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“This is me, this is what I am, I am a man”: The masculinities of men who pay for sex with women.

Abstract:

This paper draws on theories of masculinity to explore men’s motivations for beginning and continuing to pay for sex with women. Based on in-depth interviews with thirty-five male clients of female sex workers in the UK during 2007/2008, our findings suggest that a desire to pay for sex is often entrenched in notions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000) such as sex as a drive, or need for a variety of experiences and partners and is rationalised as an economic exchange. Yet, the men interviewed also expressed a need for intimacy, female friendship and conversation in a controlled environment, which challenged dominant masculine ideals. For participants there was often an overlap between various motivational factors, and accounts are complicated by the anxieties and disappointments the men express about their non-commercial relationships and the intimacy and emotion frequently attached to encounters with sex workers. The pathologization of men who engage with paid sexual services fails to account for participants’ complex, diverse motivations, which should be understood in the context of other relationships and gender relations rather than as a distinct type of interaction. We find that the theory of hegemonic masculinity provides a useful but partial account of the range of behaviours and characteristics expressed in paid-for sex, which participants use to negotiate the expectations, ambivalences and disappointments of everyday life and relationships.

Introduction:

Paying for sex with a woman reveals much about the practice of being a heterosexual man; what being a man should feel like, what is expected, what should be experienced, how it should be experienced, and what men feel entitled to. It is also about men's heterosexual experiences and practices (or lack of them) in the non-commercial sphere. In a bid to understand engagement in paid-for sex, it is necessary to locate the practices of the men involved within the context of broader theories of masculinity and examine how these are played out and negotiated within gendered relationships more broadly. The motivations for men's involvement in paid-for sex with female sex workers are perhaps one of the most researched areas of the global sex work literature, yet they have traditionally been explained in simplistic or descriptive typologies (McKeganey and Barnard, 1993; Monto, 2000). Newer work however seeks to develop a more nuanced account of men's involvement in paid-for sex (Birch, 2015; Sanders, 2008a). In this paper we seek to extend existing work in this area, by drawing on in-depth interviews with 35 UK based male clients of female sex workers to explore the relationship between their practices and motivations and dominant constructions of masculinity.

Initial work by Kinsey (1948) suggested that paying for sex was indeed a common activity citing that some 40% of men had paid for sex. This figure has oft been drawn upon to make claims towards the size of the 'problem'. However, in contrast more recent work in the UK reports that 11% of men have ever paid for sex with just less than 4% doing so in the last 5 years (Jones *et al.*, 2015). Thus, this earlier figure is deemed inaccurate. The early work of Holzman and Pines (1982) highlighted the desire for a romantic or social atmosphere, in opposition to a mechanical or cold encounter, in which social or courting behaviours were enacted, with warmth and friendliness as essential characteristics of the sex worker. In

contrast other earlier work portrayed male clients as deviant and pathological, with feminist opponents of sex work interpreting men's involvement within theoretical models of male dominance (Dworkin, 1993; Jeffreys, 1997). Research conducted from this perspective emphasizes the violence sex workers experience, before, during and after involvement in prostitution and understands the purchase of sex as a gendered form of violence against women in itself (Barry, 1995; Farley, 2004; Hunter, 1993). Other early research (Gibbens and Silverman, 1960) suggested that psychological problems may be a characteristic of male clients, contributing to their stigmatization. In addition, legal, political and media discourses about kerb-crawling, specifically, construct "clients as dehumanized, dirty and animalistic" (Campbell and Storr, 2001, p. 98), supporting perceptions based on pathologization. Perhaps reflecting this, established social science literature has been less than sympathetic towards male clients, depicting them as someone:

Whose physical, psychological, or social inadequacies and personal problems have driven him to engage in sexually deviant conduct with the behaviour, visiting a prostitute being itself defined as sexually deviant regardless of the content of the practitioner-client interaction (Holzman and Pines, 1982, p 91).

The rise in anti-trafficking ideology which conflates sex work with sex trafficking, and the increase of radical feminist influence in sex work policy, have been associated with negative cultural representations of selling and paying for sex, and several policy shifts (Sanders and Campbell, 2008). Such feminist critiques have influenced policy debates with the development of what's termed the 'Nordic' or 'Swedish' model' as Sweden was the first country to criminalise paying for sex in 1999 (Kingston and Thomas, 2018). Swedish legislation was based around the notion that prostitution is related to criminal markets including organised crime, drugs trafficking and sex trafficking and it is considered harmful

to both societies and individuals, undermining women's position in society (Kingston and Thomas, 2018) Based on the discourses of pathologisation and gender inequity and concerns around human trafficking, a global campaign has ensued, with a shift in policy from targeting female sex workers to a focus on the criminalisation of male clients, whose deviant behaviour is seen to be threatening the moral social order (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002).

Resultantly, the clients of sex workers have been criminalised in a range of countries including Sweden, Finland, France and Northern Ireland. Within this landscape it appears that the male client has become a stigmatised 'cultural figure' (O'Neill, 2015; Tyler, 2008). The cultural figure represents 'the ways in which at different historical and cultural moments specific "social types" become over determined and are publicly imagined (are figured) in excessive, distorted, and caricatured ways' (Tyler, 2008, p. 18), and become an expression of underlying anxieties, here in relation to sex work.

