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The Invisible Men: Analyzing the Virtual Subculture of England's Punters

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THE INVISIBLE MEN: ANALYZING THE VIRTUAL SUBCULTURE
OF ENGLAND'S PUNTERS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Sociology
in the College of Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2019

Major Professor: Lin Huff-Corzine

ABSTRACT

Research on prostitution has flourished over the last few decades with a new emphasis on the online sex market. To study the online market, researchers have utilized qualitative methods to investigate escort review websites. Coding for violent rhetoric and perceived intimacy are two conventional techniques that have been utilized using qualitative methods. Other areas investigated include the overall characteristics of sex buyers, price variation, and socialization of buyers. What has lacked in current literature has been the use of quantitative methods to study what factors influence the presence of positive reviews.

To expand on limited existing literature utilizing quantitative methods, the current study used data from an escort review website titled *Punternet.com* for the years 2015 through 2017. *Punternet* is a public website where sex buyers (punters in the UK) can review sex workers and discuss aspects of sex buying culture in community forums. Factors that influence the presence of positive reviews were investigated including various sexual acts (oral, anal, vaginal, manual, group sex), session variables (length, cost, location, climax, condom usage, and intimacy), and a factor related to the type of sex worker (escort). Symbolic interactionism theory was used to explain the presence of intimacy within the reviews. The results from a binary logistic regression indicate that a variety of different factors are significant in regard to influencing the presence of positive reviews. For example, the odds that positive reviews occurred were increased when intimacy, or perceived intimacy, occurred throughout the sessions and whether at least one climax occurred. Future research in this area should continue to use quantitative methods to investigate what factors influence intimacy within the sessions, due to the high significance finding in the present research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, prostitution has been met with controversy and mixed policy responses ranging from prohibition to legalization and decriminalization. Even when sex work is legalized or decriminalized, it is still faces an over-emphasis on issues such as drugs, violence, and exploitation (Home Office, 2016). As a result, sex work continues to remain a controversial topic for policy debate. The commercial sex industry tends to be equated with two contrasting views: sex work is both "good" and "healthy" or explicitly deviant (Bettio, Della Giusta, & Di Tommaso, 2017; Boris, Gilmore, Parrenas, 2010).

Sex work policy in England and Wales has remained relatively unchanged since the 1950s after the enactment of the Sexual Offence Act of 1956 and the Wolfenden Committee of 1957 (Hubbard, Sanders, & Scoular, 2016). The policy is considered quasi-legal with selling sex legalized, but the vast majority of activities surrounding it defined as crimes (soliciting, curb-crawling or street soliciting, brothel-keeping, or profiting). Sex work has continually been viewed through a gendered lens, where the female sex worker is equated as someone being exploited and in need of protection from the government and criminal justice system. There has also been a recent policy emphasis that conflates sexual exploitation with prostitution with little recognition that some undertake and consider commercial sex as a legitimate form of labor (Pitcher, 2015; Cusick, Kinnell, Brooks-Gordon, & Campbell, 2009; Hubbard et al., 2016). Recently a change has been implemented in how the Home Office (i.e., legislative body in the UK) has viewed certain aspects of sex work. The 2016 report on prostitution requested a change to the brothel keeping laws that prevent independent sex workers from working collaboratively for safety reasons (Home

Office, 2016). This policy shift may be an indication of a new direction for sex work policy emphasis in England and Wales.

While the sex market continues to be shrouded in secrecy, primarily due to the rise of the online sex market, there are still relatively large numbers of sex workers in the United Kingdom. Currently, estimates put the number of sex workers between 80,000 and 100,000 workers (Kinnell, 1999; Cusick et al., 2009; Pitcher, 2015). It is important to note that there are currently no comprehensive statistics on the actual numbers of those working in the sex industry in the United Kingdom because of the hidden nature of sex work. Many figures have been found by surveying all service providers in the country and then using multipliers to come up with a final statistic (Cusick et al., 2009; Kinnell, 1999). There has also been a shift from street-based sex work to the online sex market which has produced an expanded sex market. This shift started in the early 2000s and continues today with the vast majority of workers now involved in the online sex market (Pitcher, 2015; Cusick et al., 2009 Campbell, Sanders, Scoular, Pitcher, & Cunningham, 2018; Wietzer, 2005).

