its wide-reaching effects shaped the decision-making choices of many of the workers, including their decision to enter. Privilege can moderate negative outcomes, which in turn could lessen risks for entering workers. Petunia, a 35-year-old escort, did not like when our when our discussion turned to issues of privilege and told me so: "This is an annoying question. You haven't defined your terms." She spoke in a quick, pointed manner that conveyed both confidence and capability—like listening to a baseball coach give out assignments:

> Okay. Power and importance. I have so many different answers. There're so many definitions of that. Okay, if you take the ladder that's the one in terms of, I don't know what else to call it, "the whore-archy" is the term people use. I'm quite close to the top. I'm independent, I charge fairly high rates, I am white, I am privileged, I am educated, I can absolutely dictate the terms of my working, I'm doing this entirely voluntarily, all that stuff. On that ladder I'm very close to the top…. A lot of sex work policy is going to be, if it's decently written, will be written to benefit me and my demographic even though I'm a fairly small part of overall sex work.

Petunia noted the different ways power, importance, and privilege could be defined suggests that all of these definitions have implications for the lives and experiences of sex workers. These privileges can even extend to the level of policy decisions that are meant to be universal for all citizens but would invariably benefit one group above others. These issues are pervasive in the lives of sex workers, and once they began to explore them most wanted to continue the conversation in an attempt to unravel the complexity of privilege at both the individual and group level. Petunia even admitted that she found the question intriguing after her initial frustrations: "I'm annoyed at you for not defining terms, but now I want to talk about it forever."

The various ways that workers defined their terms when describing privilege could make it difficult to draw definitive lines between the various aspects of race and class. Few participants were workers of color, but when Yvette, a 20-year-old Asian cammer, described her entrance, she wanted to articulate the complicated relationship between the good aspects she noted in her entrance and how the work can become exploitative and troubling if these contextual elements are not carefully managed. She explained how all the different elements—racial contexts, social situations, and technology—come together to create a complex interdependence that needs constant attention to keep it from becoming "problematic:"

> It has been a really, really good way to increase my confidence, it's been really empowering. Especially when I first started out, I was 18 years old, I was in the middle of college, I didn't have a degree, and I was sitting there pulling in like crazy amounts of money, and it felt really good to be a woman, and a racial minority, and actually like being able to make my own money, and define how I was going to make that money, set my own terms, things like that…[then] I walk into some porn store and I'd see a DVD and it would say something like, "my sweet concubine" on it, and it would be a collection of Asian girls, and it would make me feel really cheap. That began to like draw away from the feeling of empowerment, where I felt like I would be taken advantage of, and I felt like I was being fetishized for my race, but at the same time I feel like having more educated people who care about how their stuff is being sold and how their bodies are being sold, like those people are what the industry needs to be made out of, so that people are able to educate themselves, people are able to realize what types of things are problematic.

Racial and class privileges are overarching themes in the lives of participants and affect many of the decisions workers make. When describing their entrance processes most workers did not specifically articulate racial and class privilege as being a causal element in their decision to enter, but would later reflect that because of their demographic characteristics they had more options than other workers and felt free to make the decisions from a place of confidence that privilege provides. The situations that most of

the participants described during their entrance processes were tacitly shaded by these overarching cultural contexts and played an important part in their entrance stories.

4.3. TURNING POINTS

Vivian grew up travelling the world and described herself as "the little redheaded girl who speaks Japanese." She had an embarrassed quiver in her voice. "It's ridiculous, you can laugh at me." A change in location and friendship networks had resulted in her exposure to sex work as a possible work option. Her sentences ran together in long elastic strings with an upward snap at the end of every extended breath:

> I met this guy in a park that had a dog that looked like my parents' dog and it was my first time away from home, so I missed the dog and I pet his dog and I started talking to him... He invited me over to meet his girlfriend, and his girlfriend had a whole bunch of hot friends that hung out in lingerie and guys would come and go and they had candy bar cell phones on the table and envelopes with money, but I never really put two and two together, because they weren't wearing big shiny red boots, and they didn't have gold earrings. I feel like it just was not what I expected. I actually hung out there for three months without even knowing what was going on. I bought my own lingerie to fit in with them. I know, I know, it's embarrassing. I was 19. Then I started googling things on the Internet because they kept using these abbreviations. I started googling these abbreviations and yeah, I finally asked, and they told me I could work the phones. Then I asked if I could try working for one day, and I did it and that's the day that I fell in love with it, and I haven't fallen out of love with it since. I really love my job, but yes, how I got into it is super, super embarrassing.

During their interviews, most participants spoke of the unique situations that accompanied their entrance. Generally, when people discuss entering a new line of work, they don't describe the specific process of entrance, but rather the events that precipitated this change of life. Changes in social networks can often lead to changes in behaviors (Sutherland, 1947), and such a change can often be described as a "turning point"

(Sampson & Laub, 1993), an event or circumstance that is part of the process of changing life trajectories.

Sampson and Laub identify that turning points are adaptive, which is illustrated in this study by the way that the participants in this study adapted to new situations and opportunities. Furthermore, this adaptation, according to Sampson and Laub, includes a crucial intermingling of cultural contexts. In essence, when people are presented with a turning point their response to that point is a complex interplay between the choices they currently have available and the cultural contexts, such as race and socioeconomic status, that surround them. When participants discussed their entrance process many of them described turning points that opened the door for them to become involved in sex work.

Many workers described a change in either location or friendship networks when discussing their entrance narrative. Furthermore, most participants noted a need for money, both in immediate and general terms, that accompanied these situations. However, though most workers had a financial situation that accompanied their entrance narrative, many wanted to highlight the non-monetary motivations that played a part in their decision to become sex workers such as fun, a general interest, or empowerment.

Technology played a largely tacit but omnipresent role in participants' recollection of their entry process. The use of technology was widely referenced, but often in passive statements, like "I reached out to someone on Twitter" or "I just looked up articles that girls had written." Workers largely considered the use of technological resources as part of their overarching tacit cultural contexts. This deep familiarity with and use of the Internet, and the accompanying racial and cultural contexts, can shape responses when presented with turning points.

One of the most common turning points was simply moving to a new area. Greg, a 25-year-old escort, considered doing sex work after he moved and his initial job plan fell through. "I started when I moved here actually. So uhm, nothing really went as planned for me moving here." His casual drawl belied his sense of urgency: "So I was here and I didn't have a job and it was getting scary because I was very broke." He explained that he'd been offered money for sex previously but never thought to take it, but that when he tried it, he "liked it" and continued to do it for that reason.

Transitions to new locations were frequently accompanied by a need for money. However, participants spoke of the need for money in a variety of ways. Money obviously has utilitarian benefits. It can solve problems, but Merton (1932) notes that it is also a nearly universal symbol of status. So, though workers often discussed money for its ability to solve immediate problems, several wanted to note the importance of maintaining a lifestyle they found conducive to commodious living. Money as both a utility and a way to maintain status were present in the stories of participants. Emma, a 21-year-old escort, sat in a sun-drenched room framing her a silhouette, emphasizing the confidentiality of our discussion. Her eyes peeked out from behind a streak of blonde hair in a sea of dark curls. She explained that she began working at 16 because she had run into trouble with medical bills, and a poor home life that couldn't provide her with the resources she needed.

> So, when I was about 16, I ran into some financial troubles related to medical bills, criminal things and I have a very toxic home so it's very difficult to pay those bills, so I ended up falling back on the only thing that I knew how to do. I had made a website for myself and I solicited myself online for sex because I needed the money to pay for all my medical bills, and fines and speeding tickets …I enjoy going up to meet new people, I enjoy taking risks. I enjoy the money aspect of it but at the same time I don't use the money for personal things. I use it for actual bills.

Emma was clearly describing the need for money in an immediate and utilitarian sense. In her description, money exists to pay bills and solve problems, and though this theme was frequent across many workers, some wanted to emphasize that the money they earned via sex work was not simply to survive or solve immediate problems, but that money also sustained a quality of life that other career options were not providing.

When I asked Charlene, a 35-year-old cammer and escort, about her entrance she was the most incisive in responding that she got into it to "survive on money." But when she reflected on what that money meant to her, she explained: "I put myself through college, I graduated college. Sometimes it can be a second income if I'm working a regular job. If I'm not, then the bills still have to get paid, still have to maintain a lifestyle." The desire for a better quality of life was often noted in conjunction with a lack of other work options. Jordan, a 35-year-old escort, was concerned that other work wouldn't be able to pay her a living wage and looming student loan debt and rising costs of living couldn't be covered by conventional wages:

> I joke that the government pimped me out. I had no way of paying for school. And it was not an option, working minimum wage in retail jobs. I guess I had some sort of prior knowledge to it. I'm not really sure how I decided like this is something that I might potentially want to do. I did my research. I found the forums and read those and decided to take the plunge.

Conventional work failing to provide adequate pay was a common theme when participants discussed money in conjunction with entrance. A few workers noted they could find no conventional work at all and then turned to sex work to survive. Suzy, for example, couldn't find a job, but wanted to be sure she was safe as she entered sex work for survival reasons. "I couldn't get a job, so I applied for welfare and started doing

contact sex work. And I knew a lot because of my research…how to do it safely and things like that, but it's still really scary when you start."

Most participants described having opportunities for conventional work, or even having a current conventional job, but found the pay to be unacceptable when judged against their expected quality of life. Isabelle, a 34-year-old dominatrix turned escort, was a dynamo who towered over our discussion both through her 6-foot frame and her boisterous personality. She spoke quickly and often in shorthand, describing how "classy" escorts make better money than her previous attempts at both conventional work and part-time dominatrixing. She was concerned that she couldn't provide a good quality of life for her pet birds and became an escort after realizing she needed to change her life and become more self-sufficient. She described how she moved into an apartment that didn't allow pets, and that in a week's time she moved from a part-time worker to a full time high-earner:

> I started doing pro-dom[6] work and stuff on the side because my part-time job was not making enough money. [The building manager] found out I was illegally subletting and had a bird and the tenants threw a fit…but I told the [manager] the truth, she gave me a week to come up with the down payment…. I would be the classiest shit to ever hit [this city].

The interplay between money, social status and legitimate opportunities were often intermingled in the participants' stories. Many workers noted that the money they made initially solved problems and was then used to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. Previous research has described this as a cycle that can trap workers within the world of sex work, unable to leave because they've become accustomed to making large amounts of money (Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006). Though this concept was noted by several participants,

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[6] "Pro-dom" is an abbreviation of "professional dominatrix".

Osu, a 27-year-old escort, expressed this as a failing of institutional job opportunities, not

a problem with sex work:

> Every other job, every corporate job, even in school, I've felt like I've been
> exploited. I feel like this line of work is actually something that I've actually set
> my price to what I think is worth my effort. This is the only job that I feel I've
> actually been completely happy with.

Osu's description is echoed in the concerns of other participants who expressed the desire

for more than money or status when discussing their turning points. Workers noted a

variety of other situations that accompanied their entrance. Some wanted a better

work/life balance, whereas others desired a job that had less obvious benefits. For

example, Deborah, a 25-year-old cammer, noted that she chose cam work to reduce her

anxiety since she does not have to deal with harassment.

> I've always had a lot of anxiety with jobs. I would go back and forth from
> camming to finding other jobs. The last time I really worked at a regular job, I
> was stalked and harassed by a manager. In camming, nobody can really follow
> you home. That was a big plus. It made me start really focusing on not having to
> work a regular job.

Hope articulated this concept in more detail: though she was interested in the money that

sex work was providing, it also impacted her ability to choose things that she found

fulfilling without having to worry about the amount of money they would produce:

> It gave me a lot of flexibility with regards to hours, and like choosing where I
> could work. And, it just made a lot more sense to me, to work once a week and
> make $400 dollars for one or two hours than to work forty hours a week and make
> that same $400 dollars….Ultimately, it was a choice that I made so that I would
> be able to do things like do a two-year volunteer position on a suicide and
> domestic violence crisis hotline. And do two years of research assistance in
> clinical psychology.

Though concerns over money were noted by the majority of workers, changes solely in

friendship networks were a less common impetus to sex work. But some participants

described exposure to a new group of people or individual as a turning point in their

entrance narrative. Lucy, a 27-year old cammer who laughed her way through the majority of questions with a good-natured inquisitiveness, described hanging out with a group of friends that exposed her to camming and how she hadn't felt comfortable with the idea until that point in her life:

> I started hanging out with kind of like [a] BDSM swingers' kind of community and I found out my friend had been doing some camming and then I thought that'd maybe be a fun thing to do and my husband was like, "I've been wanting to suggest that for years!" But he thought I wouldn't want to do it which probably until then I probably would've not but then I just tried it and I really really loved it and I was pretty successful.

Inclusion in a group that chooses sex work as a successful option for making money lends both validity and reliability to that choice. Lucy's inclusion in a group that was already successfully performing sex work legitimized both her option and choice to enter sex work. By comparison, Hannah, an 18-year-old escort, tentatively answered questions with a frequent caveat that she had only started a few weeks ago, having met an individual who helped spark her pre-existing interest in sex work.

> I basically hooked up with an escort. I didn't know that she was an escort. And afterwards, she was sort of talking to me about it. And it was already something I had researched, pretty heavily, over the past few years. Just like kind of a bit of a fascination with sex work.

Associating with a different group of people can lead to new definitions favorable to new behaviors (Sutherland, 1947) and gaining new social contacts can be a turning point for many workers when describing their entrance processes. Both Lucy and Hannah had a pre-existing interest and had "done research" on sex work prior to entering. In each case, technology played a tacit role in their entrance, both as an information gathering method and a facilitation technique. Lucy and Hannah each explained that they had done previous research online and communicated with their initial contacts via email.

Though each of these separate elements is an important aspect in the turning points of workers, most participants did not describe a single element in the events that led up to their entrance, but instead depicted instances in their lives with a variety of elements coming together to form a complex turning point. Janine sat on her couch and kneaded her long blonde ponytail. She'd flip it over her shoulder at the end of sentences like a punctuation mark.

> Well, I moved into a new apartment, and after so many horrible roommate experiences, I said, "I absolutely must live by myself unequivocally," and in [the city], that can get expensive. So I do have a full-time job at a university here…but it just doesn't pay well enough, and once I crunched the numbers, I realized that my rent and utilities would be 70% of my monthly income, which is a significant chunk…and I said, "You know what? I'd like to be able to do things like go out to eat with my friends, get my nails done, be able to take a cab once in a while instead of having to take public transportation everywhere," so I looked for a while at getting a legitimate part-time job, and working retail for $10 an hour just didn't seem like it was a valuable use of my time.

When participants described their entrance process, many noted a turning point in their lives that influenced their entrance into sex work. But the way the providers framed the turning points and measured the different costs and benefits of beginning sex work differed for everyone. Similar to the previous section, privilege as part of the decision-making process was largely tacit. The entrance narratives workers described were strikingly different from the prevailing cultural narratives on the exploitation and abuses that accompany entrance most often highlighted by oppression paradigm. Fittingly, participants framed new social situations, such as moving to a new location or developing relationships with new groups of people, through the lens of their personal contexts. This was most evident when workers discussed quality of life issues and the amount of money sex work could provide. Participants would often compare the option of sex work to other less profitable and more time-consuming conventional work. However, workers who

described these turning points did not simply turn to sex work with no preparation. Most often, they took their present circumstance as an opportunity to first gather knowledge on the topic of sex work and discover the best path to entrance.

4.4. GAINING KNOWLEDGE

Mandy, a 29-year-old escort, had an upbeat personality and an assertive tone in her voice. She spoke clearly and enunciated the t's at the ends of words. She was relating her entrance into escorting and recounted an "athlete that got caught" being an escort:

> She was a really famous Olympian…. Everyone was horrified, "Oh my gosh, why does an Olympian athlete need to do sex work?" or "how could she do this to herself?" My first thought is, "Oh my god, this is not the normal narrative of sex workers." It's not like some poor impoverished lady, like she was doing this for fun on the side. I mean she got a lot of enjoyment out of it. So, I started doing more research into it. I'm very sexually open, I don't think that having sex for money is a problem, or something that should be stigmatized, so that's actually how I got started. After a lot of research, I was like, I think I could enjoy this.

Most study participants did not enter sex work impulsively. When the majority of workers recounted their entrance processes, they discussed what their lives looked like just prior to entrance, and oftentimes this was followed by a description of how sex work became an option for them. Though some participants described "taking the plunge," this was usually preceded by a period of information gathering, where they were simultaneously trying to discover best practices to prepare for entrance but also to see if sex work would be a good fit for them. Even if participants eschewed initial information gathering, they would usually have a first experience by posting an ad online or meeting a client, and then realize they needed more information. Alyson, the 32-year-old escort, talks with a slight New York accent that only becomes noticeable if she's "drunk or angry, but not very often." She described that her initial contact with sex work was by

answering an ad on a website, but then she realized she needed more information before

moving to full-time work:

> I answered an ad for sensual massage, which was very silly…. After maybe a
> month or two I did some research online, found a website of a girl who kind of
> looked like me and had sort of a similar vibe, and I reached out to her. I was like,
> "I'm thinking about doing this. How do I stay safe? How do I set myself up with a
> website and presence and photos and all that?" She didn't really take me under
> her wing, but she sort of steered me in the right direction of how to do things.
> That's how it started when I was in grad school.

Nonetheless, like many other aspects of the entrance process, the method of gathering

knowledge was both frequently tacit and generally involved the use of technology. When

asked how workers gathered information the response was very frequently indistinct

phrases like "looked it up" or "researched." Lydia explained that she "got on [a website]

and discovered the sex worker [message] boards there. The stickies[7] had tons of

resources. So, when I was ready to hop in, I did." Mandy, however, was more precise in

describing how she gathered knowledge and the difficulties of homing in on valuable

specifics after becoming initially interested in sex work:

> It was mostly online researching, because there's really no other good forums for
> sex workers to get started. There's not a lot of information out there in the first
> place. Pretty much going online, [one sex worker] wrote a lot on her blog. That
> was a really good resource for me to figure out what things I needed to watch out
> for, how to get started. What type of clients I would be meeting. How to advertise,
> the whole gamut. So it was all online.

The most common way for participants to gain initial knowledge was by using the

Internet. Workers described using available resources to investigate whether sex work

was a viable option for them. Several also described instances of using the Internet to

clarify incorrect assumptions they had previously held about sex work. Petunia noted that

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[7] "Stickies" is a reference to a "sticky post" on a message board (see: Gaining Entry in Chapter 3). These posts remain
at the top of the page and are visible to all users and visitors. They often contain vital information about the purpose of
the page, its intended audience, or references for further information or resources.

she originally believed sex work would include much more risk of arrest and be relegated to street walking. "I was actually able to research enough to feel comfortable and realize this was a viable career and didn't just involve walking down the street and then getting arrested, which is the perception I'd had." Strikingly, when workers described their entrance processes, a large number explained that they knew no one previously involved in sex work before they began and pursued a pre-existing personal interest in sex work with only a general cultural knowledge of its existence. Kit, a 21-year-old cammer and fetish model, described a similar scenario, of having a cultural knowledge of the group and then following this up with Internet research and facilitation:

> It all started when I was 17. There was a model that I really liked…I couldn't wait to turn 18 'cause I was gonna be just like her and I was gonna do everything that she does. I couldn't wait to, I don't know, I'm like an exhibitionist. I couldn't wait to show off my body and make money for it.... I started an exhibitionist blog where I would post nudes of myself. Anonymous nudes without my face. And I started getting a lot of attention from that and I kind of rediscovered the world of online sex work…. Other girls were posting similar pictures of them[selves]. I realized, "oh they're making money off this—I could do that, too" So that's kind of what got me started. That I realized that I wanted to do it…and then did it.

Though the Internet was the most common resource for workers to gain initial knowledge about the logistics of sex work, a few workers gained knowledge from more "IRL" (in real life) sources. Gerry Anne, a 26-year-old cammer, had a halo of fish swimming around her head as she sat in front of a clear blue glowing fish tank and discussed how she became interested in sex work after tangentially gathering information from social justice work:

> I've always been interested in it from some aspect or another. When I got really involved with social justice work, I was finding out a lot about different types of sex work and basically what they do, and I always found it really intriguing….You can find skinny, conventionally attractive [people] anywhere on the Internet, but finding a larger girl who's actually comfortable enough in her own skin to go online is actually a lot rarer. So I decided to give it a try.

Similarly, Deana, a 23-year-old cammer-turned-escort, first started gathering information

in a university gender studies course. "It was kind of like your basic intro to sex

workers…[and I thought] this isn't immoral. And I was like, yeah, it's not. That vibes

with me." Even if workers described initially learning about sex work outside of the

digital realm, many followed that initial contact with Internet research.

Like most other aspects of the entrance process, these elements were not discrete

categories. Most workers described some combination of situations and techniques to

gathering information in order to begin working. Paula, a 40-year-old cammer and escort

with bright blue eyes, was a moderator of a sex worker message board and spent the

majority of her time online. Though she was very active in the online sex worker

community she rarely advertised her services because she received most of her clients

through digital word-of-mouth. But when she first began, escorting was suggested to her

by a friend who had experience as a client and was able to point her towards appropriate

Internet resources:

> It was funny, a guy friend said to me you really like sex. You're okay with your
> body. You're comfortable with yourself. You're outgoing. You'd be great at
> escorting. He explained to me, he admitted I should say, that he had been seeing
> escorts and he told me which websites to look at. I was really lucky that I didn't
> have to start at the bottom on the really skeevy, seedy websites, trying to establish
> myself. I started right at the top which makes my story a little different than most
> girls.

Workers initially gathered information in a myriad of ways, but technology was

frequently the method used to learn about the best ways to enter. Very few workers

described an entrance situation that was devoid of technology, but each worker still had

some combination of the remaining entrance elements. Noreen, a 32-year-old escort, had

an entrance story that matched her unique personality. Her hair was covered by a black

hijab that framed her bright smile.

> I had heard one of my friends talk about working in the industry, and I remember still it was maybe the first time I'd seen a real-life sex worker just talking frankly about it, and I remember being quite scandalized, honestly, and also just like mesmerized….I got in contact with her, and we had a lunch, coffee that day, and she told me about the brothel where she worked, and I went into the brothel that night.

Also, Gertrude, a 40-year-old escort, is one of the few participants who does not note the

Internet as part of the process of entrance and also met someone she did not know in

person and was influenced by the interaction.

> Actually, how I first even came to hear of it was this girl got on the train one night, and I was living in [the city]. Going home, and she's really drunk and she's like, "Do you know what I do for work? I'm a phone sex person. You should be doing it." She had some boy with her who was very embarrassed. "It's great"…. For about 10 minutes I had this conversation with her just telling me how great it is and how that's what she did. And it planted the seed.

After her initial encounter, Gertrude attempted escorting, but found it wasn't for her, "[I]

tried full service once. Hated it." But wanted to articulate that she felt the issue was one

of conflict between how she felt about the work and society's expectations: "The first

time I did sex work, my self-esteem wasn't that great, so I had this issue of society's

values and what I should be, versus what I was doing. And it made it worse, because I

actually enjoyed what I was doing." However, she explained that once she was able to

improve her self-esteem she returned to the work she found it more rewarding: "I decided

to come back up to [the city] and give it a go. And this time around I found it completely

different, because I'm a lot more centered in myself. So I've been doing that, oh gosh,

maybe four years?" Though Gertrude described a situation during entrance that didn't

include the use of the Internet, she explained how she uses the Internet to help other

workers address the same problems she faced.

> [If] I come across a sex worker who seems a bit stressed or something like that, I'll kind of reach out to her and say, "Hey, are you okay? What's going on? Let's have a chat." Then I'll send her to, like I am on [social media], are you here, are you there? Join up, there's other girls there. That way you can chat to them. You won't feel so alone, and all that sort of stuff as well. So it plays a big part for me also to help those that are isolated but have just put a question somewhere to find other sex workers who they can get advice from or feel supported by or have someone to talk to about how their day was.

It is worth noting that both Gertrude and Noreen work in a country that has full

legalization, and this could have played a vital role in their lack of Internet research prior

to entrance. There was no need for them to be secretive about their interest or about

gaining knowledge on the topic. Though both admitted there is still social stigma, there is

no need to fear legal reprisal. Furthermore, first-hand experience from an individual

third-party could certainly be viewed as more reliable than an anonymous post on the

Internet. But when Noreen did speak of technology—outside of the context of entrance—

she was sure to note its many advantages even in a society without the dangers of legal

issues.