Traditionally clients have been under represented in the sex work literature and the burden has remained on their mostly female sex worker counterparts. However, despite claims that little is known about male clients, there is now an established and growing global research literature exploring men's involvement in paid-for sex (Atchison and Burnett, 2016; Birch, 2015; Birch et al., 2017; Durant and Couch, 2017; Horswill and Weitzer, 2018; Joseph and Black, 2012; Milrod and Monto, 2012; Huschke and Schubotz, 2016; Huysamen and Boonzaier, 2015; Huysamen, 2018; Sanders, 2008a). A key theme has focused on *why* men pay for sex. Monto demonstrates that there is "no one main reason why men pursue prostitutes and no single variable that differentiates users from nonusers" (2004, p. 184) and that there are in fact "many different motivations" (2004: 171). Thus, typologies of motivations have been developed that attempt to bring together the large range of reasons why men pay for sex, with Pitts *et al.* (2004) identifying three broad motivations: factors of ease (avoidance of relationship; desire for specific sexual acts; accessibility); engagement

(desire for company and emotional engagement of the sex worker); and arousal (desire for relief and negative association with drugs or alcohol). Some researchers and sex workers have focused on the mutuality of the commercial exchange, and the value of sex work as a gendered service (Joseph and Black, 2012), drawing on evidence that clients are usually ‘average’ men without any particular or inherently problematic characteristics (Sanders *et al*, 2009). Birch *et al*. (2015) report that the primary motivation from a sample of 309 men who completed a survey, focused around thrill and excitement and the attractiveness of the sex worker. They also found a lack of deviance in the sample and that clients purchased mainly conventional services like those sought in non-commercial contexts. Sanders (2008a) draws on data from 50 interview to list four motivational factors: emotional need (loneliness or lack of intimacy), life course stage (older men becoming widowed), unsatisfactory sexual relationships (deterioration of sexual or emotional aspect in non-commercial relationships), and difficulties with non-commercial dating mechanisms (disdain for casual sex). Sanders terms these ‘push’ factors – “aspects of men’s lives that are lacking” in contrast to ‘pull’ factors – aspects of the sex industry that are attractive and are promoted as “entertainment” (2008a, p. 40). ‘Pull’ factors refer to the more cultural aspects of the sex industry, its “nature ... what it offers and the glitzy ... images and promises that emanate from adverts, websites, stereotypes, pictures and the allurements of fantasy created specifically for those who want to trade cash for pleasure” (Sanders, 2008a, p. 45). Work from this perspective challenges the abolitionist accounts discussed above which limit men’s involvement to models of dominance and submission, by recognizing that paying for sex involves a complex range of motivations beyond sexual relief.

This work contests radical feminist analysis that fails to consider that some clients regularly visit the same women, who they may have developed an attachment to, and also seek to engage in communication outside the commercial sex encounter (Jin and Xu, 2016; Jones and

Hannem, 2018; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012; Sanders, 2008a, 2008b). In fact, “companionship, emotion, and relationships are important and desired aspects of the exchange for some clients” (Milrod and Monto, 2012: 805), with the Girl Friend Experience, a service that mimics aspects of non-commercial relationships such as kissing, companionship, romance and reciprocal pleasure, being a popular and sought out service. A desire for a more ‘authentic’ encounter is not only limited to off street sex work; Durant and Couch (2019) found that some Australian clients prefer to buy sex from street sex workers in their local area as street-based sex workers were more natural with their dress and demeanor mirroring the non-commercial, in comparison to the staged and sterile brothel environment. In addition, abolitionist accounts neglect the fact that sex workers make ‘demands’, such as determining what is, and is not available to clients. Abolitionist accounts can be further challenged by the evidence that men enjoy pleasuring the sex worker, whether this is illusory or not, and that some sex workers do experience sexual pleasure in encounters (Kontula, 2008; Hart, 1998; Jones and Hannem, 2018).

Despite increased research on male clients, theoretical advancements have been lacking (Weitzer, 2005a), particularly an in-depth understanding of how gender and masculinity shape men’s involvement in paid-for sex (Shumka *et al.*, 2017). This paper contributes to studies which emphasise the social context rather than psychological reasons for the purchase of sex (Shumka *et al.*, 2017) by exploring the multiple and diverse constructions of masculinity which frame male clients’ engagement with commercial sex. In doing so, we contribute to a growing body of work that challenges the view that men who pay for sex can solely be understood via the lens of male dominance and explore the interplay of emotion, intimacy and friendship to demonstrate the diverse masculinities that these men may inhabit.

Masculinity

Theories of masculinity are a useful lens through which to analyse consumer sex, as despite evidence that women are increasingly paying for sex (see Kingston *et al.*, forthcoming), in the UK the main client base remains male (buying from other males, females, or trans sex workers). Interestingly the limited work on male and female clients of male sex workers demonstrates that they share similar motivational factors (Scott *et al.*, 2014). (Kingston *et al.*, forthcoming) argue that some women who pay for sex from men require sex with no emotional ties and wish to pay for sex whilst maintaining their primary relationship. Additionally, female clients seek sexual partners with specific physical features or pay for sex to obtain an intimacy that they are unable to acquire elsewhere (Kingston *et al.*, forthcoming). Female sex tourists are often constructed as seeking romance with elements of courtship emphasized with the economic element downplayed (Opperman, 1999; Sanchez-Taylor, 2001). Heinskou (2018) explores the role of authenticity, love, emotion and intimacy in female sex tourism, where female sex tourists can transcend the normative categories of their everyday lives in terms of age, gender, race and economic position. The pathologization of those who pay for sex is thus usually directed towards men who buy sexual services from women, with women or men who buy sex from men excluded from such discourses. In fact, Scott *et al.*, (2014) argue that while male clients of female sex workers have been under increased public scrutiny, there has been some normalisation of male clients of male sex workers due to shifting conceptions of sexuality.

This pathologization is however often associated with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), whereby the dynamics of masculinity are the process by which patriarchy is reproduced. From this perspective, multiple masculinities coexist, with the dominant cultural form of hegemonic masculinity reflecting negative male attributes such as being aggressive, (hetero)sexually experienced, unemotional, with capital

attributed to men who most closely conform to this ideal, and other men and women subordinated. Successful hegemonic masculinity is about embodying cultural norms, and demonstrating one's heterosexuality and power (Robinson, 2005 30). Hegemonic masculinity operates within a framework of contemporary capitalism, with consumer society encouraging men to seek out alternative partners via modern 'architectures of choice' (Illouz, 2007). According to Illouz, the fantasies sold to men on the internet inevitably lead them to feel entitled to real-life sexual encounters with partners who are 'out of their league'. For many men, realizing these fantasies involves the purchase of sex.