To fill the gap in the literature utilizing quantitative methods, the current study focused on the online commercial sex market in England. *PunterNet,* an escort review website where sex buyers can review and rate sex workers and discuss their experiences with other buyers, was quantitatively coded and analyzed. The reviews were coded into four different categories including overview, punter information, provider information, and activity. The codes were analyzed using a binary logistic regression to see if positive recommendations were impacted by a variety of other factors including specific sex act, condom usage, and intimacy (girlfriend experience). Throughout this paper, sex work is defined as the sale of sexual services for money or goods (Scoular & O'Neill, 2007). Also, throughout this paper sex buyers will either be referred to as "punters," which

is a term used readily throughout England, or sex buyers. The purpose of this study is to develop

an understanding of the online sex market in England and investigate what factors influence

positive reviews.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Sex Work Laws in England</u>

Laws regarding the sale of sex have remained relatively unchanged in England since the introduction of the *Sexual Offences Act 1956*, which criminalized exploiters and third party people gaining from selling sex. Buying and selling sex is not technically illegal in much of England (although it is in Northern Ireland). However, the vast majority of the activities associated with prostitution are illegal including pimping, maintaining brothels, exploitation, child prostitution, and street or any public prostitution. Legislation regarding prostitution and solicitation dates back to 1956, but is now scattered across numerous acts such as the *Sex Offences Act 1956*, *Street Offences Act 1959*, *Crime and Policing Act 2001*, and the *Policing and Crime Act 2009*, with the most recent being the *Serious Crime Act 2015* (Feis-Bryce, 2018; Hubbard et al., 2016). In regard to indoor sex markets, the most relevant legislation includes the brothel-keeping laws which make it illegal for more than two sex workers to share premises, even though this is typically done as a safety mechanism for independent sex workers (Feis-Bryce, 2018). These laws tend to push the sex industry into the informal economy and ensure that the market remains hidden, which drives it away from any formal mode of regulation (Cunningham, Sanders, Platt, Grenfell, & Macioti, 2018).

Law enforcement officials are given a full degree of discretion in applying and enforcing laws in their respective communities. They can decide whether or not to arrest or report offenses and whether the offense would become a summary offense with a penalty of a ticket and fine or whether the offense is sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for formal charges. The CPS prosecutes criminal cases within England and Wales and have much discretion in deciding which

cases they will bring forward with charges (CPS, 2017). To be charged with a criminal cases, the CPS follows the Code for Crown Prosecutors which states that there must be both sufficient evidence to provide for a conviction and it must be in the interest of the public (CPS, 2017). While they are an independent organization and making prosecution decisions independent of the government and police agencies, they work closely with the police, courts, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, and a variety of other agencies that work throughout the criminal justice system in England and Wales (CPS, 2017).

Currently, 43 police forces in England and Wales operate relatively autonomously, with each having their own specific approach to how they combat sex work (Feis-Bryce, 2012). These approaches may vary considerably as police forces adopt their own departmental definitions and interpretations of the sex work laws. This discrepancy regarding what is considered legal prostitution and what is not in England has led many opponents to the current legislation to suggest that the present laws simultaneously condone and condemn the practice creating confusion within the law enforcement community and the general public (Sanders & Campbell, 2014, Feis-Bryce, 2012; Brown & Sanders, 2016; Scoular & O'Neill, 2007; Hubbard et al., 2016).

Comparative Policies

The laws in England are relatively similar to those in the United States in which both can be considered quasi-legal. Both countries have a host of laws that criminalize the various activities associated with selling sex. The significant difference concerning the two countries arises from their contrasting enforcement styles. The United States is characterized as having a stricter enforcement approach to their laws, relying on arrests, prosecutions, and imprisonment for offenders (Cunningham et al., 2018). Contrast this with England, which relies on a variety of

5

different enforcement techniques that range from harm reduction to protection approaches while utilizing fines rather than prison sentences as consequences to deviant behaviors (Cunningham et al., 2018). These approaches can be understood when considering data on cautions and prosecutions for soliciting and loitering offenses. Between 2002 and 2012, the most common outcome for sex workers who were prosecuted for soliciting or loitering was a financial penalty or fine (Feis-Bryce, 2012). Both countries continue to focus their enforcement styles on providers who partake in the selling of sex rather than clients who purchase sex in their policing strategies.