> I can communicate with my clients and do my own safety and security as well. Online forums and stuff like that that are hooker-focused are really helpful for me….I more heavily rely on online forums and stuff like that for peer support and stuff. And then yeah, of course placing ads.

Even in the few situations where workers did not use technology to gain initial

knowledge before entrance, all the participants in the study noted how technology was

essential to performing their work, and how these Internet-based resources had become

an essential part of increasing the agency and autonomy of many workers, most

prominently in the arena of security discussed in the proceeding chapter. The use of the

Internet has become so ubiquitous for this group of people that its use to gather

information or communicate with other workers had become largely tacit. The majority

of workers who described needing to gather information during their entrance process

noted some use of the Internet. Even if workers did not report gaining information for the

purpose of entrance, most noted using the Internet during entrance: to post or answer an

ad, advertise for themselves or communicate with clients and other providers.

Throughout the sample, the use of the Internet was a crucial element in sex work, even

when simply exploring a general interest in the topic.

4.5. CONCLUSION

Workers in the study described membership in a broader sex worker community

yet they described entrance processes that highlighted their independence. This

paradoxical duality is a defining feature of the new digital model of sex work. Most

participants regularly noted that they work either fully or semi-independently, yet they

discussed issues of sex work from the framework of a broad inclusive subculture. Internet

technology has facilitated entrance into a wholly new realm of sex work, where workers

have increased autonomy while being connected to and utilizing informal social

resources.

During their entrance narratives most workers described the situations that lead up

to their initial interest in sex work. Those situations are positioned within broader

cultural, and specifically racial and class, contexts. Participants rarely discussed issues of

race and class privilege directly relating to their entrance narrative, but these contexts

envelop every aspect of people's lives. Often workers would tell the story of their

entrance in a straightforward fashion, but only later expound on their recognition of their privileged position in society garnered by their race and class.

These broad cultural contexts surrounded the immediate situations that many workers had to address upon entrance. Most workers discussed a need for money, either to solve pressing problems or maintain a desirable quality of life. However, within the needs for both money and lifestyle many workers explained that these situations arose because of a lack of remunerative work available to them. Though most workers described being able to find a job, the lack of what they considered a livable wage was a frequent complaint among study participants. These concerns were also attached to more non-monetary benefits such as increased free time, more flexibility, choice and quality of clients and an overall feeling of empowerment.

Once participants recognized their current situation, often times they used the Internet to gather some initial information on best practices for business and security. Even though these techniques were common, most workers described them in tacit terms using phrases like "I did my research" or "I looked up how to…" rather than explicitly describing the act of using the Internet to gather this information. Similar to the cultural contexts that surround the lives of entering workers, technology played a ubiquitous but often unspoken role in their entrance process.

Participants enter sex work in a variety of ways, but the majority of the sample took opportunities afforded to them as a result of cultural contexts that decrease risks and increase safety. Workers could then respond to situational turning points by using Internet technology to gather information on the best ways to enter. Though these three elements were frequent themes in participants' narratives, they were not discrete elements

in the entrance process. When combined, these elements form the complex social contexts that influences the decisions of workers to weigh the risks and rewards of entrance into sex work.

CHAPTER 5: EMOTIONAL LABOR & THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Roxy was dressed all in purple. Her long sweater flowed over the side of her chair like a cape and her yoga pants were covered in vibrant designs. She sat on a black vinyl kitchen chair with one foot tucked under her. The chair creaked as she reached to pick up her cup of coffee. "You want a real experience," she said, cradling the cup with both hands before taking a sip. "You try to make it as normal an interaction as anyone would have with someone that they're dating or sexually involved with." She set down the cup and replaced it with the lit cigarette smoldering in the ashtray, carefully balancing it between her fingers before putting it to her lips. "There's generally foreplay. I like to kiss, I think that's a really important part of making it seem like I'm your girlfriend." She took a drag and tilted her head to peek at my notepad as I sat next to her scratching fleeting observations. I asked how she felt about interacting with her clients and she nodded her head as she exhaled a long column of smoke:

> It's incredibly empowering for a [woman]. I feel like I'm getting paid to be myself, or if not complete, a version of myself, at least. There are endless versions of me, or facets of my personality. Depending on the job, I get to utilize all of them. I also feel as though, almost in a way, my entire life has been building up to this point because this is a job that utilizes every single skill set, talent, that I have in my arsenal and I really enjoy that. It's psychologically fascinating.... You're doing a constant and varied case study on human sexuality and psychology.

Study participants frequently discussed the way they presented their personal identity to clients. Some compartmentalized their work into a completely different persona, whereas others were consistent in their presentation of self, but accentuated different aspects of themselves (Goffman, 1959). Consistently, workers noted that the persona they "put on" is a delicate balance designed to insulate themselves from clients while still conveying a

sense of the authenticity that a "meaningful" encounter necessitates. Sociologist

Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) coined the term "bounded authenticity" to describe the

exchange of intimacy between workers and clients within the limits of the erotic

exchange. Most providers described some level of bounded authenticity, and that

connecting with clients in this way took extra work. The additional effort to create

intimacy was noted by most of the participants in the study as well, and some of them

aptly described it as "emotional labor." Hochschild (1979) coined this term in her book

The Managed Heart, describing it as:

> The management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily
> display; …[requiring] one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the
> outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others-in this case,
> the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls
> for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self
> that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality.

Most participants felt that this was a necessary part of providing clients with a unique

authentic experience but felt that these boundaries were flexible and frequently

renegotiated. Roxy explained the duality of attempting to give clients what they want

while still maintaining a level of distance. "It's flirtatious without being grotesque or over

the top…. You want to sound girly, and fun, and cutesy, and professional all at the same

time. That you won't brook any shit, you know?... It's a lot to balance." Roxy described

how her presentation to clients served a purpose: to fit a role that is necessary for her

brand of sex work, or any kind of work: "You change yourself, and your persona, and

your voice according to what job interview you're going to. It's just very similar." She

noted that this additional effort to present a specific tailored version of herself to clients

was a crucial part of what was being sold. "That's what I'm trying to sell, that's an idea.

That brand comes with a certain verbiage, a certain style of language, and

communication." Roxy was selling an "authentic" experience, that many of the workers in the sample also described: The Girlfriend Experience[8] (GFE).

5.2. THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE

Emotional labor during sessions most often came in the form of GFE. This is the most common service provided by workers in the study and though participants varied in their style of work, most noted that one of the purposes of their sessions with clients was to create both intimacy and authenticity. And this authentic connection was part of how they described GFE. Darla, a 29-year-old cam worker, describes what a GFE entails:

> The girlfriend experience is basically when guys pay for the girl to act like their girlfriend even though they're not. Like they'll come home, and they'll sit down on the couch and have a beer together, watch some TV.…You'll talk about your day, I'll talk about my day, and they get this feeling of having a girlfriend without actually having a girlfriend.

Though a GFE was most commonly an aspect of an escort's services, it was not limited to only in-person interactions. GFE could also be portrayed digitally during webcam sessions. Even though many workers provided digital GFE experiences, the emotional labor was still the central element to the interaction. Nicole, a 29-year-old cammer, discussed how she would often try to deliver GFE in her sessions:

> Some people cannot talk to people. So you have to pay. Even then, if they are obnoxious, I'm like god I'm glad you're paying me to talk to you. But some of them, especially the big spenders, they work a lot. They don't have time for a real relationship, they don't have time to date. And they want to talk to their porn, like I get that. That's a great reason to wanna spend money on a cam girl. You wanna be completely interactive. It's that girlfriend experience thing you know. I'm Skyping with my girlfriend. So that's really what you have to sell. That's my sell anyway.

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[8] Refers to encounters that include features of non-commercial relationships, mimicking a "conventional" dating relationship. Bernstein (2007) argues that these relationships provide "bounded authenticity" within an "emotionally bounded erotic exchange" (p. 197; Milrod & Monto, 2012).

Workers often noted that GFE contains more emotional labor than a "routine" appointment. Showing additional interest, attention and affection to clients were the major themes of a GFE encounter. Edward, a 29-year-old escort, describes the parallel version of GFE for men, but also articulates that the practice is a relational experience. He describes the additional emotional labor involved in a boyfriend experience and what is expected in contrast to a transactional encounter.

> I do what is called boyfriend experience. That's my primary thing, I guess, which is the couch, the wine, the talking, the water, whatever, getting to know each other a bit. That's like 90 percent of what I do. Every now and then, there is more of a wam, bam, thank you ma'am kind of thing where it's just a quick in and out blow job or something. Those are easy and nice because I charge the same.

Workers routinely noted that the additional emotional labor involved in a GFE encounter was rarely recognized by clients and was simply an expected part of an exchange. Interestingly, Edward notes he is paid the same amount regardless of the type of service he provides. This was echoed by many workers when they described encounters with a client in terms of amount of money for time spent, rather than the amount of labor or effort that goes into a specific meeting.   For example, many of the participants noted they also offer a PSE (Porn Star Experience[9]) service, but rarely did workers ever describe a PSE encounter in the same detail as the numerous descriptions of GFE sessions. This would indicate that as Hochschild describes, emotional labor represents an added value to an encounter and though workers often described not charging for this additional emotional labor, clients overwhelmingly preferred it. Francis, a 33-year-old escort, notes "half of my job is just emotional labor" when describing her work overall:

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[9] Refers to encounters that mimic mainstream pornography, which includes more heightened or elaborate make-up, lingerie, and sexual enthusiasm, etc.

> [S]troking people's egos, listening to their personal problems, which are sometimes incredibly intense emotionally. Having clients who are talking about their wives who have cancer, or other really debilitating illnesses. Or there's someone who, they're 36 and they've never slept with a woman before. And how did you get to that point? There's a lot of emotional labor around that and it can take its toll. That is a thing.

When participants discussed the additional labor involved in GFE, many noted that emotional labor is expected in most aspects of their work unless specifically requested otherwise. Building rapport with clients from initial contacts, scheduling appointments, and the sessions themselves all contained emotional labor. The labor was so pervasive that workers frequently made parallels to other service industries such as caretaking, therapy, and counselling. These workers described feeling frustrated at the additional toll emotional labor had on their well-being.

5.3. THE COST OF EMOTIONAL LABOR

Alyson sat cross-legged on her bed. There was a rainbow unicorn poster behind her head that gave the room a playful atmosphere. "This guy messaged me two days ago, and first of all, he didn't fill out my contact form, which annoys me, because it's the first hurdle. Can you follow directions? Can you respect my process? Every girl's process is different." She was describing the specifics of meeting with a new client and the additional labor that goes into creating a welcoming environment while still garnering helpful information to move the process forward. "He emails, 'I'm in town, I want to meet. What do you have available this week?' Which is completely useless to me when you just write to me and say, 'Are you free this week?'" Her voice quickly stutters through her frustration as she describes the back and forth. "Yes, I'm free! I'm a ho, I'm free all the time. You don't call your hairdresser and be like, 'Are you free at all this

week?' You say, 'Hey, I want to meet. I want to get my hair cut on Tuesday at three

o'clock. Can you see me then?'" She lets out a flustered little laugh, "I emailed back. I

said, 'I'd like to get together this week, sure. Just let me know when.'" She describes the

back and forth that follows, slowly repeating her questions to emphasize them. "…again,

I said, 'What time were you thinking? When do you want to meet? How long do you

want to meet for? Where are you staying?'" She lets out an exasperated sigh:

> I probably asked him point blank three or four times all those questions and got
> no response. Then he wrote back, "Okay, I'm thinking tomorrow evening. I was
> like, "Okay, no. I can't keep doing this with you, this back and forth. That's it.
> You're clearly not respectful of me or my time.…Go find somebody else." …I get
> a lot of that. That's probably happened to me four or five times in the last
> week.…I have tags on everybody [in my email], what city they want to meet in, if
> they're okay, if they passed screening. This one definitely got an annoying tag.
> They do not see the tag.... That's literally the only information that I need from
> you is when and where and how long. You'd be surprised at how difficult those
> basic questions can be.…Which no, I can't. I have a time waster tag for sure. I
> also have a "good time" tag, which I do not give out often enough. That's a fun
> tag. I think maybe two percent of my emails have that tag over eight years.

When participants discussed their work, they would often note the effort that goes into

building their business, staying connected with clients, and fostering community.

However, when these efforts were described, most often workers highlighted the

additional labor involved in dealing with clients. Though initial contact with clients or

administrative upkeep (checking email, updating advertisements, etc.) could be described

as merely "part of the job," Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) point out that labor contains

an emotional element when it is based in an interaction with a client. Above, Alyson

describes how an interaction with a client can become excessive and yield no benefit

even after a flurry of initial effort. Workers tended to describe this extra emotional labor

as occurring in three different areas: dealing with "time wasters," efforts during

provider/client exchanges, and within the broader digital community-building of the sex

worker subculture.

As Hochschild describes, emotional labor is more than performative, it's

evocative. In order for emotional labor to be successful, it must elicit the perception of

authentic emotional connection. However, workers frequently explained that they had to

be careful in managing their abilities to create these connections, in case their efforts go

unrecognized. Jordan, a 35-year-old escort, described how a client that she has not seen

in months can still require time and effort that can be unpaid or even unappreciated.

> It was a lot of emotional labor. It was constant emails when I may not see him for
> three months at a time. It was this expectation that I would reply to his emails or
> his texts or whatever. And it just became...It wasn't a good input versus output
> sort of relationship. Thankfully I haven't had too many of those. And I think I've
> gotten better over the years at managing the expectations of clients that might
> become emotionally attached. That was definitely a big one. Apparently, I'm
> really good at faking an emotional connection.

Workers identified that clients who require additional communication or guidance can be

frustrating because they lower the value of workers' time. Any client that is a "time

waster" is consuming provider resources without remuneration, thus lowering the value

of the work. When workers discussed the value of time, they were most often concerned

with ensuring that the time they put in to work was highly valued. From a business

standpoint, if a prospective client is a time-waster this invariably lowers the value of their

time and thus that time must be recovered elsewhere. Bethany, a 28-year-old cam and

fetish model, sells her personal underwear online and discusses why time-wasters are

such an issue:

> I get nothing out of it other than aggravation. You get your hopes up that
> somebody's going to buy from you....Or, like, especially if I go through all the
> hassle of sending them pictures of my selection and giving them all the
> information and all that stuff, and they pick out what they want, so I'll even take

> stuff out, and put it in a bag for them, sometimes I'll even get it ready. And then, I just don't hear from them, and so then I waste more of my time to follow up, be like, "Are you ready to buy? Are you ready to buy?" And then, nothing. Oh, god. It just aggravates me.

Troublesome or dangerous clients can ideally be screened out early with a nominal amount of effort. Workers routinely described "screening" as a process of gathering information on prospective clients to preemptively avoid problems (discussed in detail in Chapter 6). Time-wasters are problematic because they appear on the surface to be viable prospective clients, and are only revealed after time and effort have been expended.

Bethany continues, describing why time-wasters are such a specific concern for workers:

> If anyone's going to be abusive or something...they always reveal themselves in like the first message to me, so I don't even have to reply to it. But time wasters are different. Because a lot of people will send emails back and forth, will ask to see the different underwear I have, and I'll send them pictures, and we can talk for like a week just going back and forth, and then they don't end up buying. But, other times, we'll go back and forth for a week, and they will buy, and sometimes they'll become a regular.

Time-wasters are particularly frustrating for workers because of the initial investment of time and effort that must be made to discover if they will ultimately become a client. When workers discussed time-wasters they frequently described the extra effort it takes to identify them among early in their screening process. These efforts are part of their screening procedures but meant specifically to weed out potential clients who are not going to ultimately result in income.

In many instances, such screening procedures were meant to ensure acceptance of productive clients as well as avoidance of troublesome ones. Francis, a 33-year-old escort, describes how small details in the initial contacts with clients can be used to avoid time-wasters:

> I don't answer one-word texts. So if they just say like, "BBBJ?" I don't respond to that. Like, you couldn't even put it into a sentence? "Do you offer BBBJ?" No, I don't answer, "Hey," or, "Hi," or "Hey babe," none of that shit. Unless it says something like, "Hi, I'm so-and-so, are you available at x time?" I'm probably not gonna reply. And that's just something I've learned over the years. In all of the cases where I had extra time and I wasn't doing anything, so I actually did engage with some of these people, it never goes anywhere. It's always a waste of time. They don't book. So, I just don't anymore.

Several workers discussed the need to be aware of the extra emotional labor that even established clients would attempt to elicit through digital communication between appointments. Essentially, client would attempt to elicit unpaid labor in the form of an authentic connection fostered by providers even when the two are not together. Many workers noted that communicating with clients between sessions can be a complicated issue because though workers did not want to "give away" free labor, they also did not want to alienate reliable clients. Mona, a 46-year-old escort, describes how good clients don't try to get extra emotional labor through things like "chit chat" or digital exchanges, but that these relationships require careful navigation:

> They'll send me 90 messages back and forth…. The ideal client doesn't go back and forth for three hours. I am not going to play this text game with you. My phone when I'm working is for confirming only. It's not for chitchat, although I do play a client in Words with Friends[10]. I make exceptions, what can I say? I have a heavy game going now.

Time-wasters were overwhelmingly a digital phenomenon that occurred during initial contact. In a few rare instances, however, workers noted clients being time-wasters during an appointment. For example, providers will often meet with a prospective client for coffee or a meal before booking a session. In these rare cases, third-party mismanagement was most often to blame.

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[10] Words with Friends is a mobile gaming app that allows users to play a scrabble type word game with others, where each player participates autonomously via their own phone and location.

Providers were generally distrustful of additional people being involved in their business. Escort agencies, managers, or agents were referenced often when workers experienced bad situations, and most noted that these experiences stopped them from working with outside people. Deanna, a 23-year-old cammer and escort, gave the example of being sent to an appointment through an escorting agency, which that would lead to a bad experience:

> Time wasters are the biggest issue for sex work…. People that give you the runaround. Like more than anything. I've [gone] out to dinner with people and stuff like that who ditch me and left me with the bill, I've had all sorts of crazy shit happen along those lines….For the most part all of the stuff that comes to me through the escorting gig, [because] it's just a picture of some other white girl with brown hair…and they're like, "oh I want Susan," and then they send somebody, and I'm not Susan, obviously.

In addition to problems with third parties and time-wasters, the majority of workers discussed emotional labor beyond the bounds of direct client/provider sessions. Not only must providers navigate when, how, and how much emotional labor to expend on a client relationship, when emotional labor becomes overwhelming the onus of management is also on the workers who are sole practitioners. Mandy, a 29-year-old escort, describes how these situations need to be carefully monitored so workers don't get burned out or overextend themselves:

> It's very emotionally taxing. I used to do multiple appointments in a day, and I just got so tired at the end of the day, and it just wasn't good for me emotionally to do that, because it still is a very intimate process, even if I don't get emotionally attached to my clients or know that happens. For that time period of a couple of hours, you pretty much are their girlfriend. You try to connect with them, there's intimacy involved, and doing that for me with multiple people, the girlfriend experience, every day was just too much.…I told multiple ladies on [message boards] that your emotional safety is the most important part. Don't ever let somebody tell you no, if you're a hooker you can't screen for people based on weight, or ethnicity, or anything. No, no, no, you've got to figure out what you need to do to stay okay. Not what everyone else is telling you to do.

> Yeah, find out who is emotionally taxing for you to see, and also find out the amount of people that it takes for you to still be okay at the end of the day.

Mandy's point about screening for preference is an interesting take on emotional labor. Workers often wanted to ensure that clients received the benefit of an authentic emotional connection during their sessions, but not at the cost of their own personal mental health or well-being. This also highlights an additional aspect of emotional labor that workers had very different judgements on: the emotional labor of community support.

Workers in the study noted that supporting the broader community of sex workers, both digital and in real life, was a good use of emotional labor. When they discussed reaching out to other workers, seeking advice, or offering support, study participants overwhelmingly expressed this was both a positive aspect of their work and worth the additional effort. Kit, a 21-year-old cammer and fetish model, talked about sharing information with the broader community to help avoid problem clients or wastes of emotional energy: "We'll post about who's a time waster and who's doing this and who's trying to rip off who and doing what. On [social media], I follow like hundreds of girls. And I talk to tons of girls. And they talk to me and they follow me. And it's nice."

When participants discussed emotional labor, they described the different ways that labor could be spent, or conversely, wasted. Often, workers described the frustrations of unprofitable labor, but nearly all the providers in the study felt that using emotional labor to support their fellow workers was a good use of both their time and efforts. However, many providers cautioned that emotional risks or burnout should be avoided and would frequently note the different ways they minimize the effect emotional labor can have on them.

5.4. THE GIRLFRIEND PERSONA

Roxy leaned forward and balanced her cigarette on the lip of the ashtray. "What I do day in and day out is not unpleasant enough to have to take my mind away." She grasps the filter between her thumb and index finger pivoting it on the edge. "I just take myself, the real name of me elsewhere and keep it safe, wrapped up and tucked away." She rolls the tip into the bowl, extinguishing one side of the ember, then the other. "For the most part, I enjoy the roles that I play on a daily basis."

Most of the workers in the study described the use of a work persona. Providers nearly universally described changing their personality either wholly or in part to aid in their own comfort and make themselves feel safer physically and emotionally while facilitating emotional labor and maintaining an authentic aesthetic. Workers described a variety of ways to interpret and define a change in persona. Some claimed that the person they "put on" is a completely different person, whereas others accentuate the parts of themselves clients would find appealing.

Fiona explained that being able to put on a new persona was an initial draw to sex workers: "[It's] the first thing that was drawing me to work in this industry in the first place that you can pick a fake name and become sort of somebody else, but it's just like a better, more turned on version of myself I guess." She laughed to herself before lowering her voice to a smoky growl, emulating a bad attitude. "You know, because a lot of the time I'll just be like moody or grumpy or just not really want to talk." Fiona continues that her work persona is an augmentation of her identity, a common method by providers in the study:

> Of course, with the clients you have to be very smart and engage with them and
> funny, I guess. Then, they're of course giving you attention, which is nice. That

kind of compels you to continue this particular performance. I guess mostly it's just like a much more energetic, bubbly version. I don't think I can construct a cohesive other self without [some of myself] because clients remember things too, so it would be hard to lie, because I would forget, but they wouldn't probably. Also, because I'm on camera telling stories about my actual life as well. It's just a lot easier if you tell the truth but you're just better that day, just more likable.

Many of the workers in the sample described altering their persona in some way to interact with clients. A few described putting on an entirely different persona, whereas most explained that this presentation was a variation of their existing personal identity. A few participants rejected the idea altogether and stated they'd find balancing multiple personas to be too difficult. Most workers, however, noted that the development of alternative personas was an essential part of sex work and many have constructed numerous personas depending on their frequency and style of work. Paula, a 40-year-old cammer and escort, describes that she constructed a new persona every time she moved from one area of sex work to another:

Well because I used to post nude artistic photos online just for fun, like at the birth of the Internet, and I had a pseudonym for that. Then I started doing the cam shows and created a whole new persona for that. Then I started escorting and created a whole new persona for that. Then there's the real me.

Noting that there is a difference between her various workplace personas and her "real" identity highlights how Paula, like other workers, enacts her various personas. Workers described the different levels to which they develop and "put on" their work personas. Some of the workers developed a completely different identity with unique traits, but most described a more straightforward accentuation of specific parts of their personality. Bethany, a 28-year-old cammer and fetish model, described how her work persona was literally an alter ego, but still closely related to her true identity:

[Bettie] is my sex worker identity. That's who I am when I talk to someone on the phone, or even reply to messages, and take pictures, and stuff. So, she has her

own history, and she's obviously a different age than me. But, she's not that much different than me, so it's not too crazy of an alter ego, or anything.

When some participants described their work persona, they wanted to note that this person was not drastically different from their "real" identity, but simply accentuated certain aspects of their personality and aided them in being more comfortable during work exchanges. Francis, a 33-year-old escort, described how her work persona helped her feel less awkward when interacting with clients: "I think at one point I was describing myself as, the perfect mix of Velma Dinkley and Morticia Addams. What you get is really just a more idealized version of me. Slightly more articulate. Slightly less awkward." Similarly, Tiffany, a 22-year-old escort, likened it to changing your personality for any kind of job: "I don't really think of it as a persona. I just put on my work face. If you work in customer service, like if you work at a coffee shop, you have to put on a work face." Both women see the donning of a work persona as more of a shift of their existing personality to be more comfortable during work.