While claims to the hegemonic masculine 'ideal' are fragile and tenuous, even for the limited number of men who represent it, Connell explains that most men benefit from the 'patriarchal dividend': "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (2005, p. 79). The importance of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool is its identification of the multiple, contested nature of male practices in the context of larger formations of gender structures (Whitehead, 2002). If, as Connell argues, masculinity is a set of socially constructed practices and ideals, or 'masculinising practices' (2000), focus should be on the social processes and relationships through which individuals conduct gendered lives, with sexual relationships as a key site of gendered practice.

Critiques of hegemonic masculinity have focused on issues of definition and the subjective nature of the concept's interpretation. In addition, Whitehead (2002) claims there is a need to move away from a structural analysis, to recognise the multiplicity of meanings of masculinity for men themselves, and variations in how it is understood, experienced and lived out in everyday life. Further limitations suggested by Cole (2009) include the lack of recognition of multiple, interconnected dominant masculinities; it is possible to be subordinated by hegemonic masculinity and still utilise dominant masculinities. Furthermore,

the structural emphasis in theories of male power lacks an incorporation of power as organised in complicity and resistance by individuals (Cole, 2009; Sheff, 2006). Recent work on masculinities, in particular the development of ‘inclusive masculinity theory’ (Anderson, 2010; Anderson and McCormack, 2016), takes a more interpretive view by avoiding reductive presumptions of men as stoic and emotionally withdrawn (Roberts, 2017).

The limited scholarship on masculinity, emotions and intimacy has reinforced stereotypes of men as emotionally incompetent or unsuccessful (Holmes, 2015). Birch *et al.* (2017) argue that work around contemporary masculinities which calls for a dualism in masculinities parallels shifts in sex work research. Birch *et al.* claim that work such as that by Demetriou (2001) Anderson (2005, 2008, 2010) have not explored the full breadth of maleness, which has “contributed to bias in understanding men and what it to be male’ (2017, p. 1109).

Sanders research (2008a), which explores the emotional intimacy involved in sex work, challenges hegemonic masculinity as the dominant form and has led to understandings around a greater spectrum of motivations for paying for sex. Thus, traditionally, with some more recent exceptions, research into the motivations of men who pay for sex with women has tended to reinforce existing gender stereotypes, with more research needed to obtain a broader understanding of masculinity that embraces diversity and difference (Birch *et al.*, 2017). This paper contributes to a limited but developing body of empirically grounded work on male clients, by drawing on qualitative interviews with men who purchase sex to gain a more nuanced understanding of their motivations. We develop an understanding of paid sex as a site of ‘masculinising practices’ (Connell, 2000) where men enact or process dominant masculine codes and explore the disappointments and ambivalences as well as the satisfaction that these men experience in these encounters.

The study

Responding to Agustin's (2005, 2007) call for research concerning the sex industry that addresses the complexities of relationships and sexuality, the study that underpins this article sought to first, move commercial sex research, away from hegemonic moralistic discourses and two-dimensional motivational accounts, and towards an analysis of the *social context* of paying for sex, in which both sexual commerce and the intimate sphere of wider society have changed. Second, exploring this social context, focusing on relationships and sexuality, the study attends to the broader cultural formations of heterosexual male identities in contemporary sexual culture. This approach generated the following research questions:

1. What can researching men who pay for sex tell us about being a man in wider society?
2. To what extent can research on men who pay for sex tell us about the cultural formations of masculine identity and the contention that men perform multiple identities which they construct through identification in relation to other people and by drawing on social and material resources?
3. If identities are fluid, what kind of maintenance and crossing of their identity boundaries, might men's transition into paid-for sex involve?
4. Rejecting universalising models of heterosexuality, how are heterosexual identities formulated across the life course? To what extent does the fluidity and multiplicity of heterosexuality challenge the dichotomy of commercial and non-commercial worlds?

Method.

Design

This project's overarching aim, to further understand the *other* in the shape of men who pay for sex, took Mills' sociological imagination as a starting point, aiming at understanding

“history, and biography and the relations between the two within society” (2000, p. 6). The goal was to describe life worlds “from the inside out”, from the point of view of those who participate (Flick *et al.*, 2004: 3), to explore engaging in paid-for sex and wider relationships from the perspective of the men involved. Thus, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were the best method of gaining the information required. Ethical approval was provided by the University of Sheffield.

Recruitment and Participants

The barriers to sex work research are now well versed and include issues such as stigma attached to its subject matter, participant desire of anonymity the perceived dangerousness of participants, problems with ethical approval, access, recruitment, stereotypes and researcher safety (Dewey *et al.*, 2018; Hammond and Kingston, 2014; Hammond, 2018; Sinha, 2017; Shaver, 2005). However, despite such challenges a variety of successful projects about male clients have been undertaken, using a range of methods for access, recruitment and data collection. These have included using sex worker accounts or referrals (Lever and Dolnick, 2000; O’Connell Davidson, 1996; Shumka *et al.*, 2017); working through sexual health clinics (Ward *et al.*, 2005); advertising in brothels or training brothel staff to conduct surveys (Birch, 2015; Plumridge *et al.*, 1997; Xantidis and McCabe, 2000); undertaking on-street interviews (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996); using media advertisements (Birch 2015; Grenz, 2005); advertising in sports clubs (Chen, 2017); drawing on large scale national survey data (Monto, 1999; Jones *et al.*, 2014; Joseph and Black, 2012); police interviews for secondary data (Sharpe, 1998); ethnographies of sex work spaces (Durant and Couch, 2019; Hoigard and Finstad, 1992); using data gathered from clients on prevention or education programmes (Joseph and Black, 2012; Wahab, 2006); content analysis of commercial sex websites (Horswill and Weitzer, 2018; Soothill and Sanders, 2005; Earle and Sharp, 2008; Holt and

Blevins, 2007; Milrod and Monto, 2012; Pettinger 2011; Pruitt and Krull, 2011); engaging with the online sex work community to recruit for participants (Birch *et al.*, 2017; Jin and Xu, 2016; Jones and Hannem, 2018; Milrod and Monto, 2012; Sanders, 2008a); and advertising via non-sex work specific classified adverts (Atchison and Burnett, 2016; Huysman, 2018). For this study participants were recruited via posting a message on an online commercial sex message board, supplemented by an article in the local paper (see Hammond, 2018). After interviewing began, a snow-ball sample was generated as participants posted on other forums. After the initial post in November 2007, a further post was made in April 2008, encouraging participants to take part with an explicit emphasis on MSN Messenger and telephone interviews. In total, thirty-one participants were recruited via online forums and 4 from the newspaper article. Participants were sought from around the UK, but the majority, were based in England.