Issues Related to Sex Work

Many opponents of sex work commonly point out the negatives associated with the sale of sex including various health issues, violence, drug use, and human trafficking/sexual exploitation. Although these issues do exist, it is important to point out that each market of the sex industry (indoor, outdoor, or online) confront these problems with a variety of magnitudes. Discussions surrounding sex work need to be careful when suggesting that all sex workers face the negative issues associated with the sale of sex. There is a discrepancy in the levels of health and violence issues that street and indoor-sex workers face (Weitzer, 2005; Sanders, Scoular, Campbell, Pitcher, & Cunningham, 2018; Jeal & Salisbury, 2007; O'Doherty, 2001; Church, Henderson, Barnard, & Hart, 2001; Cunningham & Kendall, 2010, 2011; Deering et al., 2014; Pitcher, 2015).

A variety of researchers have noted health issues associated with prostitution over the last two decades ranging from STDs, HIV, mental health issues, to drug dependency (UNAIDS, 2014; IUSW, 2016; National Aids Trust, 2016; Macioti, Grenfell, & Platt, 2017; NSWP, 2015; Sanders, 2007; Jeal & Salisbury, 2007). Female sex workers are at an increased risk for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and the commonly held reason for this may be because they generally

have higher numbers of sexual partners than the general public (UNAIDS, 2014; Pitcher, 2015). They also have less access to preventative measures including condoms, lubricants, post-exposure medications and manage medications for those with infections (UNAIDS, 2014). According to the UNAIDS (2014), in 110 countries where data were available about HIV prevalence, sex workers were 12 times more likely than the general population to have HIV. It is noted that unsafe working conditions, unequal access to health services, condom use, and criminalization play the most significant roles in contributing to these rates, and that there is also a solid correlation between police practices and HIV and sexually transmitted infections (NSWP, 2015; Sanders, 2007; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017).

To combat sexual health issues, England has the National Health Service which provides genitourinary medicine clinics throughout England that offer a range of sexual health services. The services include testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy testing, HIV testing, emergency contraceptives, mental health therapy for individuals who have been sexually assaulted, and condoms, with all services free and confidential (NHS, 2018). These health services help to combat unsafe working conditions that sex workers face throughout their careers.

Sex workers are also more likely to show symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Consequently, an international study found that 68% of the people in prostitution surveyed throughout nine countries including the United States, Canada, and Germany had met the criteria for a PTSD diagnosis (CARE, 2016). Stigma and criminalization similarly have an impact on mental health issues. Recent academic literature points to a correlation between stigma and mental health issues as sex workers are less likely to access care and support due to significant reservations regarding judgment or being reported to authorities because of their chosen occupation (Macioti et al., 2017). Conversely, it is important to note that street sex workers are significantly more

vulnerable than indoor sex workers in regards to relevant health issues (IUSW, 2016). These two groups have different experiences related to risk and risk-taking behaviors (Sanders, 2007). Indoor sex workers are less likely to report having chronic and acute illnesses, limited drug use, less exposure to violence, and more likely to have a doctor who sees them regularly than street sex workers (Sanders, 2007). Thus, researchers have pointed to the indoor market as being a safer alternative for those who want to continue to partake in the sale of sex (Sanders, 2007).

Criminalization plays a significant role in the varied experiences of violence, mental health issues, and sexual health problems that sex workers continue to face. Studies related to HIV/STI reveal that transmission increased by two to four times when sex workers were working in localities that criminalized sex work and that decriminalizing sex work would have the greatest impact on decreasing the risk of HIV for female sex workers (Shannon et al. 2015; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Criminalization also had an impact on the experiences of physical and sexual violence for sex workers who became up to seven times more likely to experience violence when they worked in crime-related locations (Deering et al., 2012; ICRSE, 2016; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Criminalization produces instances of sexual abuse and exploitation for sex workers due to the stigma directed towards sex workers which becomes legitimized with formal laws. Equal protection under the law is inhibited with criminalization as well and consequently sex workers then believe they cannot rely on the police to protect them or believe their experiences of violence.

Throughout the academic literature, various conclusions regarding the experiences of violence across the sex industry have been uncovered. Overall, a variety of studies have found higher rates or levels of victimization in the street-based sector compared to the indoor market (Deering et al., 2014; Church et al., 2001; O'Doherty, 2011). Due to the segmented nature of the commercial sex trade, victimization varies by location including whether they operate on or off-

street. Furthermore, the geographic and spatial location of sessions impacts whether sex workers will be both multiple and repeat victims (Matthew, 2014). Many researchers point out the inherent structure of the indoor market, how it reduces risk compared to street sex work due to the presence of other individuals including workers, managers, maids, drivers and a variety of different security systems (O'Doherty, 2011, Sanders & Campbell, 2007). These measures have been used to reduce and "design out violence" in the indoor market (Sanders & Campbell, 2007). It is important to note that there is a discrepancy in the enforcement of safety measures by managers in brothels and other shared apartments and that not all managers evoke the same strategies, which may lead to an actual increase of violence for indoor sex workers (Pitcher, 2015; O'Doherty, 2011).