Participants almost universally used a pseudonym while working. But the majority of workers noted that a change in persona was distinctly different from simple anonymity. Cate, a 22-year-old cammer and pro-dom, noted that her work persona kept her safer because it masked her real identity: "I feel a little bit more safe because I have worked really hard on the persona I use to the point of where if you google the persona you can't find any real information about me unless you know what my face looks like and you can guess what my proper first name is." However, she also noted that her digital persona accentuates different aspects of her personality and that, in reality, she doesn't have the most extroverted of personalities: "I'm a lot more talkative online. Honestly…I tell my partner I hate people. This is the best job ever 'cause I don't have to deal with

customers. I deal with perverts." Cate's statement about dealing with "perverts" hints at a more complex relationship between these changes in persona and their relationship to emotional labor.

Beyond obscuring their personal identity, accentuating specific personality traits, and increasing security, participants noted that their change in persona aided them with emotional labor. Darla, a 29-year-old cammer, noted that she naturally separated parts of herself, and this helped her be well suited for her work: "I'm also pretty good at keeping the different parts segregated.…It's just something that I've always naturally done. Like this is my school life, this is my work life, this is my personal life, this is what I do." The construction of a separate work persona providing emotional or psychological distance from clients was a helpful in providing effective emotional labor. Hannah, an 18-year-old escort, describes how her work persona aids her in providing an authentic experience that is only present within the confines of a session:

> I definitely tend to be more outgoing, sweet, caring [while working]. I don't know, just trying to be this very sweet, bubbly, awesome girl. And I think I'm a bit more cynical, in general. I mean, I'm still nice, but yeah. After work, I just make fun of clients with my partner. … I sort of take a deep a breath and you're like, "I am this person when I walk in the door." And then, I always heave a big sigh, every time someone walks out. Like, "Okay. And we're done."

The notion of presenting separate personas in different social situations is not a new concept. Researchers have observed the differences in public and private personas for many decades. The most influential of these is Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Society* (1956), claiming that identity is performative in a dramaturgical sense, where an actor (individual) fulfills a role for an audience (society). However, the inclusion of digital communications between clients and providers introduces a new level of performative identity.

Belk (2013) refers to this as the concept of the "extended self in the digital world," wherein our performance of identity also exists in digital spaces shaped by five new elements. "(1) Dematerialization, (2) Reembodiment, (3) Sharing, (4) Co-construction of Self, and (5) Distributed Memory" (477). For the workers in this study, co-construction of self seems to be one of the most important aspects of the emergence of a digital "self." Workers conform their personae to the desires of clients while using their co-constructed identity as a screen against the drains of emotional labor. However, many of the workers in the sample noted that these constructed identities extend beyond the time they spend in client/provider sessions. Clients have digital access to workers even when they are not together, and participants identified both positives and negatives associated with this additional contact. Arden, a 26-year-old escort, explains that these additional contacts with clients outside of work can provide her with additional benefits, but that these interactions need to be very carefully navigated because of the danger of conflating their services for "real life":

> I choose to communicate with [clients] on a personal level. But that's my job, and I take my job very seriously, and even though, I know for a fact and it also goes both ways. These people, I help them with certain things, and they help me with certain things. I do consider some of my clients to be like good friends of mine. If I'm in trouble, and I need money, they'll send me money. If I need a favor done, they'll do me a favor. I have clients that will literally chauffeur for me. Especially the fetish clients. They do my laundry. They clean my house. They pay to get my hair done. They send me gifts. They'll buy me clothes…. And it's those little things, it's those little texts that you send out that is the difference between just getting $300 in an hour or getting $300 and then also getting you know A, B, C, and D. But you have to be really selective, and you have to be really aware of who you're dealing with because you could very easily send the wrong message to someone. Some people don't understand that there's a line that's actually drawn in the sand. That there's a place where the fantasy ends and reality begins. That we're not actually in a relationship, but we are at the same point in time. It's a balancing act.…I mean you have to keep some things personal. Otherwise you lose your fucking mind.

The inclusion of digital communications either between, or in some cases, during

sessions led to different ways to convey their work personas to clients. Hannah, an 18-

year-old escort, had a rare situation where she worked with a more experienced provider

who helped her not only set up her business but constructed a persona for her to help

improve advertisement and attract their preferred type of client: "She sort of got this

persona for me. 'Oh, like, cute, innocent, American country girl.' And I was just like,

'Okay.'" Hannah described how her persona was presented to prospective clients on

social media using hashtags and lifestyle posts:

> Here's a hashtag, bare back blowjob, BBBJ. Hashtag, fuck toy. Hashtag,
> threesome. Hashtag, strap on. That was from a double. Hashtag, skills. Let me
> see. Oh, hashtag, GFE, which is girlfriend experience, and PSE, which is porn star
> experience.…I have my nipples pierced, so there's hashtag, pierced nipples.…But
> I actually send her a lot of the stuff she puts up.… It's not all just like pictures.
> Some of it's lifestyle stuff. Like, "Oh, at the gym." There's a picture of my shoes
> and some weights. Or, I don't know, food that I cook, or whatever…. I do show
> my faces in pictures, and she gave me the option of not. She said she does as well.
> And it's because she believes that if you show your face in pictures, a lot of the
> time, you attract more people who are less abusive, versus, if you don't show your
> face, sometimes, she said they can be more abusive. Because they don't think of
> you as a human being, just a body.

Workers in the study often discussed the additional time and effort they must put into the

presentation of their work persona in the digital sphere. However, some found that this

could lead to different opportunities to connect with clients. Roxy, a 33-year-old escort,

discussed how she could move from digital interactions with clients to making money

from them. "There are occasions where you will set up a certain amount of time to sext[11]

with someone and they'll pay you for it, usually [through a website]. Or phone sex is also

sometimes an option."

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[11] Refers to "sexting," the act of exchanging erotic messages over messaging apps or mobile devices.

The interplay between the persona workers present in real and digital spaces brings with it new concerns. When workers describe in-person work personas they often noted the "taking off" process that occurred when they weren't in a session. However, many of the workers in the study spoke of the constant management of the relationship between their personal identity, their work persona, and their clients, which was associated with the proliferation of Internet communication.

Workers walk a duplicitous edge when balancing the separation of the real world and the fantasy world Arden describes. Tapping into the authenticity of her true self with her clients gives Arden material benefits, but she is also concerned both with her own safety and that her clients are receiving the quality of experience she wants to provide. Gertrude, a 40-year-old escort, pointed out that this duality of fulfilling a role while maintain a level of authenticity has implications for her clients as well, viewing her sessions as an opportunity to let their socially constructed identities fall away for a short amount of time:

> With a guy, like there's all these roles that he's supposed to fill like father, son, brother, provider, employee, boss where he's supposed to be this, that and the other. But there's no one he can really talk to, like even with your friends, unless it's like a really, really good friend, you can't fully just let your guard down.…It's more like we provide this safe, non-judgmental space where they can leave all those society labels at the door and just be themselves for a little bit and open up and not be judged and the help they need or get something off their chest or you know, whatever that is that they need. I give them that space, so, that's a big part of it.

The construction of an authentic experience, combined with the consistent digital management of workplace personas, begs the question of limiting the emotional labor of "fake" authenticity by simply replacing it with actual intimacy. Vivian, a 29-year-old escort, is a rare case in the study. Most workers either see novel clients on a regular basis

or have a semi-stable group of regular clients. Vivian, by contrast, has between 5 and 7 regular clients who she has been seeing for nearly a decade that she describes as her boyfriends. She explains that her particular kind of sex work is almost completely comprised of emotional labor:

> I would say I have sex maybe once every three or four times that I meet up with someone, and if I do, it's five or six percent of the time that we're together. It's not sex, it's selling love and companionship and a relationship. If you come to it at a truly honest point in your life, I really think that there's complete freedom to keep being, whatever you want to do, be explored. It's like a therapist but better with bigger tits, depending on who it is.

For Vivian, being "truly honest" seems to lessen the amount of effort associated with the emotional labor she's describing. However, most workers described that they prefer their relationship with clients to be separate and that the creation of authenticity was a byproduct that their emotional labor was effective. Providers largely took pride in their work, and though more often than not used their work persona to insulate them from intimacy with clients, they still wanted their clients to perceive an authentic connection and had a variety of techniques to achieve this.

5.5. AUTHENTICITY

Jordan's light blue hair was swept behind her ear, held in place by haute square librarian glasses: "I've learned over the years that the client base that I want to attract are the ones that go for ads that offer a connection or authenticity or things that more appeal to an emotional connection, plus a physical connection, not necessarily like, 'I'm gonna rock your world.'" She tugs at her grey cardigan before continuing: "There's some authenticity to it. But at the same time, it's also kind of creating that image of the ideal me.…And that's it, that's who my work identity is, it's like this ideal version of me

where I'm always ready for someone to make-out with me even though women get

headaches and have periods and may not always be into sex." She takes a pull on her

vaporizer. "But…there's a certain limit of that authenticity. My work room is away from

everything else in my life. So when I'm done working, I can close that door and have that

closure in that compartmentalization where, 'That's it. I'm done.' And I don't have to

open that door again until I have to work again."

When participants discussed their work personas, authenticity was the most

prominent theme. Bernstein (2007) notes in her book *Temporarily Yours* that as indoor

sex work began to emerge as a cultural phenomenon, the nature of the exchange was

refocused to be less transactional and more relational. In short, workers were providing

intimacy to clients within the bounds of a commercial erotic exchange, with the

authenticity of that intimacy desired by clients and a goal for providers. This has been

enhanced in the digital age. Hope, a 28-year-old pro-dom, describes how she wants to be

authentic during various experiences, and is able to adapt to a variety of social situations:

> My partner actually describes me as a chameleon. We talk about how one of [my]
> strengths …is that I'm able to shift with the dynamic of whatever person I'm
> with. But, also in my personal life, what I've been working on is being less of a
> performer and more authentic. Even when that means not necessarily doing the
> most beautiful or sexy thing or what have you….Part of what I'm working
> towards with clients is ultimately the kind of experiences that they want to have
> and the kind of experiences that I want to have are not that different, like, when I
> think about what makes a good work encounter it's being present, it's being alert
> and enjoying your body.

Authenticity was a desirable trait both that the clients were looking for and the workers

wanted to provide. However, when workers discussed authenticity as a desirable aspect

of a work encounter the majority noted that the authenticity is achieved in conjunction

with their performative persona. In essence, if their work persona is perceived as authentic providers take this as a measure of a quality interaction.

Most workers who described authenticity in their work noted that it was the perceived authenticity by the client that was the goal of the interaction. As noted above, Bernstein (2007) calls this concept "bounded authenticity." Workers are attempting to provide an authentic experience for clients, but within the contexts that surround an erotic exchange, such as their personal security procedures and their performative work persona. Alyson, a 32-year-old escort, notes that her clients enjoy when she is authentic, but for her there is a careful balance that accompanies these interactions:

> That's why they come to see me, because they feel like I'm a real person, I'm a real girl. I don't put on a lot of fake airs about me, which is...I think the genuineness is something that is very attractive to them. But it's definitely a buffed and polished persona. More smiley, nicer, less likely to roll her eyes at you. My real persona is classic New York bitchy Jew where I have something to say about everything. I think my customer service persona definitely comes out when I'm with clients. Just like more amenable, nicer, less confrontational.

Constructing authenticity is, by its very nature, a challenge. If clients perceive that a provider is distancing themselves, the authenticity would be negated and workers could risk losing a client or harming their reputation. Yet providers overwhelmingly voiced the need to provide both physical and emotional barriers from clients.

Arden notes this duality as well when she describes both trying to prevent her true feelings and identity from being revealed while also maintaining a core of authenticity. To combat this, she uses a technique she calls "hyper-focused truth," which echoes a method that workers use to achieve Bernstein's (2007) bounded authenticity within a fundamentally contradictory setting. Essentially, hyper-focused truth is used to construct

the authenticity of intimacy between both parties within the confines that the interaction

allows:

> I try to keep it all loosely based on the truth because the best lies are based in truth, and it's just a really great way for me to express different sides of my personality….I genuinely believe that there's good in all people, and I try, even if I'm with, like, a super repulsive overweight man or someone that I'm just really not attracted to, I really try to focus on that one thing that I am attracted to and exploit that to my favor so that I can provide them with the experience that they're looking for. So, I do try to base the experience in truth, but it's like a hyper-focused truth.…I'm able to be a lot more like my real self because that's what they're looking for, something more authentic.

When workers discussed having an authentic connection with clients, authenticity was

not unidirectional. Though workers noted more frequently that authenticity was an aspect

of the exchange that aided in advertisement and client satisfaction, they also described a

desire for authenticity for themselves. Noreen, a 32-year-old escort, describes using the

same method of hyper-focused truth to achieve a feeling of authentic desire with a client

she initially was uninterested in.

> I get to liberate people to a degree, like let people embrace aspects of themselves, let people feel authentic desire and feel desired, authentically desired. I used to be a terribly judgmental person, very, very superficial, judgmental person, and had all these stipulations of like, "Ew. Ew. Ew." And then this guy really liked me, and just was really quite persistent, and I found him physically repulsive, but he was just so lovely that I just couldn't help myself, but totally fall in love with him, and by the end of it, all the things that physically repulsed me about him, I thought were like the hottest things ever, so that really challenged me, and after that, whenever I get physically repulsed by something, I'd always be like, "Look. Look at that. What's going on there? Why are you repulsed, miss? What's wrong with you?"

She continues to describe hyper-focused truth as a technique that can be applicable in a

multitude of situations for a variety of workers:

> And so I feel like one of my very early brothel tricks was if I saw a client, and there was something about them that I could see that in some point in their life, they've probably received some sort of flak about, and struggled with or anything like that, I just look at that thing, and I love that thing so fucking hard, like so

> hard, like it's the most beautiful thing in the world, whether it be problem acne, or alopecia, or the various things that human bodies do.

By limiting their focus to specific aspects of either the client or the confines of the interaction, workers are able to cultivate bounded authenticity. Many of the workers in the study discussed focusing on specific aspects of the client/provider interactions to generate authenticity but weren't as explicit about the limitations of their focus. For example, Mandy, a 29-year-old escort, noted that she specifically looks for an intellectual connection to establish authenticity:

> I think the physical attraction part of it stems from the intellectual attraction. If we connect well from an intellectual standpoint and have things to talk about, then there's more likelihood of a physical attraction taking place.

A few participants explored the specifics of authenticity explained they were frustrated that sex work is stigmatized as an inherently inauthentic exchange between provider and client which invalidated their work relationships. Suzy, a 27-year-old escort, has a difficult time "faking" authenticity, "I have a really hard time with that. I think that in doing sex work, my authentic personality comes out a lot more than it does in my day to day life." She describes a conflict when a client covertly found her "real" online identity and accused her of being inauthentic. The situation Suzy describes represents what many workers in the sample described when discussing authenticity, the delicate balance of creating an authentic experience with clients while still having a delineation between fantasy and reality:

> I think he was definitely in love with me. He wanted to come…live here, or he wanted me to go where he was and live there.…I let him have that. I was pretty upfront about this is a fantasy, but to some point I was pretty invested in that dream. I think we were both getting something out of it, but also I think it couldn't happen.…He found my [social media] account one day and got super mad, and was like, "I don't understand, you're pretending to be a different person, and you said all these things, and blah blah," and I was just like, "cool, I don't

think there's that's much discrepancy in my comments on [social media] and what I say to you, I'm a complex person with a lot of different ideas and not a static person in your brain, you need to chill."

Suzy explained that because so much of the relationship was based on communication via the Internet, that she expected from the outset they would eventually simply stop talking:

He had asked me "how do you think this is going to end?", and I was like, "you know, we'll figure it out, and there's not going to be any kind of big blow up, we're just eventually going to stop talking", and that's eventually what happened after years.

This conflict between authenticity and identity can reach an impasse where a few workers explained that though they can create a situation conducive to an authentic experience it will never be "truly authentic" and because of this there will be a limit to the connection a provider can have with a client. Kelly, a 33-year-old escort, describes how authenticity is difficult for her in client/provider interactions because she has so little in common with clients:

I think they don't really know me as a person, so there's no way they could actually like me. They can like the idea of me. They can like what they know about me, but there's a certain authenticity that just can't be there because they're paying me to be there. They know that as well as I do. That creates a wall. Then also a lot of guys I see, we don't really have a whole lot in common. I'm from a small rural area in the middle of nowhere and a lot of these guys have overnights and longer dates are upper middle class, doing really well for themselves. They have an entirely different life and we just don't have a whole lot in common really. You can find small things in common to make the time go by, but it's not like we're going to run away and get married to each other. Although a few girls have tried things like that, it doesn't really work out.

Several workers noted that the creation of authenticity in less than ideal circumstances was a crucial aspect to the job, not because of the quality of client/provider interactions per say, but because accepting enough clients is the only way to maintain a business. Gertrude, a 40-year-old escort, had a broad Australian accent that made her instantly affable. "You need to be very non-judgmental and accepting and understanding of people

and most people nowadays aren't." She describes that often people would approach her to

inquire about becoming a sex worker, but she explained the ability to connect with a

variety of clients is a crucial element of the job:

> I kind of give them a little test.…I tend to say, okay, so what if some big, fat, ugly, hairy, smelly, like the worst-case scenario or some like old, decrepit, woman. You know, just build the most disgusting picture I can in their brain if someone comes in and wants to see you, what are you gonna do? And they're like, "Oh, well I'll just say no. You know, it's my right." I'm like, … "They're everyday people. If you say no to all of them, you're not going to have any business. So you can't say no to everyone." Or they'd be like, "Oh, well I'll just take the attractive one." I'm like, "There's not that many attractive [clients], it's what's attractive to you." So that's not gonna work either. And then they start actually thinking about what it is that they'd have to do and then they're like, "Oh, no, maybe not."

Despite the need for authenticity, some workers in the study found the concept of

constructed authenticity and a performative work persona to be completely incompatible.

Liz, a 32-year-old escort, was soft spoken and referred to her work as a necessary service

that was her calling. She explains that a separate work persona is not something she can

bring herself to perform because she'd be robbing herself, along with her clients, of

authenticity:

> I saw this client just a couple months ago. He was actually a quadriplegic. Yeah, that was definitely like my hardest experience since I've been doing this, like I cried all the way home and for the rest of the day and it was really difficult. But at one point he said, "If I had to describe you in one word, it would be 'genuine'." And like, I hear that kind of thing a lot. ... Of course, I'm sure that I do act a little bit different, you know, than I do in real life. I'm more accommodating; I'm not as bitchy to my client as I would be to my boyfriend, you know? I try to be very accommodating but without being fake. So, I try very hard to present myself honestly and to not put on a persona. I know a lot of other girls do kind of put on a persona, but I just don't. I don't like that, you know? I wouldn't feel good about doing that, I guess. I don't know, I don't even know if that's valid or not but that's how I feel. To me, it feels important that I'm doing something authentic.

Liz felt that combining a performative work persona and authenticity were fundamentally

conflicting. Similarly, Deanna, a 23-year-old cammer and escort, believed that a separate

work persona would be perceived by clients as contrived, and she, too, prefered to be

genuine in all situations. But this can have both benefits and disadvantages:

> I've thought about trying to make up some sort of work persona or make up different memories or make up different stories, I just don't have the time or energy to do it. My genuineness is something that I can't get rid of to where I think sometimes it works for me and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes clients want me to put on a show, and they want to deal with somebody who's very clearly doing a very performative thing…but I'm not particularly good at it. So I keep it mostly real. I keep my name different, but everything that I talk about is really my real story, my real truth…. In every facet of my life.

Deanna said that her genuineness would be a desirable quality for some clients, but

admitted that her inability to artificially create authenticity limits her business. In general,

however, workers who discussed authenticity as an aspect of their work persona

considered it part of the appeal for clients, whereas workers who discussed authenticity in

lieu of performative persona wanted to highlight its importance to themselves. Octavia, a

34-year-old burlesque performer, needs her work to feel genuine and believes that an

absence of authenticity would make her work more difficult, she describes how a sugar-

babying situation did not work out for her because she felt it was inauthentic:

> It's just not for me to fake intimacy. It feels uncomfortable.…So, I think that was the difficulty for me in that facet of it, is that whatever I do in life has to be authentic, and what I currently do now actually is. It feels much more real. So, while I am selling sexuality in performance, I feel comfortably fine with that.

Octavia is describing a situation similar to Vivian's, being "truly honest" and her stable

of reliable boyfriend clients. However, the key difference is that Octavia is the recipient

of the authenticity, with the expectation that her own authenticity will attract the kinds of

clients and situations she prefers.

Participants in the study frequently described a desire to create authenticity both

for clients and for themselves. These authentic connections could be viewed from the

standpoint of the worker providing or creating authenticity for clients both as in terms of quality of experience for their interactions, but also as a sign of good business. Workers acknowledge the limits of "bounded authenticity." Some workers noted a very specific technique for creating bounded authenticity, in the form of "hyper focused truth." Though workers most often preferred to produce authenticity for the good of their business or preference of their clients, some workers noted they found personal value in authentic connection both during and away from work. However, as noted by a few participants, there are inherent limits to authenticity in sex work because of issues of stigma-based mistrust and situational factors that necessitate worker client distance.

5.6. CONCLUSION

In the new digital model of sex work, authenticity is a commodity workers are attempting to cultivate and monetize. Workers used overlapping in-person and digital personas to provide clients with an "authentic" girlfriend experience. Workers then used digital communication to produce bounded authenticity both during and away from sessions with clients.

When providers in the study described their business, they rarely mentioned sex. Far more often they described the emotional labor of sex work. The girlfriend experience was the most common type of service provided, regardless of the type of work being delivered. The girlfriend experience requires additional emotional labor than a traditional "transactional" sex worker interaction and workers described this additional emotional labor at every level of their work and interactions with clients.

During their initial contacts with prospective clients, workers were most wary of time-wasters both because they don't result in any reliable business, but also because they waste the emotional labor of workers that could best be used elsewhere. Notably, workers discussed the use of emotional labor to foster profitable and reliable relationships with clients. However, most workers noted that there was a limit to the amount of effort they could expend for clients and preferred to reserve some of their emotional labor for use building and supporting the broader sex worker community.

Participants in the study described constructing work personas for a variety of reasons, with anonymity and increasing their comfort at work frequently noted. Furthermore, providers wanted to create authenticity in the client/provider interactions. Some workers noted using these work personas to foster a "bounded authenticity" during their sessions by using what they called "hyper-focused truth." In essence, they centered on an aspect of their client they could find appealing and exploiting that feature to nurture authentic intimacy. The creation of this authenticity takes a certain amount of emotional labor and when all the elements are balanced workers described that emotional labor can be demanding, but the production of authenticity, either for the clients or themselves was the sign of quality work.

CHAPTER 6: SECURITY

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Arden sat at an old gray Formica table, an overhead lamp bathing her in a ring of white light as she described her first experience working for an escort agency: "...I ended up leaving [the agency] because I had a really bad experience with a client that [the manager] did not screen. And he came into my home and actually attacked me." She sat with her back straight against the kitchen chair, her proper posture contrasting the black biker jacket and matching gold nose ring. "I realized that no one is gonna be as invested in my safety as I am. I'm always going to screen a client better than someone who is just exclusively doing it for the money." She flicked the cigarette between her pink painted nails and an unbroken thread of smoke crawled out of the ashtray in front of her. "Even though they might have a financial incentive to keep me safe and working for them, it's still not their safety in jeopardy. I'm not sure what she did to screen properly." Arden took a drag and stabbed her spent cigarette into the ashtray, "but I think it was a crock of shit."

Taking control of her own safety was important to Arden, and like many of the workers in the study, she recognized it was her own responsibility. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, on Risk, when workers talked about the risks they faced, they noted how their own specific risks differed from the culturally perceived risks associated with sex work, and how those risks could be diminished when placed in the hands of workers themselves. Arden was very clear that her personal autonomy played a crucial role in her own safety: "I work for myself. I employ myself. I screen clients myself. I'm obviously doing this of my own volition. There's nobody pulling the strings behind me."