Of the thirty-five participants, nineteen were currently married; six had been married yet had lost their wives due to divorce or death and ten were single. The average age was 50, with ages ranging between 29 and 69. Twenty-eight men were aged 40 and over, hence the higher average age. Educational achievement varied from no qualifications to having PhDs, and employment similarly ranged from being unemployed to holding prestigious jobs. Twenty-two of the men had children, yet none of these were the single men. A small number of participants (n=4) revealed that when they first started to pay for sex, they visited street sex workers, participants mainly direct their activities towards independent and agency women¹ who advertise on the internet². Some of the men knew precisely how many women they had seen, when and where. Others had no idea. The frequency of their visits varied and, as some

¹ This refers to the most *common* location the men visit now, in some cases it was hard to distinguish the difference between independent women and those working through an agency as many participants used the internet and the term ‘independent’ to cover any women who were advertising on the web. Thus independents, agency, parlours and brothel workers have been grouped together.

² Only one man alluded to the fact that he still might visit street sex workers, however he was unclear, and this wasn’t probed further

men had been involved for a long time, their patterns had changed. Some men were going once a week and some only a few times a year – there was no set patterns. Some men had been involved in paying for sex for only a few months while others had been paying for sex for 30 years. Again, age of first involvement varied from 17 years of age to 66.

Interviews

The interview schedule (see online supplementary file) was made up of 12 main questions and a range of probes for following up were also drawn upon (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). As more interviews were conducted, the interview schedule was adapted to include extra information that consistently came up in interviews that warranted further explicit inquiry, such as the role of the internet in generating and maintaining relationships amongst clients. There were, therefore, differences between the first interview schedule and the last. However, the first three participants returned for a second face-to-face interview, and so the data collected was similar to the later interviews. Additionally, most of the remaining first fifteen participants interviewed agreed to a second follow up interview either by phone or face-to-face. Second interviews were introduced for two main reasons. First, to gain clarification of any points of uncertainty or due to a lack of detail. Secondly, to offer the possibility to ask questions that developed during subsequent interviews. The aim of second interviews was to obtain consistent data across all participants. As key themes developed across the first interviews, second interviews allowed these to be returned to and explored in greater detail.

Data Analysis

The analysis began during transcription with NH transcribing all the data verbatim alongside making notes after interview and during transcription. The transcripts were all read to obtain an overall feel for the data. Following this initial stage, data were coded and structured in 4

steps. (1) Analysis started with coding each line of transcription so as not to lose valuable insight or context of the data. However, whilst this was helpful in providing in-depth knowledge of the data, it did not provide analytic insights and instead created a confusing range of painstaking descriptive comments and was overwhelming due to the volume of data. After several interviews this process was stopped. (2) Instead, to summarise the descriptive highlights from each interview, a short summary which aimed to describe what had been said in a brief, one-page format was developed. This allowed the analysis to progress and during this process five top-level *descriptive* themes emerged. These were: the commercial sex industry, heterosexual relationships, policy and law, masculinities, and sexuality. (3) Each interview and second interview together were loaded into NVIVO and coded under these themes. This was essential to see what the data were describing, and what was being discussed, yet it was still not particularly analytic. However, from this *organisation* of the data, several things became apparent. There was a lot of talk about movement into being a man who pays for sex, the changing and dynamic nature of commercial and non-commercial relationships, and control of the self or the encounter, especially with the use of money and time as constraints or the women having control. From this, three analytical themes were produced; (shifting) identities, (transition of) relationships and (mobility of) power. (4) The organised data were then reread within this *analytic framework*.

[Masculine Success, failure and disappointment](#)

Hegemonic masculinity depicts men as sexually assertive, emotionally detached, and with unlimited sexual desire, implying compulsory heterosexuality, homophobia and misogyny, with ‘real’ sex being defined by vaginal heterosexual penetration with an active subject and passive object (Allen, 2003; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003; Jackson, 1993; Lamb *et al.*, 2018). Men’s involvement in paid-for sex is often framed by their desire for sexual pleasure

and variety (Joseph and Black, 2012). In contrast to other work which focuses on intimacy (Jones and Hannem, 2017; Milrod and Weitzer 2012; Sanders, 2008a), some participants in this study discussed sex as a physical need and urge, with an awareness of the temporal nature of sexuality:

I guess I felt a need and knew how it could be satisfied and looked on the web. (Jeff, 69, married)

You know once you get past 50 you're on limited time to experience things ... doesn't matter what age you are, you still get those urges (Josh, 54, married).

my wife offers limited vanilla sex, I need more than. I have found a girl who understands what I like ... so I see her when I can to satisfy my needs (Huw, 47, married)

These narratives with their references to 'needs' and 'urges' suggest the investment of participants in a 'male sexual drive discourse', which normalises a higher sexual drive in men, making them want to have sex with (multiple) women (Hollway, 1984). Hollway claims this drive is framed as a healthy biological urge to reproduce. Other research (Mooney-Somers and Ussher, 2010) has also suggested that men are motivated to seek out a greater number of sexual encounters and partners and describe their urges as biologically driven. Paying for sex, it has been argued, provides male clients the opportunity to affirm their "their masculinity, sexual skill and sexual desirability to women" (Huysamen and Boonzaier, 2015, p. 551), reaffirming hypermasculinity and their hegemonic masculine identity. For some participants, the male sexual drive discourse was both motivation and justification for paying for sex, as the urge for sex with women is constructed as an essential need.