Independence was a recurring theme when workers described their security concerns, and the relationship between the Internet and its role in personal independence was nearly universally discussed among the sample. The Internet plays a crucial role in workers' ability to mitigate various risks. Participants tied the use of the Internet directly to personal autonomy, as Arden explained how her screening measures were superior to those in her previous work for an agency:

> I use sort of like my personal prostitute black book, if you will, to reference these guys. If they haven't seen a girl that I know personally, I make them send me contact information for two women that they've seen that I don't know…. I'll run his phone number through a date check service or something like that….It's a website that runs background checks and builds profiles for gentlemen that are interested in seeing providers. It makes my life a lot easier.

Arden was describing how Internet resources can lead to better security measures. However, both risks and security measures are contextual. Like many workers in the sample, Arden was vocal and detailed about her screening and security measures but noted that these measures changed frequently to address contextual concerns. Arden only used screening techniques she trusted to produce valid and reliable information about prospective clients. Above, she described the security measures for meeting a new client with references from workers she trusts. However, she had different protocols for meeting clients without references, those who had profiles on sex work review websites, or when she needed to gather the information about a client directly. Similarly, the majority of participants described a variety of security procedures based on the contexts involved. Workers could produce trusted information a variety of ways, but at a cost of varying levels of effort. Though the risks were different, there was technological symmetry when both in-person and digital workers described their security measures.

6.2. SCREENING AS WORK

Paula sat at her dining room table while the hot summer sun poured through the windows. "I couldn't do this job without the Internet. I couldn't do it." A 40-year-old escort and cammer, she moderates an online sex worker forum that answers workers' questions, discusses timely topics and builds an inclusive community. Her long blonde ponytail and bright blue eyes gave her a Rockwellian "girl next door" feel as she discussed how technology has changed sex work in the last decade. "I wouldn't have been comfortable doing it 10 years ago with just NearMart.[12] These websites, they've been around for 17 years, but you couldn't find them as easily." Paula was open and casual in her discussion of her work, she acknowledged that this was because she so rarely got to let her guard down and speak candidly about it with anyone who was not a provider. "There were actually girls that I know, actually one girl in particular, she tells these horror stories about 10 years ago when screening wasn't the norm. She was robbed and beaten and all this stuff." As the morning crept on the temperature rose in the room and she fanned herself with an envelope on the table. "Without Google and Blackout[13] and MateRate,[14] where you can verify guys, and without being able to check their Linkedin and Facebook presence, without all that, we wouldn't be able to do this safely, I don't think."

Paula was acutely aware of the contribution the Internet has made to the world of sex work for those with access to such technology. Sex and technology have been

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[12] Specific names of websites have been given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. NearMart is a location specific commercial website with an unregulated "adult services" section that many workers feel is dangerous.

[13] Blackout is a security website, also called a blacklist site, a date check site or bad date site, where providers can submit data on problem clients. Providers can report vital information, such as phone numbers and screen names.

[14] MateRate is a private review site where users are given a profile page that can be rated by other users. Providers can then access these profiles for screening purposes.

bedfellows for her since the late 1990's when she was spending her leisure time finding

dates in dial-up chat rooms. She was technologically savvy and was aware of the digital

resources for workers during their formation. When workers discussed risk, the

overwhelming majority explained that they perceived themselves to be safer than the

average sex worker. Most attributed their reduced risks to effective security protocols

facilitated by Internet technology. Though workers noted a variety of ways they

interacted with new technologies to aid in their safety, screening was highlighted as both

the most common and the most important security tactic. Screening is the process of

preemptively gathering information on prospective clients via the Internet to judge their

safety and suitability. Roxy, a 33-year-old escort, gave a straightforward definition of

how she and her partner screen prospective clients:

> Screening is actually a pretty simple process. We require a lot of personal
> information from the client. Their full real name and email address. A work email,
> place of employment, home address if we feel as though they're a little sketchy or
> we need to have more leverage. A social media profile at times. That is often to be
> able to match a face, a picture, with who they say they are when they show up.
> Then, especially important is how we verify through other girls that they've seen,
> other providers. So we'll ask for the names and contact info of other providers
> that they've seen. Get in touch with those girls and verify through them.

Though screening was routine, participants described a variety of strategies that made up

their screening procedures. Some providers, as Roxy noted, required in-depth

information, including extent of home addresses or bank account numbers, whereas

others needed a minimal amount of information such as a full name and a place of

employment.

As noted in the Methods section above, screening is so pervasive in the sex

worker community that I was screened without my knowledge in order for participants in

the study to verify my identity as a researcher with Rutgers University. Lydia, a 23-year-

old escort, had a hint of a southern accent that added to her hospitable demeanor. She

spoke often about her concerns for other workers, so it came as no surprise when she

revealed she had surreptitiously called the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers

University-Newark to verify that I was both a legitimate researcher and being advised by

a tenured professor. We both laughed at the fact that she used the same screening

measure to verify the validity of the study that she would use on a prospective client:

> *Lydia*: Well, I did do your intensive screening (laughs).
>
> *Kurt*: I know I cannot thank you enough for that….It showed everybody that I am who I say I am, which is fantastic….I obviously cannot–
>
> *Lydia*: Yeah, you can't vouch for yourself.

Lydia's screening method reflects a common method that workers use to gather

information about prospective clients. Perhaps more importantly, the result of screening

was that Lydia could confidently recommend me to other workers interested in taking

part in the study. Both personal and digital references are a common form of screening,

as well as gathering vital information via the Internet to confirm employment status,

relationships, and test the overall honesty of prospective clients.

Ensuring their own security required workers to put in extra effort. Participants

frequently noted the additional labor that the broader culture is unaware of that often goes

unrecognized in their work. When participants described their daily work routines, the

majority of their time was spent on-line with administrative tasks. Alyson, a 32-year-old

escort, described how people often assume that interacting with clients is the most

strenuous part of her job, whereas she considered all the initial advertising and screening

to be the most arduous part of her work:

Eighty percent of the job is just sitting in front of the computer, tick tacking away trying to set things up, hoping they don't flake, which is, oh my god, that's the worst part of the whole job. People say, "Oh, you must meet all kinds of gross weirdos and psychos and guys that do weird things to you." I mean, no. The worst part is just trying to figure out a specific time, a specific place, and where to meet. If you get through that hurdle, the rest of it is pretty easy and nondescript.

When most participants described their work day, they began by describing

administrative work that included advertisement, communicating with clients and fellow

workers, and screening. For the participants in the study, using the Internet was a crucial

part of their work that kept them safer. However, this reliance on new technologies came

at a price. Mona, a 46-year-old escort, sported a classic Bettie Page haircut and her thick

leather wristbands gave her a distinct punk rock vibe. She summed up her thoughts on

technology by lamenting that while increases in the safety it provides make it vital to sex

work, it can also be seen as another intervention point for those looking to eliminate sex

work, blaming advances in choice and agency for the proliferation of sex work:

It is indispensable. Watch, all the [abolitionists] are going to blame it on the technology, because "she wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for technology." I wouldn't be, because it wouldn't be safe. I mean, it wouldn't be as safe as it is now.

There is a fundamental dichotomy that workers recognized in the use of technology.

Though it presents opportunities to create a safer working environment, any new way of

performing their work will be placed within the existing sex work paradigms. Proponents

will tout the autonomous benefits and detractors will point out new dangers. However,

these simplistic frames so serve to highlight why workers felt their security was solely

their own responsibility. Regardless of differing opinions, both positions highlight that

workers cannot access traditional social resources and these new security tactics help to

ensure some level of safety in order for the participants to enter and then continue in sex

work. Thus, both sides concur that screening is a crucial part of sex work. Workers must

quickly and discreetly decide whether a new client is safe, and part of this calculation is

the acknowledgment that if they're wrong they cannot call for help.

The isolation from social resources for workers is so prevalent that most workers

viewed the police as a hazard. This also means that when workers screen clients, one of

their biggest concerns is ensuring that the person they're talking to is not a police officer.

Hope, a 28-year-old escort, described how workers are so removed from traditional social

resources that could aid in security, that she feared police intervention more than the

prospect of dangerous clients:

> I'm actually more afraid of police than I am of crazy clients because of the power
> dynamic there. I've heard horror stories from sex workers who've been raped by
> police. More often than I hear stories of people who've been raped by clients. If
> the client rapes you that sucks, but really, it's awful. But if a policeman rapes you,
> they rape you and then they arrest you.

Screening is thus a security measure that must be effective enough to replace access to

social resources. Workers roundly avoided police at all costs, so their only option was to

create a system that decreased their risks. Screening is a process with an end result: the

trust that a prospective client will be safe and suitable.

As screening measures become more labor intensive, they sap workers' time and

some workers may feel that excessive screening results in diminishing returns when

weighed against the return on the investment of time. Simply out, most workers

expressed a desire to minimize labor, which can maximize their income. Gertrude, a 40-

year-old escort, quipped, "I'm lazy! I'm happy to do minimal effort, if I'm making the

money that I need. If I make enough money, it's all good, safe, whatever!" Gertrude was

accentuating that there is a minimum level of effort to ensure safety, and the different

screening measures take different levels of work.

6.3. SCREENING STYLES

When screening prospective clients, personal references were overwhelmingly

deemed the most trustworthy. This high level of trustworthiness for personal references

streamlined the screening process because workers could be confident another provider

had thoroughly vetted a new client. Paula, a 40-year-old escort, described the different

levels of screening she preferred, from the most trustworthy, quick, and convenient, to

the most time consuming and problematic:

> Basically, there's three ways I'll do it. This is the really common [procedure], at least at my price range. I'll take one or two references from a well-known, well reviewed provider, it's gotta be someone that I've heard of that's current on the message boards and has a decent website. Not some fly by night threw my shit together website. I have to email them, and you have to give me their contact information. Don't just say I saw Lucy in New Mexico. Tell me their contact information, their website. I'm not going to run around doing the work for you. Then I'll email the girls and I'll say John Smith, this is his number, this is his email address, this is what he looks like, this is where he said he saw you, can you vouch for him? Nine out of ten times they'll get back to me and say "yes." I've never had someone say "no, he was a jerk. I didn't see him, he lied to you." Never happened.

Paula noted that one of her goals with the screening process was that it not be onerous.

The most effective screening measure was the one in which Paula did not have to "run

around doing the work for you." Balancing the amount of work it took to screen a client

with their own safety was a common theme for workers. Participants often spoke about

the different thresholds of trust they had for screening measures. Liz, a soft spoken 32-

year-old escort, agreed with Paula's assessment on personal references and noted her

additional concerns if they were unavailable: "I would never see someone without

references, I mean, or employment." She paused and sighed: "Even employment

verification, I get a little nervous because it's still possible either the person, you know,

got caught and now he's a narc, or it's a fabricated identity. That's why I much prefer

references from girls that I actually know."

As Liz described, the quality of the reference does matter, and unsatisfactory

references will ultimately lead to more work with less certain results. However, not all

workers implicitly trusted personal references; some viewed them with a certain level of

skepticism. Charlene, a 35-year-old escort, noted that since the clients provide the

references, it would be fairly simple to mislead a provider: "References can be like 50/50

because you can rip a girl off but be nice to another girl. [Then] tell the nice girl to give

you a good reference not knowing that you ripped off another girl." Often, if references

were unreliable or missing, workers had to find other ways to screen clients. Paula

described that the second way workers can screen clients is by using other digital

resources like blacklist sites and review sites:

> If they don't have references, then I'll take Blackout or MateRate because I know
> they verify them already. Usually on those websites, the girls will click 'okay' or
> 'I approve of him' or 'I recommend' but they've gotta have at least one or two.

Mandy, a 29-year-old escort, sat in her living room with her legs crossed on an

overstuffed beige leather sofa, nodding in time as she counted off the ways digital

resources are helpful as a supplement for screening clients, but noting that references are

preferable:

> Obviously references, number one. Number two, Blackout is very important, I go
> on that sometimes and I'll cross-reference names and screen-names and phone
> numbers with people. Then usually, in my area there's about five ladies that are in
> my price range, and we always end up getting the same customers at the end of
> the day, so we share a lot of information with each other too.

Review sites attempt to serve the same purpose as personal references, but often with less

trustworthy results. New digital forms of communication can bring new difficulties, like

fake provider references from fabricated clients or workers identities. Digital resources

are ostensibly easy for workers to access, but an unknown user base means it takes

additional work to trust the information provided and increases the risks of problem

clients. Mona, a 46-year-old escort, echoed a lot of these themes. The review site she

used for her screening worked well if the information provided was valid. The site

provided clients with a profile, providers ranked the quality of their experiences and vice

versa, then users were assigned a level. The higher the level the better the quality of user,

supposedly. Mona said there was no way she could be sure of the accuracy of the

information since a client profile could be compromised and the recommendations were

coming from community members she did not know personally, so she had to go through

additional steps to confirm its accuracy:

> It's not foolproof. Nothing in life is foolproof. Walking across the street and not getting hit by a bus, I can't say it won't happen, but for the most part, you know. If someone's been around, if they're a level, even a level two, they've seen at least 15 girls on there. Those 15 girls have rated them in five separate categories, and if they have any reds, one red you can sometimes overlook. Okay. They didn't get along. Misunderstandings, and you have to consider the source as well. Where did the rating come from? Although I don't really hang out with any of these girls…they have blogs as well. You can see who's flakey and who pretty much has their feet on the ground, and their head is in the clouds.…Everything's there for me. If they are a new level zero, and they may have two or three people that they've only seen, I won't see them if they haven't seen anyone, or I won't see them if that screen name hasn't seen anyone for let's say a year, and now they're coming back after a year, that handle could belong to anyone. They could have traded it. They could have gotten busted for doing NearMart and said, "Hey, you want an in into this site? Here, let me give you my name." So yeah, I'm more paranoid. My general rule is stay more paranoid than you think you have to be.

Mona's paranoia compelled her to take additional effort to screen her clients. Though

workers found references, both personal and digital, to be an effective screening measure,

many took extra steps to ensure that the information gathered was reliable. Kelly, a 33-

year-old escort, noted that sites that are set up to help workers specifically can be

problematic because of the financial incentive to increase traffic to the site. Kelly was

one of the few participants who migrated from street level work to independent escorting

using the Internet. She was staunchly self-reliant and valued being in control of her

business and her screening measures. She wryly quipped, "it's not hard to lie online"

when she explained her lack of trust of online resources:

> One of the biggest issues I have with trust of MateRate is a lot of people lie and a
> lot of people misdirect things and there are a lot of shady people and pimps and
> ne'er-do-wells that really do get involved and they—it's not hard to lie online. If a
> company sets itself up and tries to get itself a little bit of credibility by saying,
> "Oh, I'm run by a provider and here's a picture of the provider," you don't really
> know if that's true unless you meet the girl and you've worked with her and you
> see things. I know for a fact that BetterDate[15] is legitimately run by a provider
> who is still working to this day.

Most workers had mixed reactions to rating sites. Regardless of their opinions, workers

who used digital references attempted to verify the information they were getting either

by checking the social media or web presence of the client or provider. However, Kelly

continued by noting that she would rather expend the effort to screen clients on her own,

because she knew she was capable and could gather trustworthy information:

> If I didn't have my website or I didn't have a way to screen people before I met
> them, I would be relying then on other people to do that for me. You never know
> if you can trust them because they have a financial incentive to get people in your
> door. I'd rather do those things myself and with the Internet and the different
> platforms that are set up, it allows me to do that. Yeah, I think at this point if I
> didn't have that, I wouldn't do it.…I wouldn't want to do it if I wasn't able to
> screen people in advance and do all my own stuff basically because I can control
> it all.

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[15] BetterDate is a different review site that Kelly felt was more trustworthy.

Trust was a prominent theme when workers discussed screening, and ultimately was the motivating force behind the third screening style that Paula described, direct screening. That is, gathering vital information on clients firsthand. This method requires the most effort, but some workers felt this was the only way to be sure the information could be trusted. Paula explained that she resorted to collecting data only when a client could not provide any kind of reference:

> If they have none of that, and I hate doing this, it's my least favorite and I don't do it very often, I'll have to verify who they really are and check their employment. Guys don't like to do that. The lower end guys who want to pay cheap and be in and out quick, they don't want to do it at all. The higher end guys who are more executive type, they trust the system a little more. They trust the girls. They're seeing high quality girls. They trust them a little bit more. They're willing to give you that information.

Direct screening was most often concerned with verifying crucial pieces of information about prospective clients. Kaley, an 18-year-old escort, was always succinct and pointedly explained, "I screen super well.... I don't see unemployed people. I have to see people with a paper trail, so I can verify that they're not a cop." Participants tended to alternate between "not being a cop" and "being a real person," but both of these phrases conveyed the same concept, that the prospective client was not being dishonest in who they presented themselves to be. Employment and honesty, direct screening was most concerned with these two aspects when dealing with prospective clients. Liz, a 32-year-old escort, clarified why these two elements were the most important, in her customary soft-spoken tone:

> If they don't have any references, if they give me their real name and if they have some kind of a job where they have like an online presence and I can somehow verify them that way, I'll do that. And I have another [email] account that's just like a random guy's name and so I'll have them send an email to that account from their work email address to verify that it's really them.…We call it "employment verification."…The logic behind that is that if something goes

wrong...you know who they are and how to find them, basically. And also, just because if someone is willing to give you that information, generally it means that they are not intending to do anything bad if they're willing to give you their real identity.

Paula's observation above that clients "trust the system" is an interesting aspect of how emotional labor could play a part in the safety of providers. Workers felt that the more personal knowledge they had of their clients, the safer they would be. As discussed in Chapter 5, most of the workers in the study engaged in emotional labor with their clients (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1979), creating an atmosphere of intimacy that was authentic up to a point (Bernstein, 2007). Within this framework, workers were privy to increasingly sensitive information about the clients, creating a safer work environment. In essence, the better workers were at manufacturing intimacy, the safer they became.

Mona referred to the precarious position both provider and client were in as: "mutual destruction," and noted this concept when referencing a recent client: "It would be mutual destruction if I ever decided to out him, which I wouldn't, obviously. But he trusts me so much that I know where he works, obviously.…He plays in a band, as well. He works in a very banking atmosphere." Similarly, Vivian, a 29-year-old escort, noted, "I feel like if I know your kid's name, you're probably not going to hurt me." Vivian's more intense screening procedure also connected the themes of security and emotional labor. So much so that the concept of protecting herself within the confines of a client/provider interaction was an opportunity to make a joke—deadpanning that she carried a gun for safety, before she burst out laughing at the idea:

Vivian: Oh yeah, I carry a gun.

Kurt: Really?

> *Vivian*: No, it's Canada (laughing). What?!

> *Kurt*: Now you're just fucking with me because I'm American. I was like "oh of course, you carry a gun just like everybody else, it's fun!"

> *Vivian*: You can't carry a gun here, what the fuck!? (More laughter).

> *Kurt*: You're all hunters. I thought everyone had a rifle in your bag of holding.

> *Vivian*: You're not allowed to carry a gun here. No. I make precautions in my screenings. I make sure that I know who I'm talking to. I do have people that I trust that if something went wrong, I could easily call, but I have the same lovely clients.

As Vivian's reference to her "same lovely clients" suggests, many of the study participants discussed their security being connected with building trust with clients. As Paula noted above, trust was placed in "the system" or "the girls." Higher-end clients were aware of "mutual destruction" and saw that screening protocols were meant to exchange trust between providers and extend to clients. The "system" that Paula noted is the idea that clients must acquiesce to the requests of workers in order to be seen as viable clients, but they understood that the more thoroughly they were vetted, the more willing workers would be to see them.

However, not all of the participants wanted to engage in that level of emotional labor. Charlene, a 35-year-old escort, had a "no bullshit policy" and was not interested in additional emotional aspects of the work: "Seeing that it's the type of business that it is, I try not to get too emotionally involved. It's one thing to build a rapport, it's another thing to be emotionally involved." This meant that when Charlene screened prospective clients, she had a much lower tolerance for risk or ambiguity:

> Some girls say they do background checks and stuff like that, but that type of stuff costs money and sometimes it can be inaccurate. I follow a few groups and blacklist sites and stuff like that, and some names are pretty popular and kind of

ring out to you. But mostly what I do is I just check for that and ask for the work information and that's it. And if a guy can't produce that or if he gives me any lip about it, fuck him, he's out.

Charlene cut to the point of the issue: screening is a process that has limits, and if workers don't achieve the level of valid and reliable information they require, they walk away. Trustworthy sources aided in the reduction of work and though participants had varying levels of preference and trust, the more they trusted a style of screening the less effort they felt it needed to meet their needs. Gathering information on clients directly was often a litmus test for the suitability of the client, but as workers increased in their abilities or desire to manufacture intimacy, the more access they had to sensitive information about clients. Though these themes were discussed frequently by participants, many workers noted that their efforts were also bolstered by individual screening tactics and their personal social, racial, and gender privilege.

6.4. INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCES

Francis had a shaved head and several piercings that matched her silver metallic painted nails. She took a swig of coffee and brusquely listed her screening procedures: "Phone number and intuition, basically," aiming her thumb followed by her index finger at her web camera. Francis had far fewer metrics than the other workers in the study but said that judging prospective clients on their ability to follow instructions was enough to determine if they would be suitable:

I've set out how you should contact me. And so basically, if you can't follow those instructions… then I won't see you. Because if you're not gonna listen to my instructions online, you're not gonna listen to them in real life.

Francis gauged these early interactions very strictly, and other participants in the study

also noted the various details they found to be important for their security. Workers often

called these individual approaches "intuition" or "gut feelings," but also were able to

precisely identify indicators that led to "feeling off" about a prospective client. Small

details like grammar or following instructions were noted as warning signs. Regardless of

how workers described their perceptions, most were able to articulate why these feelings

arose and that they were a reflection of the complexity of the vulnerable position

providers were in. This is illustrated by Paula's final hurdle for screening clients. Though

it seems counter-intuitive, she preferred her clients be somewhat reluctant to divulge their

personal information:

> Actually, for me, other girls don't feel this way, but for me it's a red flag when
> they give that information too easily. Yeah. I don't know why. Like they'll
> message me and say, "Hi I don't have any references, but I'd like to spend time
> with you, tell me what you need from me. I'm happy to give it to you" and I'll say
> "name, address, blah blah blah," and they'll just type it all up and give it to me.
> But for some reason, I don't know why, that seems too good to be true. The guys
> who hem and haw about it…that usually ends up working out well because you
> can tell they're cautious, which is kind of good. I'd rather someone be cautious
> than just giving every girl all their information.

Judging the initial exchanges with prospective clients was one of the subtler way

providers screened. Even within the relatively banal contents of "small talk" with

prospective clients, workers were gathering information that could predict a problem

from a client. Osu described how she required new clients to provide her with some form

of identification, but noted that even if the client provided her with suitable information,

they could still disqualify themselves by making inappropriate requests:

> I require at least two provider references or work identification…like a work
> badge, a picture of your work badge from your work email. There's been one
> instance where I took someone's student verification. He went to [college], and he
> emailed me a picture of his school ID from his school email account…. People

have inquired, "Do you do student discounts?" Honestly, that is like the best way for me to never talk to you again. I always say on my profile. "I don't negotiate." We're not a flea market.

This ability to be more discerning in client selection was one of the benefits of using the Internet. Most workers noted that screening takes a few days and rarely did workers describe seeing new same day clients. This gave them time to reflect on the interaction and decide whether to see a client. Traditionally, scholars and others have presumed that workers have very little choice in client selection. But the majority of workers in this study noted that while several factors went into deciding to see a client, the choice ultimately belonged to the provider. Francis continued her thoughts from above on the consequences of prospective clients following or failing to follow directions:

I always looked at it like they're applying for a job. Right? Like, clients like to think that they have all this control and they're picking me. But in reality, I'm the one with all the power. So, it's like a job application. And I will pick and choose, and if you fail the job application, see ya!

A test of honesty and rule following was often a clandestine aspect of screening. Assessing the quality of a client was more than physical safety and prompt payment. Some workers used their screening measures to make sure that the experience with the client would be a positive one and attempted to avoid client who may be "time wasters" (see Chapter 5) or just an overall bad match. Screening for "time wasters," including people who appeared to be prospective clients but ultimately did not schedule an appointment, was a common theme across most participants. Workers often discussed that they valued sex work because of the additional benefits such as autonomy and free-time. Time wasters were a specific issue during screening because they threatened the indirect benefits of the work while not providing any return on the workers' efforts. Though time wasters were not as big of a concern as personal safety, they were a frequent

nuisance that workers attempted to minimize at every opportunity. Izzy a 19-year-old

cammer, talked about the subtle ways she judged whether a client would be suitable; poor

initial communication was a prime indicator of a time waster:

> If they want a private show, somebody that's not going to waste my time.
> Somebody that will actually like ... I don't want somebody to start a private show,
> and then immediately leave because then that shuts off my public broadcast so it
> loses me viewers and then it also, it's just a waste of my time. Just wastes my time
> because I mean, if they pay for one minute, then cool. I got 25 cents from you and
> you lost me viewers. It's not worth it.

Time wasting was an indication of a poor potential client. Clients who were too flippant

in early communications were often ruled out immediately. The potential of a time waster

was that workers may be putting in additional efforts for less value, decreasing the

profitability of their overall labor, which workers guarded fiercely. A few participants

would weigh their current workload with whether they'd "take a chance" on a new client,

but when most recounted incidents of trying to gain a new client with poor

communication, the result was often a time waster.

Janine, a 30-year-old escort, used good communication as a general screening

measure, and found that a prospect who was well spoken and respectful could often lead

to a good client:

> I ruled out seeing a client because he used so many abbreviations and acronyms
> and text speak that I could not understand what he was saying, and I was like,
> "This is just not working for me." So if I see that a client uses full sentences, has
> good grammar, responds in an intelligent way, if there's any kind of witty banter
> or if there's any type of substance to the conversation, then that usually is enough
> for me to agree to see them as a client, and so far, it's worked out very, very well
> for me, and I know that this is a really unorthodox way of doing things, and like I
> said, it's pretty risky, but I mean, I am expecting that the longer I do this, the
> more likely it will be that something bad will happen.

The conceit that Janine would eventually be victimized is another reference to the

interplay between the broader cultural perceptions of sex work and the individual

contexts of participants. Different kinds of worker privilege extended to amount of effort and, ultimately, overall security.

Janine explained why the risk that "something bad will happen" was an acceptable level for her: "Thankfully, with my full-time job I have superb health insurance." Janine was in a privileged position where access to healthcare was not as much of a concern as it would be for a worker who did not have an additional job that provided good health insurance. And similar to the discussions on both identity and risk, she tacitly acknowledged this position and its benefits: "I know that's a very casual way of looking at things, but it seems to work well for me, and I have never once felt like I was in danger or that I was being threatened or that I was unsafe, ever." The different worker contexts had direct impact on the amount of work participants had to do in order to stay safe.

Often personal contexts remained largely unspoken, but a few workers wanted to note the specific differences between their own personal contexts and those of other workers concerning security. Walter, a 26-year-old escort, lived and worked in Germany and felt there was a different culture for screening in his country as compared to both Australia and the United States:

> Screening is difficult in Germany. There is not a screening culture….I have heard of all these screening techniques that are used in the Americas or Australia or something like that, but there is nothing like screening that I do to others….I'm trying to get better, like I'm trying to find technologies to screen….Maybe I just don't know shit, but that's my impression.

A broad culture of screening could influence workers to take more or less stringent measures when interacting with prospective clients. However, broad cultural contexts can also be perceived at the individual level. Walter, as a male sex worker, perceived and responded to risks very differently than his female counterparts and his particular lack of

screening included those personal frameworks. Edward, a 29-year-old escort, spoke about

the contexts of both gender and other facets of privilege, emphasizing what he perceived

as the difference between men and women, and straight and gay cultural expectations

around sex work:

> I don't [screen] in any sort of traditional way. I know a lot of the women will get references through other women or get workplace information. I shouldn't say a lot of women, a lot of privileged female sex workers tend to be able to do that. I don't. I've never done that. I don't even know how any of my clients would respond to that.…I think with the stigma attached to queer gay sex, especially for straight dudes, there would be no way they'd give me their personal information. There are some dudes whose names I don't even know, to this day, and I've seen them for years. I don't really screen them. I read their texts…read between the lines, how well are they presenting themselves in an email? Are they saying, "hello, how are you, this is who I am, this is what I'm looking for," versus "I want to fuck," you know?

The culture of secrecy and stigma for the gay community made screening through

gathering personal information difficult for the male workers in the study, causing those

male workers who did screen to rely almost exclusively on the Internet. This point is

crucial, since it highlights how personal contexts interact with broader social frameworks,

like using the Internet for security.

Both Edward and Walter had access to the same technology as the women

workers and shared many of the same social and racial privileges, but the stigma

difference between heterosexual and gay sex work was enough to make the utilization of

technology for security purposes completely different. Edward noted that his screening

had to be more intuitive, relying on "read[ing] between the lines" to look for clues. This

was similar to Janine's description above, but her primary reliance on communication

was an outlier among women in the sample. Regardless, potential clients who

communicated well were perceived to be better clients, and both Edward and Janine were

measuring their relative level of risk based on their privileged positions. This meant they could make their assessment of safety based on less information than some of the other workers in the study. Greg, a 25-year-old escort, noted that he found covert ways to gather limited information on his clients. He also admitted that his screening timeline was shorter than that of other workers, happening just before seeing a client. He was more concerned to ensure that they were a "serious" client and not a potential time waster by requiring that clients provided him with a car to meet:

> I require a car because I can't run around [the city] and have them cancel on me or some BS like that. So, they get the car, also a security thing because they're using their money, their name. So, if something happens to me, their name is there, somewhere.

The men in the study shared a distinctly different experience with screening and security than the women. Broadly, Edward and Walter acknowledged that screening as a security measure was "cultural" and "traditional," speaking to how widespread it was as a practice among providers. As workers, they had an expectation that they should engage in screening, even though they believed it would be more difficult given their situations as male workers with male clientele. They tie the use of screening to the context of "privileged female sex workers." Walter described himself as privileged because he was white, a citizen of his home country and young: "At least I need to tell myself that," he said, smiling at the fact that he recently turned 29 years old. However, being a man and a gay worker placed him in a different framework for security and screening protocols. English was Walter's second language, so he spoke slowly and often paused to convey his ideas. He believed that in this specific context, women have an advantage. The demand was higher for women, and privileged workers had an easier time of accessing those markets due to their position. Moreover, he believed that clients were less likely to

simply walk away from a woman provider when screening was either requested or

required:

> I've kind of lately wondered, what are the limits to gay male escorting? Because I just have the impression that they are much more high-profile lines who are females of course. If you are female and you're going into high profile escorting, like being independent and having all kind of nice privileges that allow you to go into this upper part of the ladder to climb up that career. So as a woman you will get much more chances I think with clients. Like there's just a much bigger market. I just kind of lately wonder, what are the limit of the market for male escorts, you know?

The individual contexts of the workers in the study provided different lenses from which

to view their own security. Though the majority of workers specifically noted screening

as an effective measure to increase their own security, the practice worked best for

workers who shared the privileged position of being in high demand and with relatively

low stigma, enabling them to require more information and refuse work if their screening

requirements were not met. However, it's worth noting that the ability to refuse work and

the position of high-demand extended across both race and gender lines. Mandy, a 29-

year-old Asian escort, noted the complexity of this when describing how she, a highly

educated, in-demand woman, could walk away from sex work if she so chose:

> I think it's different for me, because if this line of work somehow didn't give me any returns, I have my other jobs that I can go back to. So, I'm not reliant on this income at the end of the day. I use the money here to help pay for grad school, help finance my businesses, things like that. Where some ladies, they don't have that other option. If something happens to them, if they get a bad review, word gets spread about them, then that's not good. [I talked to a woman on a forum yesterday]. … She told me about this really terrible client, he got super-drunk during their session together, and he started getting really verbally abusive and calling her a whore and saying...just awful things. I reported him [to a blacklist site] for her. Yeah, I report everybody, but I know a lot of people don't have the luxury to do that.

Mandy used her privileged position to help other workers. Often participants with

privileged positions could afford to take more security risks and gathered less information

than other workers because they did not need to rely on the income sex work provides.

Exclusively digital workers also recognized their unique positions and wanted to point

out the overlap between themselves and in-person workers.

6.5. DIGITAL SYMMETRY

Yvette sat cross legged on her bed, her purple and red hair stood out against the

burnt orange walls behind her. She was explaining that security for webcam performers

was different than workers who meet clients in person: "It's really is less applicable to

the kind of work I do than it is to people who escort, but—." She took a thoughtful pause.

"Sometimes people who order customs[16] or people who want Skype shows will try and

get free things out of us." Yvette sold private Skype shows where she performed one-on-

one for clients over her webcam after she was paid an agreed upon amount. She had a

young face that looked younger thanks to the Pikachu sweatshirt she was wearing, but her

young face was belied by a serious and thoughtful expression:

> I've had people who are like, "all right give me a Skype show, I will PayPal you
> the money." And they have websites that are built to make it look like someone
> PayPal's you money, but it's really just a fake email. You get a thing that looks
> exactly like you've received money from so-and-so….And I learned that the hard
> way.…I've learned to check my account, I've learned to make sure that, before
> taking a custom order or like doing anything at all for anyone, that I receive
> payment first because people are so quick to want to cheat you out of things. But
> other than that, because I'm not meeting up with these people in person, like some
> other sex workers are, there's a little bit less of a stringent screening process. It's
> more like, "Are you going to pay me? Okay you are? Fine I'll do this for you."

At its core, screening lends itself to being applicable to escorting or almost any "in-

person" style of sex work. This is because screening's first and most common purpose is

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[16] Refers to custom videos. Clients pay a premium price for workers to record scenes or scenarios that the client
requests.

to ensure the physical safety of workers. But the Internet has created new situations, and with new advantages come new challenges. When participants discussed screening, it was almost universally defined as gathering information on prospective clients that workers interact with, but digital, especially digital-only workers would often screen and noted it implicitly rather than labeling it as such. Gerry Anne, a 26-year-old cammer, noted that though webcam work had different risks than in-person work, there was still the possibility for harm to workers:

> Obviously, doing cam-girl stuff is safer in terms of a lot of stuff…but I mean, there's still certain risks involved because you never know when somebody might try to stalk you online, or somebody might try to find your personal information, or whatnot. Plus, I mean, harassment even over the Internet can be just as bad as harassment in person.

What Gerry Anne was describing is a kind of digital symmetry, where though the type of work was different, the concerns were similar to her in-person counterparts. When in-person workers interacted with prospective clients, if those clients were deemed dangerous or otherwise unsuitable, the worker ceased contact and refused to see them. Digital workers did something very similar when interacting with clients and making judgments about their behavior. If workers did not want to interact with a client, that person could be personally blocked or reported to the website they were using and could have their membership revoked. Blocked members on websites were able to still use the site but were unable to view or interact with the particular worker that blocked them. Reported users may be kicked off the site permanently if they were deemed dangerous or abusive. Gerry Anne continued by describing her criteria for blocking problem clients:

> Anybody who ever said anything vaguely threatening or harassing got blocked. They weren't allowed to see my site anymore. And if I thought that they were enough of a risk I might report them. Like, if they made any kind of death threats or anything that might be considered a threat of violence…. Anybody who made

any kind of fat shaming comments, they were blocked. I don't need that kind of shit. Anybody who started asking too many questions about what I did in my—for lack of a better term—civilian life…. I didn't let anybody know where I lived…. I do allow friends to come to the site, because hey, if they wanted to see it, why not? Plus, it's always nice to have some friends to talk to if I ever got bored.

Screening measures also extended to situations beyond clients for digital workers. Often, digital workers would use screening measures to judge whether the sites they used to provide their services were suitable. If digital workers were satisfied with the platform they were using, most often that was because they were able to curate their workspace and were satisfied with its level of screening and control. Deborah, a 25-year-old cammer, used screening metrics to judge the quality of sites she would agree to work for. She wanted to know that the websites she used contained specific safety protocols or features that ensured the safety of her personal information and financial security. For example, cammers would often work for a hosting site that would host their videos and provide clients with a platform to pay providers. Clients would attempt to find ways to see workers' media for free by paying to gain access but then cancelling the payment at a later time. Deborah explained:

I will not work on a site that does charge-backs. Because of that, I don't have to screen clients at all. Charge-backs are when somebody has filed a credit card fraud. They say to their provider that this was a fraudulent charge. What's interesting about it is that there are plenty of sites that do charge-backs. But, statistically, charge-backs are challenged by the business, and the business wins 80 to 90% of the time. So, when a business is taking a charge-back from a girl who just did an hour-long cam show and now can't pay her rent, they're probably getting that money back, and not having to pay her share. So I will not work a site that does charge-backs. I determined that at 18.

Deborah needed assurances that a client would pay for the services she was delivering. Furthermore, she had to trust that the website processing the payments and holding her vital information was protecting her in a satisfactory way. Again, screening contains an

element of trust that is transferred, and in this way digital workers' concerns mirrored those of the in-person providers. They needed their identities to remain hidden and required assurances that clients could and would pay for services. Kit, a 21-year old cammer, echoed these sentiments when discussing how her security concerns were about keeping her identity hidden: "The closest I go to screening is like being vigorous in my, in protecting my own personal information." However, though she claimed she does not screen, her vigilance was by definition the preemptive security that screening entails.

The other main factor digital workers screened for, beyond safety and guarantee of payment, was the ability to pay. Nicole, a 29-year-old cam worker, used a web platform where workers were able to examine the profiles of the user client-base. Clients were then ranked using a two-part criterion, first a point system, and then second, the amount of money associated with their profile. Workers are "tipped" during shows via tokens that are commensurate with money. Workers collect tokens and then exchange them for payment from the website. Clients can request to have a private show with cam performers, which then costs additional tokens depending on the pay scale the worker sets. At first, Nicole was going to describe how she doesn't screen clients, but then realized it was something she did so routinely that she didn't notice:

> Well I was gonna say you can't [screen], but you can. [The site I use] has—you click on their name…. You can see how many points they have. The higher the points the more they have spent on [the site]. Some of them can figure out how to hide those things so they stay hidden. So those are the people you're like, they can either have a lot of money or none at all. Sorta like a poker face, you talk to them and figure it out…. So, if there is a basic member talking to you, you can click on their name and see they have been on the site for three years and never bought tokens. You can kick them the fuck out because you know they are not going to [purchase a private performance].

Nicole could gather information on clients as she interacted with them, and the screening

by profile approach helped digital workers avoid time-wasters, increase the value of their

work and avoid problem clients, similar to in-person workers. Though escorts often took

longer to screen prospective clients, cam workers still used the same metrics, just within

the microcosm of the website. Both kinds of workers still had to be vigilant about the

validity of the information they were receiving and used individual tactics to bolster their

confidence in specific decisions, like when Nicole described that "some of them can

figure out how to hide those things" and she had to use a "poker face" to gauge if they

were a good client. But screening was so integrated into these interactions that often cam

workers claimed they had no screening metrics before explaining how they screened for

quality. As she explained that she didn't screen clients, Izzy, a 19-year-old cam worker,

had an impossibly fuzzy pink robe wrapped around her shoulders that made it look like

she was being enveloped by a Muppet:

> The website kind of does all that work for me. I know that you have to have a
> picture of your ID, stuff like that, and I know that people aren't going to scam me
> because I can see the money, I can have them tip first, and if they don't, then I
> don't do anything.

What Izzy described was screening that happened so quickly and in the moment that she

accepted it as part of the interaction. When she considered screening, she thought of the

initial gatekeeping of proving identity to gain entrance. Workers could use the

information on these profiles to judge not only the safety of clients, but their preference

as well. Similar to in-person workers, digital workers wanted to be sure to select clients

based on their suitability as well as security. Nicole described how she could access

information on clients and choose who she sees based on her current mood:

> If someone is asking you for a private show you can click on their name and there is a section where you can write notes about them. My notes are usually their name, how much money they spent and what they wanted and their attitude. Sometimes my notes are "don't do this one if you are in a bad mood." You know, if you're in a bad mood he'll get the fuck on your nerves. He'll spend a lot of money when you really need it, go for it but just know he will try your patience. So, I screen them myself. And you can always end a show at any time…. So if you start to get in a certain mood, and it's always better to log off or just not log on at all if you're in a bad mood.

Though digital workers said that their concerns were different from in-person workers, the risks and responses were strikingly similar in both cases. Digital workers still faced risks, both physical and emotional, and their response was to attempt to preempt any problems with payment or abuse through screening. Workers also applied these tactics not just at the level of clients, but also at the level of administrators. Digital workers were able to gather "real-world" information about the prospective client, just like their counterparts, and decide if a client would be a good fit for their business, based on whether they had the means and willingness to pay and were honest in their presentation of self. For workers who only provide digital services, screening was most often described in terms of seeking the most profitable or reliable clients. Such participants did note that the possibility of physical danger existed, but they were more concerned with the possibility of emotional abuse that clients could pose. Most workers considered screening to be defined by initial admittance, but when describing interactions with clients, having access to the clients' personal information helped guide digital providers' decision making. As screening metrics improved, workers were able to screen not only for their own safety, but for suitability as well.

6.6. CONCLUSION

In the new digital model of sex work, security is in the hands of workers. Most participants described security as part of the work of being a provider. Preventing security concerns was the most common way to ensure the safety of workers. But similar to the other themes in the interviews there was a duality between the broader cultural concerns over safety and what this specific subpopulation of workers was most concerned about.

Workers noted that screening was an effective security measure to determine both personal safety and professional suitability. The screening metrics for this group of workers were so effective that they were also used for connecting providers with the clients they desired to see.

Workers also used emotional labor as a screening tactic along similar lines of their concerns over work personas and risks of sex work. If workers felt they could establish bounded intimacy with a client, they perceived that client to be safer. This is because the workers felt that a client who is seeking an authentic connection with a worker would be more likely also provide the additional personal information that gives workers a distinct advantage.

Lastly, if the new digital model is a lens through which all sex work can be viewed, we should find similar concerns among strictly digital sex workers. That was the case in this study. Cammers noted that screening and security were a concern for them and often used the same technique, yet slightly modified, that in-person workers use, even when that screening was implicit in their narrative. Digital workers screen for

suitable digital platforms to host their work and they can screen clients in real time during chat and video sessions.

      Security in the new digital model crosses various demographic lines and types of work. Workers across work areas felt that when they screened thoroughly, they utilized their personal autonomy to gain positive results, including safer workers in the community at large. This idea reflects the broader theme in the digital model that independence of providers strengthens the community of workers.

CHAPTER 7: RISKS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Charlene bustles around her living room, she's cleaning up because she's

expecting an appointment later in the day, she blurs by the screen as she talks over her

shoulder. "I have zero tolerance for bullshit and that explains why I have my call

blocker…. I have a zero-tolerance for bullshit and I'm block-happy, so I don't have time

for their shit." She stops cleaning a table, stands up with her hand on her hip and shakes

her head "being online is like high school," she points a red manicured nail at the

computer screen: "too much drama!" Charlene has a long history as a worker and has

moved from street-level work to independent escorting. This has given her strong

opinions on the dangers of sex work, and she felt there was more to the risks than just

client/provider interactions. That part of what makes sex work dangerous is its

connection to the broader culture:

> Society has made it bad. Society has fucked it. Every time something happens,
> they put it on the news and it becomes kitchen table talk and that brings out more
> weirdos, creeps, pranksters. And then you got these pimps and these young girls
> and it's very dangerous. You've got girls out here fucking for $50 completely
> unprotected. You know? Shit like that. And that creates a health hazard and a
> safety hazard because you think that just because the bitch over here do it, that
> I'm going to do that shit, and it's not going.

Charlene's frustration around the risks and dangers of sex work was a common theme

with participants. The cultural fascination with sex work focuses on the most extreme

risks and paints the work with a broad and homogenous brush. In essence, if one worker

is threatened with violence from a client, this must be true for all workers and all clients.

Charlene's description runs the gamut from creepy clients to abusive pimps and sexually

transmitted diseases. When these examples become "kitchen table talk," they affect the

lives of workers. Stigma increases and is persistent, access to traditional social resources becomes troublesome, and workers are left to deal with a variety of risks. Because this is the overarching cultural narrative of sex work, when participants described the risks of sex work they echoed these anxieties. However, when participants discussed the reality of their personal experiences and daily concerns, they often noted that the risks of their job were present but not overwhelming. Charlene explains:

> I think I have the same dangers as anybody else, like a police officer, a fireman or a bank teller. It's a job just like anything else that has its risks because at any time you can be working a regular job obviously and anything can happen. I can work at [a bank] right now and let's say you decide you're having a bad day and you decided, "These hoes," and you come in and rob it. Well, you know, guess who has a gun pointed in their face and got to try to give up some money or lose their job regardless? Me.

The perceived danger of sex work has been a persistent concern both in the majority of scholarship and the culture at large. Lack of access to conventional social resources leaves sex workers vulnerable. Victimization is a common focus in sex worker research (Benoit, Janssen, Smith & Flagg, 2018), with violence, drug abuse, robbery, and other forms of victimization being recurring themes. Study participants had very different concerns from the traditional literature on sex work. When workers discussed risks, most wanted to draw a distinction between the general risks associated with sex work and their own management of personal risks. While they wanted to acknowledge that risks exist, they felt that this didn't preclude their personal involvement in sex work.

Most study participants spoke broadly to the cultural perception of the risks of sex work rather than describing their own feelings or perceptions of personal danger. This is not to say that they wanted to minimize the possible risks other workers could face, but this meant they often had difficulty when trying to bridge the gap between their own

experiences and the broader subculture of sex workers. Ultimately, participants did speak about their personal concerns, but most often these were born not from broader homogenous culturally perceived risks like violence from clients, but from issues that stem from their position in society (discussed in Chapter 4) and the specific situations that accompany their specific type of sex work. Concerns around social stigma, lack of access to traditional social resources like police, digital abuse, or emotional abuse were intermingled with the conceit that these risks are associated with the independence and commoditization of sex work.

7.2. RISK PERCEPTIONS

Izzy, a 19-year-old cammer, had an unsure quiver in her voice. "Who else would threaten me in my job but clients? I don't know. It's hard to put into words." She hesitated between her phrases: though she admitted there were risks in her job, she didn't believe they were very plausible. "I guess what I'm saying is if I had a client that was a stalker and wanted to find out where I live and come and break into my house, that would be a threat to my physical safety, and I can't think of any reason that, I don't think." She cut herself off and began again, vehemently: "I guess what I'm saying is, a lot of people will say sex work is dangerous, but I don't think that sex work itself is dangerous. I think having clients that are dangerous is what's dangerous."

When participants discussed the risks associated with their work, most often they would list the various risks highlighted by western and specifically American culture that are presumed to be associated with sex work. As Izzy stated, "a lot of people will say sex work is dangerous." It is this overarching cultural narrative that workers often spoke to

when initially deconstructing the various risks associated with their jobs. Mona, the 46-year-old escort with a punk ethos, gave a sardonic explanation: "That [risk] factor's always there. Come on. Everyone's seen that bad episode of Law & Order." She tags her statement with a sarcastic "it must be true," before waving off the remainder of her answer: "I've never ever...I'm not picking anyone up off the street, etc., etc. using that site…no massage parlor." But she ends with a dismissive, "Sure, it could happen." Both Mona and Izzy waver between addressing the overarching cultural perceptions of the dangers involved in sex work, while qualifying that they've never personally felt particularly endangered.

This interplay between the broader cultural beliefs of sex work and the perceived personal realities of risk made talking about risks with workers difficult. Often participants would note these broad perceived risks, but then reevaluate them based on their own experiences. One participant, Gertrude, a 40-year-old escort in Australia, shows this when describing the difference between work in her home country versus the perception of what sex work is like in the United States:

> I remember someone telling me, who worked in the USA, that it's almost like it's expected that you are going to be raped at some stage if you do sex work. It's just the way it is. I'm just like, "Do you understand how wrong that thinking is?" Because over here, it's just a job…and if they keep pushing, you're just like "No" or you leave the room, you talk to the receptionist if you can't handle it yourself or as one girl did, I think she kept saying no and he kept trying anal when she didn't want it, and so she ended up just stopped, turned around, she had those long nails, grabbed him by the balls with those nails and was like, "I said no" and just ranted at him. That's kind of our expectation.