In this discourse, women were positioned as the gatekeepers to sex. Access to women's sexuality either as wives, long-term partners or through casual sex was often viewed as problematic, with sex workers providing encounters that were not easily available elsewhere. John (40, married) revealed dissatisfaction about his access to 'fulfilling sex' within his marriage, going on to state that he would like a relationship where: '[I] didn't feel that I had to apologise for having a demanding cock, really ... It kind of feels that way in the context of my marriage.' Again, the male sexual drive discourse is dominant in John's discussion of his sexuality, which he reduces to his 'demanding cock'. Similarly, Oliver explained that:

If I would try to have sex ... Probably about six times last year.... one time, I was told, "You're obsessed by sex", and I thought, "hang on a minute", well not really. I'm just trying to be a husband and do my thing and have a bit of fun a bit of relaxation and I feel as if I'm being rejected. (Oliver, 63, married)

When Oliver is sexually disappointed in his marriage, he feels justified in seeking out paid for sex; he equates sexual access to his wife as 'being a husband' despite her reluctance. Partnered participants often complained about how their sexual needs were not being met within long-term heterosexual couple relationships, and how this was unfair. Milrod and Monto similarly report finding older married clients experience "sexual frustration and disappointment directed at their wives who were perceived as having rejected years of their sexual advances" (2017, p. 74). While most long-term married couples experience a decline in sexual relations, passion and intimacy, due to a range of factors (Ashkam, 1984; Carpenter *et al.*, 2009; Duncombe and Marsden, 1996; Mooney-Somers, 2010), the married participants interviewed here sought to maintain their relationships while fulfilling their sexual needs with commercial sex. The belief that heterosexual relations are predicated on male sexual desire and female sexual passivity underpins many of the participants' accounts, as when refused

sex by their partners they feel within their masculine right to obtain it elsewhere.

While paid sex provides a space to enact ‘masculinising practices’ (Connell, 2000) for those participants who position themselves as sexually potent, where they can develop a sense of their own hegemonic masculinity, other participants displayed subordinate masculinities. As Lynn Segal (2007) points out, rather than enjoying sexual dominance, most men experience their greatest anxieties and uncertainties through heterosexual sex. Challenges in accessing women, because of failure to meet the hegemonic ideal, were articulated by several of the men interviewed:

“Geek needs girl, geek can’t find girl, geek pays for sex” would be how I would summarise it, in my early 20’s really” (Mark, 47, married).

Mark explains that his masculine failure to attract women, embodied by his ‘geekiness’ as a younger man, led him to paid-for sex. Similarly, Chen (2016) argues that working class Taiwanese men who travel to China to pay for sex were often excluded from non-commercial relationships at home and were waiting to be chosen, whereas in paid-for sex they were on the opposite side of the dyad, choosing who to have sex with. Research has suggested that men who pay for sex because they are unable to attract a partner may experience this as a weakness or humiliation (Joseph and Black, 2012), however, many of the men interviewed here freely admitted to lack of masculine success in this area:

‘A friend of mine, I just confided in him and told him I was still a virgin at 32. So he said, “You’re joking” and I said “No!” so he said, “We’ve got to do something about this”, and he did, he advised me to go and find someone’ (Brad, 52, single).

Brad’s desire to ‘confess’, coupled with his friend’s reaction that they needed to ‘do something about this’ suggests that Brad’s being a virgin did not accord with hegemonic

ideals of masculine sexual experience. In contrast to other research suggesting that young men who did not achieve hegemonic ideals could be bullied (Flood, 2008), Brad's friend was supportive and understanding. However, parallel to Flood's findings he did seek to integrate him into the world of heterosexual experience. Brad's experience of sharing his anxieties with a supportive male friend, is perhaps indicative of a shift in men's practices towards 'inclusive masculinity' (Anderson 2010; Anderson and McCormack, 2016), which emphasises the presence of a less competitive, more emotional masculinity, particularly amongst younger men, at least in their relationships with each other. Hegemonic masculinity, in terms of sexual dominance over women, retains its currency in these accounts, however it coexists with participants' articulations of their anxieties and emotional and intimate needs. Other participants reflected with regret and disappointment on how their sexual performances in non-commercial contexts were not validated; John described how being a client is his only 'sexual outlet' and he wishes for something different:

[I'd like a marital relationship] where's there's no bullshit involved, where I don't have to put on any masks, where I can, I can be sexual in myself really ... take my clothes off and be who I am and just say, you know this is, this is me, this is what I am, I am a man, let me be a man. (John, 40, married)

Such discrepancies concerned men's sense of themselves as failures in their non-commercial sexual and relationship contexts. Charlie expressed regret about the life choices that had led to him becoming a client:

Ending up punting is not how I'd hoped it would go ... There's a tinge of regret in some punting experiences ... [it] brings home that things have not gone well in my life in sexual ways ... things didn't work out ideally in the way I'd have liked them to have worked out in my marriage. (Charlie, 63, married)

This sense of regret has been reported elsewhere and other research has suggested that some married clients would stop paying for sex if their primary relationships became more sexual (Milrod and Monto, 2017). The privileging of sex within a couple relationship as more meaningful than casual or paid encounters reflects heteronormative hierarchies of intimacy (Budgeon, 2008), with sex and love bracketed as ‘the ultimate peak of intimacy’ (Jamieson, 1998, p. 108). Within this context, commercial sex is seen as something secondary or problematic for some of the participants and frequently reflected the disappointment associated with normative heterosexual masculinity (Craib, 1994; Cornwall, 2016), as idealised aspirations and expectations become ever more difficult for men to fulfil. Men’s disappointment in their partner, sex life and a general sense of the ‘failure of daily life’ (Illouz, 2012, p. 218), is a dominant cultural trope and a shared narrative of many participants. For some they were unable to gain access to women they considered sexually attractive or the type of sex they fantasized about, or their relationships were sexually unrewarding, and this was coupled with the general failure to live up to unattainable hegemonic ideals and a sense of time passing. The purchase of sex, and the attendant fantasy proved a way to navigate such disappointments in everyday life.

In sum, the primary reasons participants offered for engaging in paid sex were associated with validation of their masculine identities, framed in terms of the demanding male sex drive, and sexual voraciousness, or because of failure to achieve sexual success in non-commercial interactions and general disappointment with non-commercial sex. This supports other work around men’s motivations of paid-for sex which found that men wanted a variety of partners, were unhappy with their sex life in their current relationships or were struggling to find a partner at all (Chen, 2017; Milrod and Monto, 2012, 2017; Pitts *et al.*, 2004; Sanders, 2008a; Weitzer, 2005b, 2009).