Gertrude moved seamlessly from describing the culturally perceived dangers of sex work to a personal response to a risky situation. This was the most common way for workers to articulate their concerns over the risks of their work. Participants never wanted to

undermine the concerns of workers who were not in similar, advantageous positions.

Paula, a 40-year-old escort, didn't want to minimize the risks faced by other workers, but

wanted to be sure to explain that she was in a low-risk situation which she had designed

to be low-risk and long-term sustainable. "I've never felt unsafe. I mean I'm sure there

are [risks], but in my five clients a month times 12 months ratio, I've never felt physically

uncomfortable." She adds a quick matter-of-fact: "I know it happens, but I've never felt

that way," and then transitions into talking about how she handles safer sex practices:

> I always use condoms. I don't let their crotch anywhere near mine, even when
> we're making out. That's a no. It's too easy to get pregnant these days and STDs,
> so I don't let them near me until they have a cover on, as we call it. I get tested
> every three months. I usually go into my doctor, my regular doctor, once a year
> and then I'll go to rapid testing, where the porn stars go, about every three
> months.

These types of qualifying statements ("I know it happens") and slight changes in topic

(from violence to safe sex practices) were a very common way for participants to try to

convey their complex feelings on risk perceptions. They both confirm and refute the

broad cultural perception that sex work is dangerous by acknowledging that sex work can

be dangerous and that others are affected by victimization, but then asserting that the

risks are both more minimal and manageable for themselves. The insight that risks are

present but not a concern "for me" was a reflection of many of the racial and cultural

contexts of privilege discussed in Chapter 4. Francis, a 33-year-old escort, had an edgy

looking lip piercing and shiny silver nails that poked out of the sleeves of her baggy black

hoodie. She didn't feel that her job was particularly risky, but bluntly stated all the

contextual factors that play into her not being specifically at risk for client violence:

> Yeah, clients don't scare me. What's so scary about a 36-year-old virgin who's
> never kissed a woman before? That's fucking harmless. That was literally my
> Wednesday night. I'm actually not complaining about it.…Just because, I'm

white, I work indoors, I charge a relatively large amount. I'm still low-mid range, but it's still a decent chunk of change. So, I feel like, in terms of client safety, I'm pretty okay.

An important aspect of the discussions with participants on risks was the difference between a "risk" and "danger." Risks were dynamic factors that were able to be mitigated, whereas dangers were static and unacceptable. Workers spoke often and readily about the possible risks of sex work, but though they admitted their work contained risks, most noted that they personally felt these risks did not extend into the realm of "danger." Petunia, a 35-year-old escort, hesitated as she explained the risks of sex work, trying to convey that the kind of work she participated in doesn't contain the elements that would turn risks into danger:

> I think people overestimate the danger. It's not as safe as some other jobs, but it's nowhere near, especially the end of it that I am, the danger is nowhere near what it would be.…Every single client I've ever had has been fairly respectful. They're not there just to fuck a piece of meat. I don't deny that I'm sure somewhere in the industry that exists, but it's just really not my part of it. I know a lot of agency girls, I know down to mid-range personally. Nobody has said that's really the case. Yeah, the whole seediness and the—. The other thing is the demographics of it, like the idea of sex work as being [on a] street corner.

Petunia's position as an independent escort, and her racial and class status, meant she could acknowledge the risks of her work but feel somewhat insulated by her position. These same contexts were often echoed in the decision-making process upon entrance. Hope stated this concept similarly in Chapter 4:

> Like also, having the education that I do and having the access to healthcare that I do, and the physical, like, you know, genetics that I do. Like, being a conventionally attractive, white, young, cis, fem, woman.…Like, there's just certain—I'm able to charge certain rates and do certain things, like insist on safety precautions and still have clients.

Both Hope and Petunia were explaining that the perception of danger was part of the homogeneity of the overarching cultural view of sex work. But Hope's description

reveals the fundamental contradiction that the majority of participants noted during their interviews. Sex work contains risks, but those risks are different depending on the type of work, the characteristics and status of the worker, and the effectiveness of security measures. When participants viewed their work through these contextual lenses, they could then categorize the risks of their work according to their ability to manage them.

7.3. MANAGING RISKS

Kaley, an 18-year-old escort, was draped in a fuzzy grey cardigan and spoke in a low long grind with each word stretched to its limit. She summed up all the different types of risks she was aware of as a sex worker: "Sexually transmitted diseases, assault, rape, murder. Yeah." She draws out the word "yeah" in a long groan and then laughs, "I think that covers it."

The most common way for workers to discuss the risks of their job started with a broad assertion about general risks. This would most often be followed by a specific example of a risk and what could be done to reduce it to a manageable level. When participants discussed risk management specifically, the first and most common risk they noted was the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STI). These discussions tended to follow this same process of confirmation and refutation, then vague to specific risks, followed by risk management. Laura, a 29-year-old escort sat in her kitchen tapping the side of her screen every few moments because our connection was glitchy. She was explaining the physical risks associated with sex work but noted that she was most concerned about active steps she could take to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and infections, believing these concerns were manageable. Like many of the

other workers she starts her discussion by speaking on the broad cultural perceptions of

the dangers of sex work:

> I could get assaulted. I could be raped. I could get an STD. It's highly unlikely I will get pregnant, but I could get pregnant. I could have some kind of mental trauma that could happen. That's a huge risk and something that does happen.

Laura then spoke to her own experience, while concluding that she had effective ways of

dealing with these specific risks:

> The physical part of being assaulted or raped, I'm not terribly worried about that, partly because I'm more likely to have that happen from a boyfriend or husband than from some client, because that has happened to me from somebody I love. It's already happened. I've already been through that. It's not a big deal. STDs, I take PrEP[17] for HIV prevention. Then, everything else, other STDs, I'm not very worried about. I get tested about every six weeks for STDs. Nothing. Haven't gotten anything. Pregnancy? I'm on birth control.

Similar to Gertrude above, Laura's description of risks broadly, ("I could get assaulted")

followed by a repudiation, ("I'm not terribly worried about that") was the most common

method of description. This was also frequently followed by refocusing on a specific

issue, "STDs," that can be mitigated ("I'm on PrEP."). Laura did say that she's not

particularly worried about STIs, but these risks are minimized because of specific steps

she's taking, compared to her repudiation of violence by stating that she's been a victim

of violence in the past and it's "not a big deal." Participants' discussions of risk and risk

management thus was most focused on specific ways to minimize specific risks in an

effort to highlight their ability to increase their control and independence. STIs represent

the most common manageable risk that the majority of workers spoke to.

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[17] "Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a way for people who do not have HIV but who are at substantial risk of getting it to *prevent* HIV infection by taking a pill every day. … When someone is exposed to HIV through sex or injection drug use, these medicines can work to keep the virus from establishing a permanent infection. When taken consistently, PrEP has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV infection in people who are at high risk by up to 92%. PrEP is much less effective if it is not taken consistently." (https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html)

Workers' confidence around managing the risk of STIs has slowly been making its way into recent sex work scholarship. Contemporary research has found that the relationship of sex work to higher rates of STIs is complicated at best, with some studies showing that the rate of STI among the sex worker population is the same as the general population. Other studies have shown lower rates than the general population when high-risk variables like drug abuse and poverty are controlled for (Minichiello, 2015; Read, 2012). Participants in this study would frequently note their own social statuses and how they relate to their work, and by extension the risks of their jobs. White, middle class workers would speak to STI prevention as an existing but manageable risk that could be applicable across most, if not all, workers. Definitive safer sex protocols in turn become the clarion measure for all risks faced by workers. When Janine, a 30-year-old escort, was asked about the steps she takes to reduce risks, she only discussed reducing risks of STIs: "Clients request to have unprotected sex with me, and the answer is always and will forever be 'no', and for no amount of money will I have unprotected sex with a client." Though participants consistently stated that there are a variety of risks involved in their jobs, STI transmission was the risk they felt could be the most broadly reduced with specific measures. In essence, when workers discussed the risks of their work, they chose to acknowledge a variety of risks, but then focused on the specific ones they felt posed the most potential risk and that they had the best ways of reducing.

Risks of violence from clients was a frequent theme in the interviews as well, but workers most commonly didn't give as much specific detail on how to minimize the risks of violence. This was especially common when discussing ways to manage risks of violence during appointments with clients. Edward, quoted frequently in previous

chapters, affected a scholarly look while explaining why he's not very concerned about violence. He noted that his lack of concern was a byproduct of his social privileges. Like others, he noted the interplay between the presumed violence in sex work and the broader culture and its media representations. Not only was Edward white and middle class, but also a man; he felt that this minimized his risks even more compared to women. He called his risk of violence "theoretical," before, like many other participants, only discussing specifics concerning safer sex practices. Looking over his horn-rimmed glasses, he explained:

> There's always this theoretical fear of violence that you see in the media or you see in movies, but it's never literally happened or come close to happening to me, so that's maybe super privileged, likely partly super privileged, likely also less common than we assume or that many people think. Otherwise, I practice safe sex or safer sex as best I can.…I use condoms for fucking all the time. As a dude, I have either an inflated sense of how I can defend myself, but also I think most of the time, my clients are more afraid of me than I would be afraid of them, and I talk to my friends who are women who are in the industry, and they're like that's literally never happened. That's never been a thing I felt. That's a big difference. As a dude, I have a certain amount of A: misplaced confidence, but then B: a cultural social sort of position that they're fearful, usually more of me.

Edward noted that his sense of security stemmed from his perception that clients were more afraid of him than he was of them. He even doubted whether this observation is accurate, but this perception, combined with his race, gender, social status and a lack of violent incidents in his work was enough for him to not be concerned. Instead, he focused on the positive steps he took to decrease his risks of STI. Furthermore, Edward's perception that he would be able to handle any situation that arose was a common theme amongst many of the participants, suggesting it was not just his gender privilege but other facets of social status and the organization of digital sex work that shaped exposure to risk and risk management strategies.

The ability to manage risks is part of the complex relationship between sex work and broader social constructs. Sex workers who work independently noted that part of the appeal of independent work was being in control of their own safety, not in the sense of complete elimination of risk, but the ability to assess what risks they felt were minimal versus ones that could become dangerous. Jordan, a 35-year-old escort, talked about the importance of managing risks and that her attention to detail has led to a relatively lengthy career with no incidents:

> We talk about providing oral sex without a condom, which is something that I provide, which is technically a risk. But in seven years, nothing's ever happened, knock on wood. That's a manageable risk for me. Being independent, having control over screening a client and who comes into my space has provided me with way more physical safety than when I was working for an agency. That's mitigating that risk there.

Workers also took pride in being able to manage risky situations. Faraday, like other participants, broadly expressed the presence of risks, but then spoke to her own ability to manage situations in her work as a way of showing capability and independence. However, Faraday specifically interacted with BDSM clients, and this work contains unique risks as compared to other kinds of sex work:

> It depends on what you're doing of course, but you're going into contact with people…. Everything in BDSM has got a risk. Somebody could have a heart attack while they're tied up and I do a lot of edgy stuff. I do breath-play.…Breath-play is a restriction of somebody's breath. You could put a bag over their head and they're breathing their own air, for instance, for a period of time. Forty-five seconds or something like that. Strangling somebody lightly with a noose or using a mask and a rebreather bag. Sometimes with the use of legal inhalants, stuff like that.

Though BDSM is uniquely situated for dangers to clients, Charlene noted that sex work can have risks simply because something unexpected might happen. If it does, there's significant risk to accessing traditional social resources, increasing the potential to place

workers in a delicate position. This example again highlights how workers in the study

differentiated between risk, management and danger. Charlene loved to recount the

unusual anecdotes that happened during her work and though these situations can contain

risks, she took a lot of pride in her ability to take charge of these situations:

> Oh, I've had all types of stupid ass shit happen. I went over to see one couple one time and the guy was a severe diabetic. I told these stupid mother fuckers, "When I come over, don't drink, don't do any fucking drugs." Both of these mother fuckers [were] fucking wasted as hell. So, I get there, and the wife is talking to me. She throws up all over the kitchen. He sees it, he then throws up all over the kitchen. And guess what? I have to act like I'm Wolf from fucking Pulp Fiction and shit, like, "All this is perfectly fine. We're going to clean this up, we're going to clean you up, you're going to get in the shower and clean up" ... You know? Because I need my money. It's like, that's what I came out here for. Shit. So, I had to clean them up, get them in the shower, and kind of get them sobered up. And they're just drunk as hell. It was just a nightmare. But then they called me over a second time during one of their birthdays and shit. [So], he wants to fist her. And he's fisting her in the ass and it's gross and now you have anal leakage coming out and it was just gross...and you're just like, "You know what? Fuck this. This is my line. I'm not about to deal with this shit. I didn't sign up for this."

Charlene's reference to "Mr. Wolf" is a character from the movie Pulp Fiction, a

character that works best in stressful, dangerous, or, as the film character notes,

"explosive" situations. Mr. Wolf's role in the scene is strikingly similar to that of a sex

worker: he is a character twho arrives with little prior introduction and is there for a

singular purpose at which he excels. He arrives promptly when needed, dresses and

presents himself in an incredibly blunt but professional manner, and acknowledges risks

but remains calm. Similar to Charlene, Mr. Wolf also describes his limits in these risky

situations: "I'm here to help, if my help's not appreciated, lots of luck." Finally, the other

characters in the film scene recognize that part of what makes Mr. Wolf so good at his

job is his ability to handle these situations while remaining in control. Samuel L.

Jackson's character explains: "[He's] totally fucking cool, in control, [doesn't] even really get pissed when you're fuckin with him."

The fact that Charlene likened herself to Mr. Wolf was meant to highlight that though her job could be "messy," she was adept at navigating these conditions, taking pride in her ability to take control of absurd situations. The fact that she returned for another appointment with the couple was the culmination of her anecdote: "But then they called me over a second time!" Her voice rising at the end of the sentence accentuated just how outlandish the request was, yet she went back to give the couple another chance and see if she would be able to handle them a second time. In this case, it was only to find that she had reached her limit and exercised her choice not to participate further.

This shows the dual nature of an independent style of sex work. Though Charlene was able to walk away from an encounter, she could not rely on conventional social resources to help manage the risks of her work. Both Faraday and Charlene were describing situations in which, because what they do is both illegal and socially stigmatized, whatever situations that arose during their appointments were ultimately their problem. Conversely, this also meant that the limits were decided by the workers themselves.

This trade of risk for independence was a common theme with workers and transcended types of work. Deborah, a white 25-year-old cammer, had fiery red hair that stood out against the blue wall of her bedroom. Her green eyes grew wide when she described reaching her limit with a client. Deborah described camming on her own terms when an African-American client asked her to say racially charged insults she was uncomfortable with:

> A lot of times the dude's user name will be the N word in all capital letters, or the N word three times in all capital letters, and he wants you to say horrible things, and things that I [am] like, "Sorry, but that's not going to be me. That's not going to be my mouth" kind of thing. So that's really common.…The first time I had someone ask me to do that was when I was 18.…This guy was like… "Can you call me the N word?" And I was like, "No. I'm not. Sorry." He was like, "Really? I'm paying you $5 a minute. You can't say that?" And I'm like, "Look, it doesn't matter. The only reason I'm doing this job is so that I can do it on my fucking terms. I'm not going to do that." And he was like, "I guess I kind of like that. I haven't had a girl outright refuse." And he offered to tip me money and I was like, "No, this is a deal breaker. I don't care."

Deborah embodies nearly all of the workers interviewed when she stated that that she was doing this job on her own terms. This sentiment of exchanging risks for the independence of sex work was noted by many of the participants in the study. Risks that could be definitively reduced were reduced, but risks that were more difficult to manage were categorized as part of the cost of being an independent worker. Workers would then focus on a specific manageable risk to accentuate their capability and independence. Though many workers found risks to be overestimated, participants admitted that there were specific elements about sex work that tangibly increased the amount of risk involved. Olivia, a 21-year-old escort, arched one of her dark thin eyebrows and pointed out the crucial reason sex work contains risk:

> I think there's always quite a bit of risk. Despite taking precautions. But at the end of the day you're in a room alone with somebody. So, it's always a risk, and that's somebody you don't know. Obviously [something] could happen with any one of your friends, but because there's the whole secrecy around it as well, I think it's extremely risky.

Olivia's observation echoes that of Faraday and Charlene. The secrecy of sex work, its stigmatization and its implicit lack of access to conventional social resources can play a large part in the proliferation of work risks. Workers lack access to the traditional social resources that help reduce risk for "vanilla" citizens. When workers assessed the amount

of risk involved in their jobs, questions of STIs or client violence were measured

alongside social risks, such as stigma and risks from police.

7.4. SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL RISKS

Penny, a 21-year-old escort, sat in a dark room in front of a blank wall, the glow

from her laptop and the camera's oblique angle give her the visage of someone calling

from a dystopian future. "There are some [risks], in terms of feeling self-doubt about

what you are doing or willing to do, but I still think that the majority of that all just come

from stigma rather than anything I actually think or anything that actually transpires with

clients." She pulled the sleeves of her long grey sweater over her knuckles. "It's more

because of the societal attitude or misconceptions about sex work, than something about

getting too attached to someone or even a relationship being affected by someone

knowing that I've done it." She reached up and tucked some of her lavender hair behind

her ear. "I wouldn't have a relationship with someone that had a strong stigma against it

that would feel emotionally harmful for me." Penny also noted that even if sex work were

decriminalized, while it would have beneficial effects for safety, stigma cannot be

regulated through legislation: "[Decriminalization] doesn't mean that the social role or

stigma will be taken away….That's not really as important as actual safety or not being

treated as either a victim or a criminal....But there's still the social side that wouldn't

necessarily be changed that much from it, I think."

Penny viewed stigma as an external influence that forced its way into both her life

and the wider sex worker community. This represents another way that sex work interacts

with the broader western culture. Stigma is defined by Goffman (1963, p. 3) as "an

attribute, behavior, or reputation which is socially discrediting in a particular way: it

causes an individual to be mentally classified by others in an undesirable, rejected

stereotype rather than in an accepted, normal one." This definition encapsulates how

many workers described their efforts to negotiate risks in their work. Not only was stigma

a negative result of sex work, it also augmented the existing risks (Benoit et al., 2017;

Krusi et al., 2016; Weitzer, 2017). As noted above, workers would concede that the

broader culture views sex work as dangerous, but they emphasized that danger is

increased because of the stigma associated with sex work. Suzy, a 27-year-old escort,

explained that stigma is an additional burden applied to even the more mundane aspects

of life:

> Reducing the stigma and being able to see it as just another job like everybody else does, not fucking horrible, that you have to keep a secret and be ashamed of—Christ, if you could not have to worry about whether or not your boss at your regular job or your landlord figures out you're doing this, and wouldn't have to carry that stress around, that would make everything a million times better.

Similar to other risks noted by workers, stigma played the same dual role of being both a

broad concern for the subculture of sex workers and a more complex concern for

individuals. Workers regularly voiced concerns for other sex workers that they did not

know, or who were not in as privileged of a position as they were. The validity of their

concerns was often shaded by the same cultural bias the majority of people have about

sex work. One participant who explicitly noted the difference between the social and

personal aspects of the risk of stigma was Hannah, an 18-year-old escort. Hannah wore

big black headphones that looked like earmuffs framed by her long straight blonde hair.

She described that stigma could be overwhelming for others, but then qualified that it was

not an issue for her: "I think society really wants people to feel shame about sex and

having a lot of sex. And sometimes that can be overwhelming, I think. I haven't,

personally, had any issues. But I definitely could foresee feeling dirty and disgusted by

yourself, for some reason."

A few workers pointed to this relationship being more complex than simply

desiring less stigma to decrease risks and increase safety. Similar to risks like STIs, these

social risks are traded as part of the independence of work. Noreen, a 32-year-old escort,

quieted her normally exuberant voice to convey the seriousness of her explanation of

stigma. While not wanting to diminish its negative impacts, she saw sex work's

relationship with broader society as more complex than simply wishing there could be

less stigma around her job:

> [Reduce] the stigma of being a sex worker but, at the same time, that's where I
> feel a lot of the power comes from and a lot of the money comes from because it's
> a dirty, seedy thing. Like people will spend more money because it's dirty and
> like that kinda helps it.…It's a double-edged sword you know? You want it to not
> be a big deal but at the same time if it wasn't, we wouldn't be making as much
> money.

Alyson, a 32-year-old escort, agreed with this sentiment. She described stigma in a

similar fashion but believed that since it has a complicated relationship to broader

society, the fact that the work is stigmatized, and also illegal, delivers benefits. The

perceived scarcity of workers ensures fewer women in sex work overall and an increase

in monetary value:

> There's two devils on my shoulder. The social justice warrior part of me is very
> much in favor of criminal [justice] reform, but the other part of me knows that
> there are advantages to a black market.…Honestly, I don't think it makes a huge
> difference either way. There's always going to be stigma attached to it. As long as
> there's that stigma, that will keep a lot of women out of the industry. I don't know
> if that's better for the industry as a whole or if it's worse.

Stigma, by definition, is the unseen disapproval of the broader culture, yet any society is made of a collection of individuals, not all of whom will share the same perceptions. As with the assessments of other risks, stigma was ever present in broad discussions, but workers had contradicting ideas when applying it to their own personal situations.

Many workers noted that stigma could have far-reaching effects, but that their fear of stigma could often be more harmful than the actual results of people discovering their work. Jordan, a 35-year-old escort, discussed stigma often in her interview. She had a low growl in her voice from only sleeping three hours the night before and fumbled around her desk looking for her vape-pen. "I discovered the joys of quitting smoking. So now I'm one of those assholes who vapes." She shuffled papers around and raised the pen in victory after finding it: "There we go!" Jordan noted the difference between stigma as a broad reaching cultural indictment and the reactions of her friends to being told of her work:

> I would love to address the stigma of sex work. And I think that is the biggest thing, I didn't tell anyone about sex work for years because I was terrified as to what their reactions would be. And me starting out versus me now, present me, kind of wants to go back in time and slap past me upside the head and be like, "You can talk to people. They're gonna be okay with this." The friends that I have come out to have been really fucking cool about it.

Though Jordan described a situation in which her friends were accepting of her work, she was less enthusiastic about the broader cultural risks. She noted that risks are associated with the level of independence a worker has and their ability to make their own decisions about their work. She specifically noted the relationship between stigma and accessing social resources like the police, including how the interplay between lack of independence and lack of access to resources affected her ability to manage the risks of her job:

> I've had a client assault me. Unfortunately, that was when I worked for a third party in a massage parlor. That's when I had no control over screening or who walked through the door. So that was like, "Get the fuck out." But even that, if somebody assaulted me in regular life, it would be like I'm calling 911 right now. But as a sex worker, you don't have the same abilities to that because of the stigma that's involved. Because it's like the fear of being outed because of A, B, C and D.

Jordan's description of working for a third party who reduced her ability to choose clients, combined with social stigma that prevented her from being able to contact police is an example of the far-reaching effects of social risks. When most participants discussed stigma in broad cultural terms, it was to describe losing a job, being ostracized from friends or family, or being found out by police. But in Jordan's situation stigma precluded access to traditional social resources, which in turn resulted in a dangerous situation.

Similarly, Arden noted that working for a third party reduced her independence. An agency sent her a client that was dangerous, and the agency was unapologetic for exposing her to greater risks:

> They had no good reason for that other than, "oops, shit happens." So that was like a huge turning point for me. Fortunately, it's just a bad story that I remind myself of. Nothing bad actually happened. I didn't get raped, but there are plenty of girls out there that do, and horrible things happen to them and you know it's really a shame I think that there isn't a way for women to have protection because you can't call the police. That's what's so fucked up about this industry, is that the demand for what I do is never going to go away, but the laws could change to protect women who are put in these vulnerable situations, who don't have a voice, who can't stand up for themselves, who can't screen themselves, who don't have someone to call to say, "hey, I'm ok," "hey I got paid." You know there are plenty of girls out there who are completely by themselves.