Consumer masculinities: rationalising the purchase of sex

Constructions of hegemonic masculinity are often based on assumptions of male rationality, which is key in distinguishing men from emotional femininity (Connell, 2000; Illouz, 2007; Jackson and Scott, 1997; Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004). Masculine identification with reason has meant the suppression of emotions and anxieties for men in everyday life (Seidler, 1992, 1994, 1997). Men are therefore socialised to understand their bodies as separate and discrete objects that function almost independently from their emotions (Monaghan and Robertson, 2012), which enables the disconnection between sex and emotion that underpins dominant constructions of male sexuality. By taking a 'dispassionate' stance (Williams, 2001) towards their non-commercial situations and 'objectively' analysing their options, participants were able to come to the rational solution of paying for sex. Mark explains that for him paid sex provides a solution to the issues in his marriage:

In real terms we've been married 23 years. I love her more now than I did then, despite all these suicide attempts and all the other issues ... People often don't believe them when, [I say] "I saw a prostitute to try and save my relationship, to try and keep my relationship going"... It's trying to find a safety valve, an outlet for, erm, things that aren't being catered for at the moment. My wife's ill, what do I do? (Mark, 47, married)

While Mark expresses emotion, in the form of love and care for his wife, paying for sex is discussed as an emotion-free, rational decision made in the context of his relationship. The compartmentalization of love and sex was present for several participants, who viewed commercial sex as a bounded encounter for accessing emotion-free sex free from responsibility and commitment (Bernstein, 2001). This enables men to compartmentalise their identities by keeping the persona of a good husband at home, alongside expressing and

fulfilling their sexual desires and enacting their full heterosexual masculine identity in paid-for sex (see Huysamen, 2019).

Rationally, money offers participants a logical way to pursue pleasure while protecting existing relationships, with the commoditised exchange a way of controlling the emotional aspects associated with sex. A rational management discourse, in which the focus is on an individualistic pursuit of pleasure (Jackson and Scott, 1997) was explicit within participants' narratives. The rational management discourse was made possible by what McNair (2002) calls the 'democratisation of desire', an increased accessibility of finding out about sexual commerce, due to the industry's expansion, and the liberalization of heterosexuality (Hawkes, 1996), which has entailed an increase in the commodification of sexuality and desire. That ease of obtaining some sort of sex, was a key driver for participants. As John explained:

There's, there's no need to, for me to negotiate, er, a possible sexual encounter it's obvious ... I'm going there for some kind of sexual experience. (John, 40, married)

The rationalization of commercial sex is often framed in economic terms. Paid sex enables the challenges of dating etiquette to be side stepped and was frequently referred to in comparison to the financial cost of casual sex. Russell, explained that he preferred to spend the same amount of money obtaining guaranteed sex and conversation:

I spend about 40 quid on taxi there and back, maybe about 100 quid on drinks and if I multiply that by 2 weeks, so that's 280 quid. ... So just like weighing that up against having a kind of professional coming into your hotel, you're spending the same amount of money but you're guaranteed to kind of have sex (Russell, 29, single)

Participants frequently expressed a transactional understanding of heterosexual sex, which legitimized commercial sex as more 'honest'. The availability of sex workers, as opposed to the unpredictability of casual encounters, was also important to Joe:

I mean, I'm 56 years old. I'm not unattractive, I think. I'm not going to go to a club and pull, let's face it. So what am I going to do when I want to have sex? ... If I phone this woman, if I pay her this money, I know that I will have sex with her. It's not like a maybe if I take her out for dinner and spend a week or 2 chatting her up, which isn't my thing anyway. I feel, in a sense I feel that is more, erm, sleazy than just going, "Look love if I give you 100 quid will you suck my cock you know?" Erm, it's just much more honest, it's much more straightforward. "I don't want to get married and have your babies", you know. "I don't want to settle down and make a home with you, I just want to fuck. So if I give you some money, can we fuck?" "Yes that's fine", and you know after we've fucked I'll say, "Bye thank you very much" and I might never see you again, er, it's that. It's that easy availability is something I want some of the time and I don't want to be tied for you know years to somebody, just so if I'm lucky I can get to fuck ... That's the attraction the fact that I can just go, "Hello ... I'll be round at 7.30, I want to do x, y and z", and she'll go, "Fine, that'll cost you x pounds". (Joe, 56, divorced, single)

What was evident in the men's stories, was a rationalised 'straightforward' process by which men used their economic resources to address issues of sexual dissatisfaction. The emergence under neoliberalism of a new entrepreneurial masculinity (Cornwall, 2016) puts individual satisfaction at its centre, which is available to those who can afford it. This project of individual self-fulfillment (Illouz, 2007, p.203) legitimizes desire and fantasy as a basis of action, which are realized through consumption, literally the purchase of sex for the men

interviewed here. The development of sexuality as something to be governed according to neoliberal principles of managerial discourse and performance imperatives is argued to have fundamentally altered sexual relationships (Tyler, 2004), and here it appears that participants apply rational principles to their pursuit of paid sex. Yet accounts of the purchase of sex as a rational, emotion-free action coexisted with discussions of intimacy and emotionality, as explored in the following section.

Attachment and intimacy in commercial sex

More recent developments in sex work research have sought to emphasise elements of friendship and intimacy in commercial sex (Birch *et al.*, 20175; Jones and Hannem, 2017; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012; Sanders, 2008a), challenging accounts that men seek out sex as an act of violence. For many of the participants, the emotional intimacy represented by friendship was important, and while some were motivated by the idea of emotionless sex, they often developed attachments to the sex workers they visited. The data reveal that sharing activities, talking, support and reciprocity, usually identified as features of platonic friendship (Allan, 2003; Pahl and Spencer, 2003; Walker, 1994), were common. Beyond the rational, transactional understanding of the encounter, the importance of companionship, along with the sensory pleasures of intimate contact, emerged in participants' discussions of their engagement in commercial sex, as John explained:

[I] enjoyed her company, I enjoyed talking with her, I enjoyed what she looked like, I enjoyed what she smelled like, you know I enjoyed being with her ... The social encounter part ... the sheer enjoyment of somebody's company. (John, 40, married)

The pleasure participants obtained from sex work extended beyond sexual gratification, with many expressing enjoyment from the general encounter with a woman. Participants

expressed awareness that the emotional labour was part of the transaction, and that they were ‘paying’ for attention and affection as well as sexual services, with other research suggesting that men who take part in sexual commerce are fully aware that they are buying into an illusion (Frank, 1998). Yet when this emotionality failed to materialise it spoiled the encounter: “I want there to be an emotional part with the girl definitely. That’s sort of, where if I see a girl where there’s no emotional part at all, I see her once” (Mark, 47, married).

For some participants this conversation and company developed into emotional engagement, with intimacy based on mutual knowledge and understanding. Despite becoming involved in commercial sex as a rational choice to contain their emotions, and pursuing individual pleasure, paradoxically, emotional engagement was necessary. Images of men in control of their emotions were rejected by participants, as Lupton (1993) suggests, when in private men can ‘let go’:

With good Escorts, I literally fall in love (at least for 55 or 115 min), but serious, I sometimes have visions of how they would be good partners, good mothers. don’t quite know, but some dates are very intense. resulting in some very exciting moments together ...visions of things we could do together, romantic walks (done, no sex, just handholding) meals (done) and endless cuddles on a bed. but also: long conversations in person or on MSN. worse visions: imagine having a child together. starting again. (the complications are unimaginable) but some ladies seem like Great potential partners (Harold*, 43, married)

In this way, encounters with sex workers represent both a normative masculine practice, as an outlet for men’s perceived biological ‘urges’, as well as an intimate space for men to retreat from outside demands and expectations. The extension of the encounter such as via long conversations, is perceived as a marker of intimacy and as a sign of mutuality; an indication

that the sex worker enjoys spending time with him (Jones and Hannem, 2018). However, for Harold, this is confusing and the bounded nature of the encounter weakens as he begins to imagine his commercial partners as potential marriage material (see Milrod and Weitzer, 2012). For Jason (51, single), repeat visits have enabled deeper relationships to develop (Sanders, 2008a). For him, these visits have increased his ability to relax and relate to the women, and to enjoy feelings of compatibility, which he described as challenging in non-commercial contexts because of his Asperger syndrome:

You know I've met one or two that I've been to several times ... You can actually get together and relate to them better... And other ones'll actually go out of their way to make you feel a bit better. And when I had that depression I met one and she, she, well she's got a daughter who's got Aspergers syndrome. So she helped me and, erm, quite often I went to her and we just had a bit of a cuddle and she'd just jack me off. That was enough ... One of, two of them, it's hard to describe, you just fit together ... You get somebody who's actually compatible with you, you know what to expect and you can really relax into it. (Jason, 51, single)

Jason's account highlights the mundane familiarity of these encounters, as well as the care involved, which are assumed aspects of socially privileged, domestic relationships, yet here represents an essential element of paid sex. Research suggests the existence of a range of friend-like relationships (Pahl and Spencer, 2003); the 'girlfriend experience' (Sanders, 2008a) type of arrangement described by Jason suggests a managed intimacy or companionship. However, for some clients these regular visits allowed the development of a genuine friendship, something both implicitly and explicitly stated by the participants. Matt recognised that deeper involvement could be problematic, but nevertheless developed what

he experienced as friendships with the women he saw, in terms of emotional involvement and support:

I get close to and I do get emotionally involved with the people that I see here. I'm conscious that, of the fact that, it is a commercial relationship and, and I'm conscious of the fact that if you took the money side out of it, I probably wouldn't be sleeping with these people. But, erm, I feel an emotional closeness to them, if they're in trouble I try to help them. If I was in trouble they are the kind of people that I would kind of go to and ask for some understanding and sympathy or emotional support. Er, I think of them as very close friends. (Matt, 58, married)

'Settling down' with one or more sex worker was a common practice. Whilst encounters with multiple sex workers mirror the act of 'playing the field', a key element of hegemonic masculinity, the process of 'settling down' sits in opposition to hegemonic ideals. Huw (47, married) described: 'I have punted with 10 working girls so far, but only one has become a repeat, or a regular. It's a close comparison to playing the field then settling down with a girlfriend.' Similarly, Josh describes the process of becoming a 'regular' as one that requires a sense of normality, emotions and attachment in a process that has parallels with committing to partner:

once I've handed the money over, it feels quite loving. I can't divorce sex from emotion, that's my, I don't know if problem or not ... I'm learning about meself and women. I know a lot more about how to please a woman than I've ever done with me wife, put it that way. So she's a good teacher ... from a practical point of view, it's great fun ... But there's all the messy emotions tied up in it that you've got to be aware of and keep under control. (Josh, 56, married)

Intimacy and emotional closeness were identified as crucial to the relationship between participants and the sex workers they visited, with many expressing vulnerability and attachment, beyond expectations of sociability on the part of the sex worker. While the emotional aspects of the encounter are not always identified as initial motivations, they emerge as an essential driver for many of the participants' engagement with paid sex. These narratives highlight the elements of friendship that are present within commercial sex encounters: trust, support, knowledge, joint activities and emotional engagement, elements of the mundane that are nonetheless experienced within sexual commerce. Such elements are in contrast to constructions of hegemonic masculinity which emphasises emotional detachment. Men's expectations of commercial sex encounters are thus far removed from established stereotypes of what is offered during brisk encounters on street corners. Many of the clients appear to be constantly negotiating the emotional and rational boundaries of paid sex, emphasising the transactional nature of the encounters, and yet managing their emotional attachments to the sex workers they visit. This reflects shifts in the market towards a more 'leisure' based industry, providing a complete experience (Brents and Hausbeck, 2007), which demands an encounter involving significant emotional labour on the part of the sex worker, with our findings here aligning with other research (Bernstein 2007; Birch *et al.*, 2017; Hart, 1998; Jones and Hannem, 2018; Lever and Dolnick, 2000; Milrod and Monto, 2012, 2017; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012; Sanders, 2008a, 2008b).