As Arden noted, the broad-reaching effects of social risks came in a variety of forms other than stigma, such as both lack of access to and fear of police. When participants spoke of police specifically, they most frequently noted that they were looking to avoid them at all costs and their only concern was to ensure that any new or prospective client

was not a police officer in disguise. Noreen, a 32-year-old escort, laughed her way

through recounting a story of a friend who saw an unfamiliar client and mistook him for a

police officer:

> He says something along the lines of, "If you call 911, I'll show up at your
> house," and she has to stop the session and —her hard "no" is if you're a fucking
> cop,— and she just cannot believe, "Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. Is he a cop? Did I
> completely mistrust? Is my radar so off that I totally trusted myself in a situation
> with a fucking cop?" And he's like, "No, no, no. I'm a fireman." She's like, "Oh,
> okay. It's fine."

The fact that participants did not have access to police protections was all but universal in

the sample. Though workers came from different countries with varying degrees of

legality, they felt that the risks of interacting with the police far outweighed the benefits.

The police represent a volatile risk that has both extreme and far reaching consequences.

Hope, a 28-year-old escort, described why this is the case:

> I don't know of a single woman who's an escort who feels comfortable going to
> the police if anything happened to her. And in fact the police are one of the
> biggest threats, because there are consequences for your future employment in
> any other industry…. The police have power and their word counts as more than a
> sex worker's. I'm more afraid of the police, of corrupt police, than of corrupt
> clients.

Though the police were roundly avoided by study participants, there were a few notable

exceptions. In very specific situations, some would call upon the police if they felt they

had no other choice. Emma, a 21-year-old escort, was one of the few participants who

noted she would call the police if she felt she was in danger:

> The rules are we have to have a safe word just like in any consensual relationship
> in case something goes too far. And when I say that safe word, they have to listen
> to it or I have my cell phone nearby and I will call the cops. And I don't care if
> I'm risking getting caught myself.

Emma's exception is most likely due to the fact that she catered to clients who wanted

more extreme BDSM scenes, and she needed to convey to her clients that the boundaries

she had established could not be crossed under any circumstance. Also, she had previous experience with the criminal justice system. "I have been assaulted and I was charged with drinking alcohol under-age, so I have no fear of being involved in the court system. Just because I've done something wrong does not mean they get to do something wrong back to me." However, Emma still said she was aware that she would be at risk of arrest if she were to call.

Participants overall noted the complicated relationship that workers have with this specific social resource. Calling on police may diffuse or resolve a specific incident with a client, but it would have lasting effects that could jeopardize their careers, their overall reputation, or especially their safety. Kelly, a 33-year-old escort, shook her head and lowered her voice to a whisper, and emphasized, "I'm not paranoid" when she considered the consequences of calling the police for her work:

> There would be other [workers] that would be, "Oh, did you hear that, you know, Kelly is outing people?" I'd be like, "No, I'm not outing people. I just want to get paid for what--" I can't call the cops. I can't say hey, you know, I can't take him to Judge Judy. Now because of the way things are set up, and it's so client-centric, because people are just trying to get the client's money, I don't really have a way....Even though I have his information, because it wasn't violent, I feel like it's not [something I could go to the police for]....Because it's just a monetary thing basically that I got ripped off on, I feel like it's bad for business basically if I was to make a big deal about it.

Kelly said that she would call the police if violence were involved, but in situations that involve arguments over payment she had little to no recourse. Moreover, if she were to contact the police she would almost certainly be accused of "outing." Kelly's description of "outing," revealing the identity of providers or clients either accidentally, or more concerning, maliciously, was a major concern when it came to accessing any social resources. A worker who calls the police risks being outed to their family and

community. This can ruin relationships, affect their ability to find work, and lead to jail time.

Hope, a 28-year-old escort, described a situation in which she was outed. Hope was an enigma by design. She was the only worker in the study to not have her interview in person or appear on a webcam. She felt participating in the research was important, but her own safety protocols prohibited her from showing her face. Instead, she talked to me via video conferencing software with her camera disconnected. She explained that her precautions were a direct result of an outing incident:

> Unfortunately, I had a stalker, which decimated my business and it was really awful. And, you know, [I] lost most of my clients and [it] scared the shit out of me, too. So, it was really—really terrible. My email was anonymously hacked. I actually don't know who it was to this day. [They] used it to find out all the names of my clients and my friends and my lovers. [They] spent the next six months sending awful, threatening emails. They got my vanilla[18] name [and] used the power of the internet to look up my family members and were emailing private pictures from my email account to my family members. It was really awful.

For Hope, as for Jordan, talking to friends and family about her work seemed daunting, but Hope laughed when recounting that she was pleased both her family and conventional job were ultimately supportive:

> It was a very difficult time with my family. Ultimately, we're stronger for it because, this way, you know, my family knows the work that I do. I would have rather preferred that they find out in a different way, you know. Well actually, I would have preferred they find out never. But it happened. And professionally, my [job] was actually extremely supportive. Luckily, I was [at a liberal institution], so they're not exactly close-minded. [But] to be living in constant fear and also having to navigate opening a case with the police…. Although it's actually been positive. This is because I had really amazing resources and privilege. Cis privilege and femme privilege… I also had a close friend who's a feminist blogger [and] a very powerful lawyer. And this person, pro-bono, wrote to the [police] for me. [They] helped me draft a cease-and-desist letter to the stalker. And, if we had found who the stalker was, [they were] gonna help me sue

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[18] "Vanilla" in this context is defined in Section 1.5 above.

the fuck out of him in civil court. So, I had resources that most sex workers don't have.

Hope noted the same social privileges others specified when discussing risks and risk management. However, her example was an extreme case of specific risks for workers being drastically different than the overarching cultural expectations. When workers described outing it was one of the most extreme possible outcomes. As Jordan noted, "There's a risk of social safety, being outed. I think the most terrifying to me is the social safety one."

While Hope was able to navigate the experience with few lasting consequences, her risk was also applied to a new kind of situation. The Internet is often credited for making sex work safer for independent workers, but there are also new dangers associated with this form of communication. Hope was never able to discover who outed her. Her experience is a prime example to the risks that accompany the digital interactions necessitated by the that the new venue of sex work online.

7.5. NEW DANGERS

Study participants almost universally interacted with new clients via the Internet. The Internet has created new ways for workers and clients to communicate, but these connections come with unique risks that workers have learned to navigate. For example, disrespectful and judgmental clients can lead to negative mental health consequences. Laura, a 29-year-old escort, wanted to articulate that interactions with potential clients could be one of the more risky aspects of her work because there was no familiarity or trust built up in early communications:

> You can have potential clients that text you rude things when you won't meet with them, and that makes me feel sad. I don't like people saying mean things to me. There was this one person who I think does this.... He set up an appointment, and I gave him the general area I was in. Then, he guessed what apartment complex I was in, and then he said, "Oh, I'm a cop with the LA Sheriff's Vice Department." …I was like, "Yeah, I wasn't born yesterday. Shut up. That's not how it works." …He left me alone pretty quickly, but it really messed with my head that day.

These types of concerns were often discussed in a very different fashion from the broader "traditional" culturally associated risks of sex work. The emotional labor of sex work (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 2012; discussed in detail in Chapter 5) does not have the corresponding cultural equivalent that the risks of violence or STIs have. Workers noted that emotional risks were pervasive and difficult to both anticipate and prevent. Participants noted that mental health concerns can have a deleterious effect on workers emotional well-being. When Charlene, a 35-year-old escort, discussed the concerns of her daily work, she noted that the Internet specifically created additional interactions with clients that could be frustrating and require additional emotional labor:

> You kind of see the personality through the posts and you can see that they're dramatic or ratchet or however they're displayed and whatnot. So it'd be like, do I really want to deal with this? Do I really have a capacity to want to deal with this person?

Digital communication and its abuses were mentioned often by participants, but with far less definitive strategies to manage them. The risk of exhaustion from the emotional connection that clients requested (see Chapter 5) was a risk that workers felt was part of the job that bridged the gap between digital and real-life interactions. These interactions were enhanced by the digital facets of their work. Liz, a 32-year-old escort, described how even experiences during the menial business tasks of sex work could have emotional

effects. Many workers were members of review boards that "rate" the quality of the

providers and their services:

> The whole like review system is really hard, you know, it preys on your
> insecurities, like really bad. And even without reviews, just the fact that you know
> that this guy is coming in, he's going to be judging you on how you look and he's
> going to be seeing every inch of you, I've found that that's one of the most
> difficult parts of what I'm doing. Just the insecurity feeling like I'm always going
> to be judged and rated and ranked, and all of that…I think that it's really easy to
> feel depressed, like I find especially if I'm working a lot.

Workers often noted more personal emotional risks and generally interpreted them in a

much more individual way than the way they described other risks, which were based in

broader generalities and cultural views of sex work as dangerous. Emotional risks also

tended to be expansive and could be applied to almost any aspect of the work. Liz,

continued by accentuating the emotional risks involved in the personal effects of the

stigmatization of sex work:

> I'd say there are definitely emotional risks, I mean one is that…if you end up with
> a client who is disrespectful or doesn't treat you well, I mean, it can be really
> devastating just because you're in such an intimate and vulnerable position. If you
> get the sense that you are like used or looked down upon, it really hurts.

Liz felt that her work put her in an emotionally vulnerable position. Her report was

echoed by other workers in the study. When workers discussed the more "traditional"

risks of sex work, they also noted that the work placed them in vulnerable positions, but

in these discussions study participants described relying on increased independence to

either manage the risks or accept their presence.

Likewise, some risks can be unexpected consequences of dangers that of which

workers are already aware. Osu, a 27-year-old escort, talked about the emotional toll of

concealing her work. She was concerned over the stigma associated with sex work and

wanted to protect herself, but did not anticipate the additional emotional risks of having

to frequently lie to most people:

> The one that I can think of off the top of my head is just constantly lying to everybody. I used to think, "I lie to everyone to protect them because I'm not ashamed of what I do. But I don't want to burden them with--" Then I'm thinking about it. I'm like, "Who the fuck am I kidding? No. I lie to people to protect myself," because I don't want to be that one friend who does the taboo thing, the questionable one. I don't want to be the one who like something's missing or something happens, I'm the one who's thrown under the bus just because of what I do. So, it's constantly lying, and I think now it kind of makes me want to. … I don't have as many friends, and I don't know if it's the result of me getting older and just being like, "I'm tired of everyone's bullshit," or if it's because I don't want to deal with having to make up these backstories and keep up with this lie. But that being said, it's not like awful. It's not bad, but it does get kind of lonely sometimes.

Osu's observation that attempting to avoid stigmatization has left her lonely was similar

to workers' discussions of other risks. Often, they acknowledged that in their work they

were trading risks for independence, and if they were able to work "on their own terms,"

certain risks were acceptable. The relationship between broader culturally perceived risks

and the realities of what the individual participants faced was complex. Though

addressed risks they could predict might be problematic, they also were frequently left to

deal with unexpected results. But as Osu noted, she found this trade off to be less than

ideal, but not worse than the alternative.

7.6. CONCLUSION

The assertion that that most workers made that sex work is dangerous, but

worthwhile to them on balance, speaks to the duality of the new digital model of sex

work. Providers in this new model value independence and the added autonomy it

includes over the perceived danger. Part of this stems from the study participant's

understanding of their own privilege and the access to information that privilege creates. The digital model of sex work also stresses the early adoption of new technologies that aids in communicating with clients and fellow workers. Risks are measured in terms of personal contexts for the individual and cultural perceptions for the broader sex worker community. Most study participants felt a sense of community with the broader sex work community and wanted to acknowledge the dangers other workers may face. But when workers examined their own personal risks, they found far less to fear. When most workers discussed the overarching cultural narrative of the dangers of sex work, they would make a broad proclamation that echoed these sentiments, then slowly reduce those sentiments until they eventually landed on the fact that they face very little danger.

The danger that most workers identified with specific detail was the threat of STIs, and most pointed to these risks as proof of both positive change in the sex worker community (via the predominant culture of safer sex practices) and as risk that can successfully be prevented (via the lowered rates of STIs among certain sex worker subpopulations). In this way, workers wanted to highlight that dangers exist, but there are tangible solutions to these risks. Workers overwhelmingly did not want to minimize the struggles of workers from less privileged positions but wanted to highlight their own lack of risk as positive aspect of the work.

The social risks associated with stigmatization were a far more prevalent concern for the participants in the study. As in the discussions of race and privilege, workers noted that the dual role of stigma as a structural issue should be reduced, but from a personal level some felt stigma could aid in the empowerment of sex work, either by defying patriarchal norms, or simply by making the work more valuable due to its

illegality and lack of supply. Again, the duality of both being a member of a marginalized community, yet a privileged individual made approaching the risk of stigmatization difficult for providers in the study.

The rise of the Internet has complicated this duality by simultaneously providing resources in the form of knowledge and support, while also creating new risks due to increased connectivity with clients, other workers, and society at large. When workers were affected by emotional risks, they had far fewer available responses then their more tangible physical or social structural counterparts. Emotional concerns weighed heaviest on participants, and that these new risks were part of the cost of doing business in the new digital sex work model.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

8.1. INTRODUCTION

Jordan arched her eyebrow behind her chic square librarian glasses and gave a thoughtful

nod: "How do you put one on a rung over another?" She was explaining the problem of

viewing sex work hierarchically, but emphasized that although sex work was a good

choice for her, someone else could be coming from a different set of circumstance: "I felt

way more exploited working retail than I ever have in sex work…[but] for some people,

sex work is way more exploitative to them than working." Jordan explained wanting a

different view of sex work that acknowledged individuals' backgrounds, circumstances

and choices, and did not distinguish workers based on their type of work, but she swept

her blue hair out of her eyes and continued:

> There is this unspoken hierarchy…where you have strippers that look down on
> massage providers because, "Well, I don't have to touch their dicks." And then
> you have massage providers that look down on escorts, because, "Well at least
> I'm not fucking their dicks." And then you have escorts that look down on street
> base[d] workers because, "At least I'm not working the streets." Everyone's in a
> different position for whatever reason. It might be the hand that they were dealt. It
> might be how they've chosen to work in that field. But at the end of the day,
> we're all still sex workers.

Providers in the study roundly rejected the classifications used by previous research. The

four paradigms, though useful for framing the relationship of sex work to society, or

more aptly society to sex work, were unable to recognize the parallels between workers

while simultaneously highlighting substantive difference such as personal choices and

situational factors. Furthermore, when previous research has described the work it's most

often broadly dichotomized into "indoor" and "outdoor" work, each with its own set of

preconceptions, but largely grouped together based on the physical location where

providers deliver services. The new digital model of sex work presented in this

dissertation is wholly different from both of these previous forms. The digital model of sex work presented here concerns itself with three elements that focus on the context and process of sex work: (1) The early adoption of technology for information gathering, sharing, and communication; (2) a dual sense of strict individuality with a focus on agency while maintaining a perceived group membership; and (3) the creation of an authentic digital self.

A context specific model of sex work is not a new concept. Both Chapkis (1997) and Weitzer (2007) advocate for a model of sex work that includes the individual circumstances of workers. However, the former emphasizes that her "sex radical feminism" model is a re-framing of feminist theory, whereas the latter uses the polymorphous paradigm to frame research on sex work. Where former models of sex work tended to be too broad, attempting to categorize sex work under one large concept, these two models may be too narrow, focusing on individuals and the variety of "constellation of occupational arrangements, power relationships, and participants' experiences" (Weitzer, 2011, p. 16).

By contrast, the digital model of sex work aims to find a balance by explaining the process of the work itself in the terms that these workers have used to describe their entrance, balancing of work and private lives, and assessing security and risks. This model is substantively different from both of these previous attempts in that the digital model focuses on how providers describe their work and the complexity of membership in a broader sex worker community at both the individual *and* communal level. Both Chapkis and Weitzer highlight the contextual differences across workers and situations,

but neither emphasize the role that collective group membership plays alongside these personal contexts.

As seen throughout each of the four analysis chapters, the workers in this study consistently returned to the themes highlighted by the digital model: (1) that technology was a means to an end, with the two-fold ability to isolate workers while simultaneously providing assistance from a community; (2) that the use of the Internet provides for greater individual autonomy; and (3) that the Internet provides a space to create a digital persona that connects with other workers and clients on an authentic level.

Olivia, a 21-year-old escort, described these themes when I asked her what effect she thought technology had on sex work. Wearing a blue metallic robe and tousled hair that made it look like she had just woken up in the future, she tapped the screen of her phone while she explained:

> It's hard to say [whether the Internet has made things better or worse], because primarily I would say better because it helps having access to different points of view and realizing you're not alone.... And it makes you evolve within your own point of view, and it helps you understand your position. So, having access to this is amazing, but on the other hand, I think the Internet in general makes every one of us feel observed all the time. So, in general, this society of taboos and of judgment and guilt actually provides me with a job, because we don't have a sense of guilt and taboo, with being a prostitute. But yeah, it also kind of creates this very strong isolation and weight on your shoulders.

This duality of technology being viewed as both a benefit and a detriment was noted repeatedly by workers. Most typically the Internet was noted for its potential rather than broadly proclaimed to be either helpful or hurtful. The Internet played a major role in participants' entrance, construction of work identity and personas, and their perceptions of risk and security, but it was not a panacea.

8.2. PRIVILEGE AND CONTEXT

Providers in the study often combined new technological advantages with their own

personal privilege and context to explain their involvement in sex work. Regardless of

the subject area, workers often noted the "invisible backpack" of privilege that played a

role in their information gathering and decision-making process. Participants were ardent

in their membership in the sex worker community, but rarely presumed they were in a

similar situation to other workers. Again, the digital model's paradox of

individual/communal also extended to their responses to issues of information sharing.

Workers either overtly or tacitly acknowledged their race and class privilege, but when

the topic was discussed directly by some participants, as Alyson, a 32-year-old escort,

pointed out: "It's not a very politically correct question to be asking, right?" However,

she was quick to note that she benefitted from some, but not all, privileges when

discussing hierarchy:

> I'm not down with the ladder. Obviously, I have a ton of privilege. I'm a white,
> college-educated, younger woman, of course. I'm not slim, so I don't have that
> sort of privilege, but I definitely—I wouldn't put myself on a ladder, because
> that's a horrible analogy.

Workers identified that their privileges gave them a wider range of options when

approaching sex work. They would speak often about the general advantages they faced

because of their societal positioning. So again, as workers adopt the Internet as part of

their work routine, the paradox of the digital model is expressed through their individual

agency and simultaneous group membership. Workers acknowledged they were part of a

broader community but recognized their specific circumstances placed them individually

in a different position from workers with less privilege. Most rejected the idea of a sex

worker hierarchy, however, and instead wanted to express that the community

encompasses a vast array of people with different social positions. Self-identified

advantaged workers who did address the hierarchy expressed that they needed to

advocate for better treatment and less stigma for all workers. Olive, a 21-year-old escort,

was uncomfortable with the sex work hierarchy, but wanted to explain how her story of

being a consensual worker could be used for advocacy:

> I think in regard to my privileges, I'm mostly at the top because I have a community, I have a voice, I have general authority. If I wanted to speak out as well publicly, I would also have authority because people would like my story obviously because it would not make them feel guilty. So, I'm pretty high.

Once workers acknowledged their privilege, they described the second way personal

contexts are manifested in the digital sex work model: how workers respond to

immediate situations. If the new digital model of sex work is to be described as a process-

based model, it must show that it can adapt to immediate situations. Workers regularly

discussed using the Internet to learn current or improved techniques for specific issues

they were facing, but the digital model does not only account for the method by which

information is passed from one worker to the next, but also can assess the appropriate fit

for the information being exchanged.

Workers often recognized that a solution for one provider would not or could not

work for another. As discussed in Chapter 6, screening measures were widespread among

the participants, but the information garnered by workers ranged from the broad (general

screening metrics) to the specific (type of screening appropriate for a given type of

work). Penny, a 21-year-old escort, did hotel in-calls; a specific kind of escorting where

the client and provider meet in a hotel. Penny learned general information on the best

way to screen, as well as best practices for her specific kind of work:

> There's a lot of things that now I've learned about—obviously how other people

work —especially because of Facebook groups. But for people who do hotel in-calls it's somewhat different, but they still do vetting.…There was a lot of things that I did that now people have told me that that is obviously not the most safe, and obviously it's risky in any area, but especially for example with even using NearMart[19], which in some ways I don't understand…In the end you're still going to have to do screening.

The sharing of knowledge is an essential part of the digital model, but similar to group membership, it is a dynamic model with both community and individual aspects. Workers routinely called for the expansion of the digital sex worker community, so that all workers could access information on how best to run their business and protect themselves from risks. However, participants routinely noted the complex relationship between their own individual contexts and the best practices of the broader sex worker community. The simultaneous repudiation and confirmation of the sex work hierarchy is a part of the digital model that requires more research.

8.3. SOCIAL LEARNING AND THE INTERNET

The first element of the digital model of sex work is the early adoption of technology to aid in the processes of sex work. The persistence of any group is reliant on the transmission of that group's values, attitudes, techniques, and motivations. Participants in the study noted repeatedly that though they worked alone, made their own choices and provided for their own security, they still felt as if they were part of a broader sex worker community. Theoretically, this is the concept of cultural transmission, the notion that cultural norms can be shared and learned between group members. Sutherland (1947) offered a method through which behaviors are transmitted within groups. Sutherland's

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[19] NearMart is a location based commercial website that has a poor reputation among most workers.

differential association theory argues that deviant acts are learned in the same way any behavior is learned, through interaction with others. Community members assess the frequency, priority, duration, and intensity of relationships and adopt the definitions of groups they view most favorably.

Sutherland's theory may be altogether insufficient for the purposes of describing modern sex work. Often, the participants in this study entered and remained in the field with limited knowledge or exposure to the definitions favorable to sex work or the communities of people who encapsulate those definitions. In Thurkal et.al.'s (2005) study, for example, several workers only knew an acquaintance or single friend who was involved in sex work. Similarly, Silbert and Pines (1982) found that roughly half of their sample, when interviewing sex workers about entrance, had some contact with a person familiar with sex work. In the current study, many of the workers noted having a very limited or in some cases no knowledge of the intricacies of sex work prior to entrance. Most mentioned their use of the Internet when gathering information. Their use of the Internet to gain knowledge and membership to the world of sex workers provided a virtual "closeness" that eschews traditional metrics such as Sutherland's (1947) frequency, priority, duration, and intensity; and instead allows group members to gain knowledge via their choice of community and as circumstances dictate.

The language of Sutherland's associations appears both deterministic and mechanistic in its descriptions of learned cultural norms and doesn't reflect how workers discussed their relationship with the broader sex worker culture. Glaser (1956) noted these shortcomings and attempted to address them by modifying differential association to include groups that someone might choose to identify with. Glaser called this

modification "differential identification." In essence "a person pursues criminal behavior to the extent that [they identify themselves] with real or imaginary persons from whose perspective [their] criminal behavior seems acceptable" (1956, p. 440). Here, Glaser builds on the work of Mead (1934), who asserted that the individual, and their integrated "self" are in and of themselves a social process. The self is developed through the process of communication between the principal "I" and the socially constructed "Me." Since identity is constructed through communication - a social process - part of identity is taking on imbued social roles both directly and vicariously. This leads to a successive series of relationships between the individual and social groups. Membership is perceived, roles are adopted, and behaviors are learned. Differential identification describes "identification somewhat unconventionally as 'the choice of another, from whose perspective we view our own behavior.'

What we have called 'differential identification' re-conceptualizes Sutherland's theory in role-taking imagery (Glaser, 1956). The two key elements that predicate this differential identity are *prior identification* and *present circumstance.* These two concepts were repeatedly described by providers in the study when they discussed the core concepts of the what would later become the digital model of sex work. These concepts include: the early adoption of new technologies to aid in perceived group membership (prior identification), and the gathering and sharing of knowledge on sex work best practices and concerns over the autonomy of the broader sex worker culture and individual providers (present circumstance). This adoption of new technology as a social learning process leads to the second major aspect of the digital model of sex work, the dual sense of independence and broad community membership.

8.4. ALONE IN THE COMMUNITY

Workers spoke often of their connection to the broader sex work community. Though they worked alone and often had no direct contact with other workers, the theme of *prior identification* was consistent across all aspects of the analysis. When evaluating the different types of sex work she had done, Paula, a 40-year-old escort, said: "I kind of feel like I've always done it," with an endearing humor that conveyed her sense of connection with both the work and providers as a whole. As Jordan noted above, a sense of community is preferable to an unspoken hierarchy in the work. The majority of workers in the study echoed this sentiment in one form or another, rejecting that workers should be isolated, while admitting the difference across peoples due to their personal privileges and circumstance. A feeling of community—though set apart due to geography, anonymity and social stigma—was a consistent theme in the interviews, and workers felt that their membership in the broader sex worker culture was an important aspect of their experiences.

This concept of prior identification was most obvious when the workers discussed there entrance experiences. A large portion of the study participants noted having no social contacts with people who were current or previous workers. Gerry Anne, a 26-year-old cam worker, said that she had "always been interested in it from some aspect or another." However, prior identification does not require previous group membership. Mere aspirations are enough to begin to identify with a group (Sherif & Sherif, 1953).

When workers discussed entrance, they often noted a sense of solidarity with the broader sex worker community even though most began their journey of entrance alone.

This accounts for one of the main aspects of the digital model of sex work that participants described: the interplay between belonging to a broader community, while still retaining strict independence. But the concept of prior identification also extends to the transmission of knowledge when shaping workplace identities and personas, and security practices as well.

In order for workers to identify as a member of the sex worker community, they must also be aware of the group's cultural norms. Participants described more than just a sense of community when they described belonging to the sex worker subculture. Learning best practices from the digital community of sex workers with regard to how to conduct their businesses and keep themselves safe was mentioned frequently. Workers learned these techniques as part of group membership. Jordan, a 35-year-old escort, described how belonging to the community of sex workers not only taught her basic techniques for her work, but also that being part of a community gave her a sense of ownership with her work that had elongated her career:

> I use technology to connect with other workers. Twenty years ago…I probably wouldn't have stayed in the industry for so long because I wouldn't have connected with other people and learned from them and had that sense of community where it's not so socially isolated or so stigmatized.

Notably, the group membership that Jordan described not only transmitted relevant techniques for sex work but also taught her specific language and tactics to shape the work to her own preferences:

> I've learned over the years that the client base that I want to attract are the ones that go for ads that offer a connection or authenticity or things that more appeal to an emotional connection, plus a physical connection, not necessarily like, "I'm gonna rock your world." Some people do use that advertising. I do think it attracts a different client base. It's kind of who you want to work with and how you want to work is the language that you're gonna use.

Providers in the study recognized that community membership carried with it a fundamental paradox. A feeling of identification amongst the participants was essential: "If the participants feel that they belong together for this purpose, they do belong together" (Sutherland, 1947, p. 219). However, group identification also meant a commitment to anonymity because of the social stigma associated with sex work. As previously discussed, workers noted a lack of access to conventional social resources, which resulted in an adherence to certain community practices, such as screening and the construction of a work persona to shield themselves from physical and emotional dangers. The choice to adopt these behaviors, however, rests with the individual community members. Glaser argues that behavior is not the result of deterministic associations with those in our social spheres, but rather behavior is context specific —not unlike the context specific model of sex radical feminism proposed by Chapkis (1996) and the polymorphous paradigm suggested by Weitzer (2007). However, part of the digital model of sex work, with its focus on both communal and individual autonomy and its information sharing methods, is a recognition that both situational factors and demographic characteristics play a role in the autonomy of community members. In essence, group members make decision based on what is best for themselves as both a group member and an individual, and the information that leads to that decision comes, in whole or in part, from their use of the Internet.

8.5. THE AUTHENTIC DIGITAL SELF

The creation of a work persona was noted by many of the providers in the study. Even workers who were hesitant to call their work performance a "persona" did note that while

interacting with clients they tended to accentuate parts of their personality to both make themselves more appealing to clients while creating a boundary for their own personal emotional and physical safety. The digital model on two aspects of this performative work persona. First, it is the fact that this persona was created and exists in digital spaces. Secondly, the creation of a work persona must be perceived as authentic both by the workers and the clients. Octavia points out that her work persona hinges on its authenticity:

> It's all real. It's just I know which parts people want to see and which they don't care about. I just want to give them the parts that they want to see. I can save the rest of it for the rest of my life.

Similar to other aspects workers discussed, the authenticity of their work identity coincides with their presence in digital spaces. Octavia repeatedly noted the importance of connecting with prospective clients in digital spaces, but the fact that this is one of the primary purposes of the creation of a digital persona was largely tacit in conversations with providers. Izzy was one of the few workers who paired their online performance with its real-world counterpart: "I like to be more cutesy and sweet online. Definitely more submissive than my actual self. ... I'm obviously more sexual online. It's more of a persona for me."

Similar to the work of Bernstein (2007), providers in the study were vocal about the importance of authenticity, but the digital model of sex work extends the "bounded authenticity" described by middle-class workers at the beginning of the 21st century to include an authentic digital self. Workers often continued the performance of a work persona to the interim period between sessions with clients. These extensions took place almost exclusively in digital spaces and workers had a variety of responses to the

additional labor of catering to clients outside of the bounds of a paid session. Noreen, for

example, had a prospective client who wanted to book a session far in advance, then

communicate with her up until the time of the appointment:

> He's texting me every day about what he's studying and just blah, blah, blah, and
> I'm like, "Mate, if you want to text me, that's cool. I offer texting packages." I
> offer a daily texting package, and I offer sexting packages, and phone sex
> packages, so I'm available. You can just pay me. Thank you.

The creation of a work persona is not a new concept, but for the digital model its creation

and continuation in digital spaces is an important difference from previous sex work

models. Interestingly, workers frequently noted that the authenticity that they strove for

during in-person sessions with clients had to be equally as present during digital

encounters, noting another example of the digital symmetry. The fact that workers

reported authenticity must be present in both digital and in-person interactions is an

affirmation that the digital model is well-suited to describe the contexts and processes of

sex work rather than its categories and settings.

8.6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The conceptualization of the digital sex work model has consequences for how sex work

policies can be approached in the future. The Internet has allowed workers to coalesce as

a community, and as such, this community has experts, advocates and leaders who are

more adequately equipped to address sex work on a policy level. Though researchers and

non-working advocates may have vital information to help inform policy debates, the

most effective way to introduce positive change would be to go directly to

knowledgeable community leaders. Vivian, a 29-year-old escort, was adamant when

asked how sex worker policy can be improved if public figures "pass the mic":

> I think passing the microphone to people who are experiencing all these different issues is so important. Sex work and sex work laws need to be by us and for us. It's our bodies, it's our choices. You don't need to tell consenting adults what they get to do in the bedroom.

Vivian noted that workers in the digital model recognize the different social positions and

circumstances of the broad spectrum of workers, but even if oppressed groups are not

using these new technologies, the internet is giving them a voice:

> People who were street level had to jump into a car without spending half a second to figure out whether this guy was on any kind of drugs, they didn't have anything. Internet changed everything. We all get a voice now.

Future research on digital sex work should examine the role that agency and autonomy

play in the formation of subcultures. Workers often expressed that the strength of the sex

worker community was one of their driving motivations for remaining in sex work.

Participants who indicated that the Internet was a key element in worker autonomy

frequently wanted this same agency to be available to all workers regardless of social

position, race, or class. As previously discussed, the technology gap is closing, and more

people are using the internet every year across all races, nationalities, and classes. As

technology becomes more ubiquitous, and sex work adapts, researchers must begin to

explore the role technology has on hidden and stigmatized subcultures.

8.6. CONCLUSION

Providers in this study came from a variety of background, locations, and types of

sex work, yet they often spoke of unifying themes regardless of their differences.

Participants described similar processes when discussing their entrances to work, the

construction of workplace identities, and how they perceived and addressed the risks and security of their jobs. Taken together, these common themes represent a new model of sex work substantively different from those previously studied. The majority of previous research on sex work dichotomizes work into type (indoor/outdoor) or theory (oppression/empowerment). The digital model of sex work described by participants emphasizes a process that draws workers into a broader community, while still recognizing their individual circumstances and situations, and emphasises the premium workers place on autonomy.

The digital model of sex work represents a different lens through which researchers can examine sex work, concentrating on the autonomy of both the broader sex worker community and individuals, and also in methods of transmitting information. Workers admit that there is an advantage to being part of a digital community that offers support and practical answers to current issues within sex work. The digital model of sex work is also a dynamic model that accounts for varying levels of workers' privilege and their current situations. Furthermore, the digital sex work model describes new and innovative behaviors unique to this group of people. Issues of identity and security are augmented compared with previous research, and techniques such as workplace personas and screening offer effective solutions to prevent issues voiced by workers and researchers alike.

Ultimately, these various elements coalesce to present a new model of sex work that has emerged due to increased communication via the Internet. Workers routinely encourage unity between the different types of workers and agreed that research that reflects the voices of workers was an integral part of the future of sex work. The broader

community of sex workers, bolstered by new forms of communication, contains experts,

advocates and leaders that should be a voice in continuing debates over sex work policy.

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APPENDIX A: STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Orientation	Type
Alyson	32	Female	White/Jewish	Pansexual	Escort
Arden	26	Female	White	Bisexual	Escort
Bethany	28	Female	White	Bisexual	Cam/Fetish
Big Beautiful	46	Female	White	Straight	BDSM
Cate	22	Female	White	Bisexual	Cam/BDSM
Charlene	35	Female	AA	Straight GFP	Cam/Escort
Darla	29	Female	White	Bisexual	Cam
Deana	23	Female	White	Bisexual	Cam/Escort
Deborah	25	Female	White	Unfortunately Straight	Cam
Edward	29	Male	White	Queer	Escort
Emma	21	Female	Hispanic	Bisexual	Escort
Faraday	34	Female	Jewish (American)	Bisexual	BDSM
Fiona	25	Female	White	Queer	Cam/Prod
Francis	33	Female	White	DNI	Escort
Gerry Anne	26	Female	White	Pansexual	Cam
Gertrude	40	Female	White	Hetero Flex	Escort
Greg	25	Male	White	Fluid	Escort
Haeden	21	Female	White	Straight	Escort
Hannah	18	Female	White	Bisexual	Escort
Hope	28	Female	Native/white	Queer	Escort
Isabelle	34	Female	White	Hetero Flex	Cam/Fetish
Izzy	19	Female	White	Bisexual	Cam
Janine	30	Female	White	Straight	Escort
Jessica	22	Trans Female	White	Pansexual	Cam/Escort
Jordan	35	Female	White	Queer	Escort
Kaley	18	Trans Female	White	Straight	Escort
Kelly	33	Female	White	Bi/Straight	Escort/Street
Kit	21	Female	White	Queer	Cam/Fetish
Laura	29	Female	White	Bisexual	Escort
Liz	32	Female	White	Straight	Escort
Lucy	27	Female	White/Jewish	Bi/pan	Cam
Lydia	23	Female	White	Pansexual	Escort
Mandy	29	Female	Asian	Hetero Flex	Escort
Mona	46	Female	White	Straight	Escort
Nancy	46	Female	White	Hetero Flex	Escort
Nicole	29	Female	White	Bisexual	Cam/Burlesque
Noreen	32	Fem Variant	White	Pansexual	Escort
Octavia	34	Female	White	Bisexual	Burlesque
Olivia	21	Female	White	Bisexual	Escort
Osu	27	Female	Asian	Bisexual	Escort
Paula	40	Female	White	Bi/Straight	Cam/Escort
Penny	21	Female	Asian/White	Bi/pan	Escort
Petunia	35	Female	White	Queer	Escort
Quinn	26	Female	White	Homoflexible	Burlesque
Roxy	33	Female	White	Open	Escort
Suzy	27	Female	White	Queer	Cam/Escort
Tiffany	22	Non-Gen/Fem	Chinese	Anything Goes	Escort
Vivian	29	Female	White	Bisexual	Escort
Walter	26	Non-Bin/Male	White	Queer	Escort
Yvette	20	Female	Asian	Queer	Cam/Fetish

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
ASB III, 3 Rutgers Plaza, Cook Campus
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

April 4, 2014

P.I. Name: Fowler
Protocol #: 14-570M

Kurt Fowler
School of Criminal Justice
123 Washington St
Center for Law & Justice

Dear Kurt Fowler:

(Initial / Amendment / Continuation / Continuation w/ Amendment)

Protocol Title: "The Changing Experience of Sex Work in the Digital Age"

This is to advise you that the above-referenced study has been presented to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, and the following action was taken subject to the conditions and explanations provided below:

Approval Date:	3/31/2014	**Expiration Date:**	3/30/2015
Expedited Category(s):	6 , 7	**Approved # of Subject(s):**	60

This approval is based on the assumption that the materials you submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) contain a complete and accurate description of the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research. The following conditions apply:

- **This Approval**-The research will be conducted according to the most recent version of the protocol that was submitted. **This approval is valid ONLY for the dates listed above;**
- **Reporting**-ORSP must be immediately informed of any injuries to subjects that occur and/or problems that arise, in the course of your research;
- **Modifications**-Any proposed changes MUST be submitted to the IRB as an amendment for review and approval prior to implementation;
- **Consent Form(s)**-Each person who signs a consent document will be given a copy of that document, if you are using such documents in your research. The Principal Investigator must retain all signed documents for at least three years after the conclusion of the research;
- **Continuing Review**-You should receive a courtesy e-mail renewal notice for a Request for Continuing Review before the expiration of this project's approval. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that an application for continuing review has been submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to the expiration date to extend the approval period;

Additional Notes: Expedited Approval per 45 CFR 46.110.

Failure to comply with these conditions will result in withdrawal of this approval.
Please note that the IRB has the authority to observe, or have a third party observe, the consent process or the research itself. The Federal-wide Assurance (FWA) number for the Rutgers University IRB is FWA00003913; this number may be requested on funding applications or by collaborators.

Respectfully yours,

Acting For,
Dr. Beverly Tepper, Ph.D.
Professor
Chair, Rutgers University Institutional Review Board
(MW: lb)

cc: Jody A. Miller

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Professor
Chair, Rutgers University Institutional Review Board
(MW: lb)

cc: Jody A. Miller

RUTGERS
UNIVERSITY

ATTACHMENT 4:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

The Changing Experience of Sex Work in the Digital Age
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Kurt Fowler
IRB Approval Number:

You have been invited to participate in a research study. Below is some information about the study that will help you decide whether you'd like to take part.

What is and why are we doing it?

This project is about the personal and professional lives of sex workers. It is a study being conducted by Kurt Fowler, a doctoral student in the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. I plan to interview between 40 and 60 sex workers. I designed this study to better understand the legal and societal issues surrounding sex work as both employment and lifestyle. If you choose to participate in this study, you may aid in changing the public perception of sex workers. Participation is completely voluntary.

What procedures are involved?

If you agree to participate in this research, you can expect to sit down with me for a conversational interview, in which we talk about your experiences of sex work. If you would like to know more about the topics of conversation I would like us to talk about, I'm happy to talk about it further, or share a copy of the interview guide with you to review.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

To protect your confidentiality, the only people who will have access to the information you provide are project personnel, including me and my dissertation advisor, Dr. Jody Miller. We will not disclose any information that you share during the interview. When the results of the research are written, published, or discussed, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. We will not use your name in any of our reports, and will not include other specific information that could identify you.

In addition, during the interview you have the right to review and edit the audiotape. At your request, the interviewer will erase any section of the tape in which you accidentally use your

_____
Participant Initials

Form Version 2014.a		Print Date: 3/2/2014	
Rutgers University: Institutional Review Board: Human Subject Research	Page 24 of 36		

RUTGERS
UNIVERSITY

ATTACHMENT 4:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

The Changing Experience of Sex Work in the Digital Age
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Kurt Fowler
IRB Approval Number:

You have been invited to participate in a research study. Below is some information about the study that will help you decide whether you'd like to take part.

What is and why are we doing it?

This project is about the personal and professional lives of sex workers. It is a study being conducted by Kurt Fowler, a doctoral student in the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. I plan to interview between 40 and 60 sex workers. I designed this study to better understand the legal and societal issues surrounding sex work as both employment and lifestyle. If you choose to participate in this study, you may aid in changing the public perception of sex workers. Participation is completely voluntary.

What procedures are involved?

If you agree to participate in this research, you can expect to sit down with me for a conversational interview, in which we talk about your experiences of sex work. If you would like to know more about the topics of conversation I would like us to talk about, I'm happy to talk about it further, or share a copy of the interview guide with you to review.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

To protect your confidentiality, the only people who will have access to the information you provide are project personnel, including me and my dissertation advisor, Dr. Jody Miller. We will not disclose any information that you share during the interview. When the results of the research are written, published, or discussed, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. We will not use your name in any of our reports, and will not include other specific information that could identify you.

In addition, during the interview you have the right to review and edit the audiotape. At your request, the interviewer will erase any section of the tape in which you accidentally use your

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Participant Initials

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own or someone else's name on tape, or any other comments that you decide you did not want to share. Each audiotape will be kept in a password protected computer file, and it will be destroyed once we have copied down what you said. The files containing your written interview transcripts will also be stored in a password protected computer.

Aside from the consent form we ask you to sign, we will keep no other record of your name, and your name will not be linked to your interview. Your consent form will be stored in a separate locked office by my dissertation advisor.

How much time will the interview take?

The interview is designed to take approximately two hours. However, In the event that further information is required, you may be asked to participate in a brief follow-up interview at a later date. Follow-up interviews are expected to last approximately one hour. Your participation in an initial interview does not require you to participate in further interviews.

Is there any risk to me?

I anticipate that you will enjoy being interviewed. However, it is possible that some of the questions may make you feel anxious, concerned, or sad. If this happens, please tell me immediately. If you are interested, I will provide you with a list of referral services available in the community and will assist you in setting up an appointment with any of those service providers. You may choose not to participate, and you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.
You may stop the interview at any time.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

I hope that you will find participation in the research to be personally rewarding. My goal is to take your perspective seriously, as you teach me about your experiences with and beliefs about sex work. In addition, you will receive an information sheet about agencies that may be able to assist you, and if you like, I can help you to contact them. In addition, the information you provide may help to inform public policy and perceptions of sex work.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

You can choose whether to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in the study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. If you talk with me now, and later wish that you hadn't, all you need to do is contact me, and I will destroy your interview and not include it in the study. I will also send you a letter confirming that I have done so.

If you are interested, you may receive a summary of the researcher's interview findings.

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If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me at:

Phone: 973-353-3247
Email: kurt.fowler@rutgers.edu

or you can contact my advisor Dr. Jody Miller at:

Phone: 973-353-1303
Email: jody.miller@rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB
Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

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MAR 3 0 2015

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AUDIO ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study on the changing experience of sex workers in the digital age, conducted by Kurt Fowler. We are asking for your permission to allow the PI to audiotape your interview as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the study.

The recording(s) will be used for *analysis by the researcher.*

The recording(s) will include a numerical identifier and pseudonym.

The recording will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the PI's locked office in the Center for Law and Justice. It will not include any personally identifying information, and will only be accessible to project personnel. Data from the interviews entered in a computer software program for analysis will be stored in a password protected file. The identity of subjects who participate in the in-depth interview will be protected by the use of numerical identifiers and pseudonyms. Digital audio-files will be password protected and will be erased upon transcription of the in- depth interview into a document file. All document files will be stored on a password-protected computer and will only be accessible to project personnel.

During the interview process, please refrain from disclosing your name or any identifying information about anyone else. In the event that you accidentally disclose identifiable information, this information will be immediately deleted.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Kurt W. Fowler
PhD Student
Center for Law and Justice
123 Washington Street, Suite 567A Newark, New Jersey 07102

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

SEX WORK STUDY INTERVIEW

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this conversation about your life and experiences. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that you may choose not to answer any question, and that you can stop the interview at any time.

As a reminder, your identity will be kept confidential, meaning no one will be able to link you personally to what you have discussed with me today

[If approved] Remember that I'll be recording the interview so that I can recall what you've said as accurately as possible. Once I type up what is on the recording, I will erase the recording. You can tell me to stop recording at any pointy.

Do you have any questions before we get started? Feel free to ask any questions you may have as we move through the discussion.

If you're ready, let's begin.

Part 1: Personal characteristics and life history

These intro questions are designed to make sure I don't make any assumptions about you.

> 1. What is your gender?
>
> 2. How would you describe your race/ethnicity?
>
> 3. How would you describe your sexual orientation, for instance, straight, gay, bisexual?
>
> 4. How old are you?
>
> 5. Where were you born?
>
> 6. And where did you grow up?

Now let's talk about your professional life.

Part 2: Employment

> 7. Can you tell me about your involvement in sex work?
>
> 8. How did you get into this line of work?
>
> 9. Is this your primary source of income?
> 10. Walk me through a typical day. What happens?

11. Can you tell me about your clients.

12. Can you tell me about your experience with your last client?

13. What sort of preparation do you do for a particular day or session?

14. What different kinds of services do you provide?

      a. Are there particular "costumes" or "props" that you use?

      b. What informs your choice to use particular costumes or props in a particular session?

15. How many clients do you see on an average day?
      a. Are some days busier than others?

      b. Some times of day busier than others?

      c. Why do you think that is?

16. How do you decide how much to charge for a given service?

17. Are there any services you prefer to provide?

      a. What are the reasons you prefer them?

      b. Any that you don't care for?

18. Would you say that any of your services provide you with non-monetary benefits? (Ex: Personal satisfaction?) Can you tell me more about that?

19. Do you ever trade your services for something other than money? Under what circumstances would you do that? What other things do you trade them for?

20. How do you advertise your services?

21. Where do you do the majority of your business?

22. What roles does technology play in your work?

23. How would you describe what you do in an advertisement to attract business online?

Now I have some questions about your professional and personal boundaries.

Part 3: Boundaries and Tone

24. How do you screen clients?

    a.   Tell me about your ideal client.

    b.   Tell me about a time when you chose not to meet up with a client.

25. How is the tone and content set for an interaction?

26. Have you ever had to handle a client who became too attached?

27. Have you ever found yourself overly attached to a client?

28. Do you enact particular work personas? Can you tell me about them?

29. How do you set limits?

    a. What kinds of limits?

    b.What are the reasons you set the particular limits you do?

30. How do you enforce limits?
    a. What happens to someone who goes over the line?

    b. What, if anything, could cause you to cross the lines you've set?

31. How do you decide what it is you will or will not do?

32. In what physical spaces do you work? How do you decide?

33. What, if, anything, do you do to separate your own space from workspace?

    a. If you work in space that is not yours, is it possible to "make it yours"?

I'd like to turn to a discussion of your health and safety.

Part 4: Health and Safety Considerations

34. Are there any bodily risks in your job?

35. Do you take any precautions for your physical safety? What kinds of things do you do?

36. How do you get general safety information regarding your work (i.e. police activity, bad customer reports, disease outbreaks)?

      a. Where does this information come from?

      b. Does this information affect either your job or your personal life?

37. How would you describe your involvement with alcohol? Tobacco? Drugs?

38. do clients play any part in protecting your physical safety?

39. How often are you tested for HIV/STIs?

40. Are there any emotional risks in your job?

41. Do you take steps to reduce the risk of being detected by law enforcement? Can you tell me about those?

      a. Have you ever been arrested?

      a.   (if yes) What was that experience like? Did it change your work strategies in any way?

I have some questions about the sex work industry and how you see it.

Part 5: The Industry

42. Is anyone else involved directly in your work? That is, do you have business partners or managers?
      a. (if yes) what role do they play? What are their responsibilities?

43. Are you familiar with other people in your same line of work?

      a.   Do you ever perform services in pairs or groups?

      b.   Are there levels of power/importance to the business? Where are you located on the ladder?

      c.   How many people work with you? Do they offer similar services to yours, or are   their services quite different? Can you tell me more about this?

44. Do you have any ideas about how to improve the sex industry?

Now I'd like to ask you some things about the relationship between your professional and personal life.

Part 6: Connecting with the Greater World

45. What kind of qualities in a person makes a good sex worker? How so?

46. Who knows about your job?

    a.   How did they find out?

    b.   What were their reactions?

47. How do you behave around people that are aware of your job in the sex industry?

    a. How do you behave around people who are unaware?

    b. If people outside your job don't know about your job, do you attempt to maintain
       anonymity?

    c. If so, how?

    d. Is this any different from the way you behave or portray yourself online?

48. Has working in the sex industry affected your personal romantic and sexual relationships?

49. Has working in the sex industry affected your personal social relationships?

50. Would you recommend your job to others? Why or why not?

51. What misperceptions about your job do you regularly encounter?

52. If you could tell the world one thing about your work, what would it be?

53. Have I missed anything that you feel is important about you, your experience, or your job?