While recognising the emotionality attached to paid sex for many male clients, we should also be cautious of interpreting these motivations as preferable to those based on overtly sexual desires, or dispassionate, rational decision-making. The idea that emotions such as love are inherently more progressive than others tends to obscure how they may sustain gender inequalities (de Boise and Hearn, 2017, p. 788), such as power imbalances between clients and sex workers. Furthermore, research has shown that men invested in the hegemonic

ideal often have a more positive attitude to the sex workers they visit than clients who identify with more vulnerable or fragile masculinities (Joseph and Black, 2012). That sex as an expression of intimacy is somehow more meaningful or valid than the type of sex available in casual encounters reflects wider notions of the ‘specialness’ of sex (Hawkes, 1996; Jamieson, 1998; van Hooff, 2015) that gloss over heteronormative frameworks. The research presented here suggests that rather than viewing paid sex as a distinct type of relation, it has much in common with other aspects of heterosexual relationships, including the imbalance of sexual and emotional labour. Yet the expectations and experiences of companionship, intimacy and in some cases deeper attachments and friendships for the men interviewed here, are at odds with abolitionist feminist accounts (Barry, 1995; Farley, 2004, 2018; Farley *et al.*, 2017; Jeffreys 1997; Raymond, 1998), and other oversimplified representations of sex work as simply men paying for ‘access to women’s bodies’.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates both the continuing relevance of theorizations of hegemonic masculinity in interpreting men’s engagement with commercial sex, as well as the limitations of this framework. Hegemonic constructions of masculinity continue to underpin participant’s accounts, with sexual prowess a marker of success for men (Connell, 2005; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2012), and essentialist understandings of masculinity and femininity apparent. The overlying motivational issues for the men interviewed correlate with those reported in other studies (see Birch *et al.*, 2017; Campbell, 1998; Jones and Hannem, 2018; McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Milrod and Monto, 2012¹ Milrod and Weitzer, 2012; Monto, 2000; Pitts *et al.*, 2004; Sanders, 2008a; Weitzer, 2005b, 2009). Participants described a variety of reasons for paying for sex: dissatisfaction in a current relationship, lack of success with conventional dating mechanisms, wanting something more, and commercial

sex as a straightforward way to fill a gap in their life. The findings detailed in this paper suggest complex, diverse motivations for men who engage with paid sexual services, which are not easily reducible to types or categories. Participants frequently referred to paid sex as a necessary outlet for their masculine ‘needs’ and ‘urges’, while for others paying for sex represented a transgression from hegemonic ideals they were unable to attract women in non-commercial settings. The financial nature of the encounter was also interpreted as more ‘honest’ than non-commercial sex, with heterosexual relationships generally understood as transactional in nature. Yet this exists alongside articulations of the intimacy and closeness that paid sex affords within a controlled environment, where men are supported in managing emotions, that if displayed in other contexts could result in their masculinity being challenged (Birch *et al*, 2017, p.1117).

Participants in this study seemed to require an encounter that entailed significant emotional labour on the part of the sex worker, mirroring findings in other studies (see Carbonero and Gómez Garrido, 2018). At a surface level, friendliness and conversation were essential, moving through to a complete experience mirroring non-commercial encounters, with strong emotions attached. These experiences and expectations, and the ways in which the sex industry accommodates them, are at odds with some feminist accounts (Barry, 1995; Farley, 2004, 2018; Farley *et al.*, 2017; Jeffreys 1997; Raymond, 1998), and other representations of sex work as simply men paying for ‘access to women’s bodies’. For the men interviewed, paying for sex was framed as a normative masculine practice, rather than a deviant or marginalized act. The men negotiate commercial sex in the context of their other heterosexual relationships, and it appears to be embedded in wider gender relations, rather than operate as a distinct type of interaction. While findings are presented here in terms of how they relate to conventional hegemonic scripts, rational or ‘consumer’ masculinities and more emotional motivations, for participants there was often an overlap between various

motivational factors. Distinctions between the rational and emotional are increasingly blurred (de Boise and Hearn, 2017), and this was reflected in participants' discussions about their sexual urges and attachments. The range of motivations speaks to a variety of characteristics and behaviors associated with multiple masculinities, supporting the findings from Birch *et al* (2017). The desire for intimacy, closeness, female friendship, conversation sit in opposition to the way that men have traditionally been theorized. Thus, hegemonic masculinity provides only a partial account of the range of behaviors and characteristics expressed in paid-for sex, which participants use as a way to negotiate the expectations, ambivalences and disappointments of everyday life and relationships.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the data collected. The socio-cultural context in which sex is bought and sells takes many forms (see Agustin, 2005, 2007). Although street sex work has visibly decreased in the United Kingdom, some women still sell sex on the street; these women do not operate online as outlined above (Ellison and Weitzer, 2016). Buying sex from street-based sex workers is frowned upon within online sex work communities (see Sanders, 2008a); thus, clients soliciting street-based sex workers may be less actively involved in engaging with the online community. The recruitment methods generated most participants who read comments on online sex work forums despite attempts to recruit via other offline means such as the local media, thus the focus here remains on the various forms of off-street sex work. Additionally, despite repeated calls to criminalize clients in England with success in Northern Ireland, the purchase of sex remains legal in England, unless the "prostitute subjected to force" (Policing and Crime Act, 2009). Thus, caution must be taken in terms of generalizing the findings across the spectrum of the sex industry. The sample is mostly made up of older men; it is unknown why younger males are underrepresented, speculatively this

may be as there are fewer younger men online or because younger men felt less able to come forward to discuss paying for sex, however we have no evidence to support this. The sample here mirrors Sanders, which drew on similar methods in the UK recruiting more older and partnered men with limited racial diversity (Sanders, 2008a). However, despite these limitations, as argued elsewhere the aim here is not “to make sweeping generalisations about all clients across the spectrum of the industry. Instead the aim is to offer some data on a sensitive topic of which little is known, by speaking to a group that are problematic to access, thus contributing to a developing literature about male clients while recognizing the limits to generalisability.” (Hammond, 2018: 5).

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