Another theme throughout the literature points to the high risk of murder that those who partake in sex work face. It has been shown that active female sex workers are up to 18 times more likely to be murdered than women of the same age and race from the general population (Potterat et al., 2004), and in the United Kingdom they are 12 times more likely to be murdered than members of the general population (Ward, Day, Weber, 1999). In the United Kingdom, sex work is the job with the absolute highest risk of occupational homicides for women (Cunningham & Sanders, 2017). Between 1990 and 2016, 180 sex workers were murdered according to a database on sex worker homicides (Cunningham & Sanders, 2017). Sex workers are also a vulnerable population in regards to serial killers. Between 1990 and 2016, 17 sex workers were killed by serial offenders with the most notable being the Ipswich serial murders. Steve Wright was a serial killer who murdered five prostitutes near Ipswich, England (Cunningham et al., 2018).

A relatively new and alarming trend has been the shift from high murder vulnerability for street sex workers to recent estimates putting indoor workers at the highest risk for murder since 2010 (Cunningham & Sanders, 2017). An explanation for this may be due to the changing

environment of the sex market and the increased use of technology-facilitated work (Deering et al., 2014). A diverse workplace and the use of technology within the indoor market has been associated with a significant decline in the numbers of those participating in street-based sex work. The displacement in street prostitution has led to an increase in the various sectors of the indoor sex market. Another new and distressing trend has been the increased vulnerability of homicide that migrant female sex workers face. Between 2013 and 2015, 82% of the sex workers who were murdered were migrant women compared to zero in the previous seven years (ECP, 2016). Research has also noted that the legal status and criminalization of the sex market plays a crucial role in shaping homicide and other violence patterns for sex workers (Deering et al., 2014). When sex work is criminalized or quasi-criminalized, as is the case in the United States and the United Kingdom, violence tends to occur within the market and individuals are less likely to report violence to any formal body due to the decrease in legal protections afforded to them because of the criminalized nature of their work (Deering et al., 2014).

Human trafficking, and sex trafficking specifically, have long been tied to the sex market as a place where victims of trafficking are sold for sex. Various researchers in the field have argued at length that the prostitution policy in the United States, United Kingdom, and parts of Europe has been influenced by abolitionist moral discourse, which has a tendency to equate sex workers with victims of sexual exploitation (Pitcher, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2016; Sanders & Campbell, 2014; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Bettio et al., 2017). Trafficking in the European Union, which includes the United Kingdom, is predominately an EU affair, meaning that the vast majority of victims and suspects identified in the EU are EU nationals (Europol, 2016). The United Kingdom remains a key entry point for non-EU nationals with them being moved to other EU countries after arrival. The most common victims are female EU nationals from Central and Eastern Europe with

the highest proportions coming from countries including Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (Europol, 2016). Within the sex market, there is a tendency to equate migrant sex workers as being victims of sexual exploitation, but researchers, after undertaking a survey of migrant sex workers in the United Kingdom, found that less than 6% of migrant sex workers had been trafficked by deception or force (Sanders & Campbell, 2014, ECP, 2016; Connelly, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2016).

Online Sex Market

While the laws have remained relatively unchanged regarding sex work in England, the composition of the sex market has undergone a shift in the last decade. This change has been notable since the early 2000s, but was initially sparked in the 1990s when web-based advertising for the commercial sex market took hold and communication systems shifted toward email, chat-rooms, forums, phones, and webcams (NSWP, 2015). Due to this change, notable reductions have occurred in the street-based and indoor markets. These include indoors brothels, saunas, and flats that have had increased involvement in the sex market brought on by technological and cultural developments with some researchers pointing to this as a possible sign of social acceptance for the sex industry (Brooks Gordon, Perry, Mai, & Sanders, 2015; Scoular & O'Neill, 2007; Feis-Bryce, 2018; Brown & Sanders, 2016; Jones, 2015). It has also been noted that this shift from street-based sex work to online services does not merely imply a shift but an actual expansion of the online market (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011). It is estimated street-based sex workers now encompass only around 10-30% of the total commercial sex market and that by some estimates off-street sex workers outnumber street workers as much as 2:1in some localities (Pitcher, 2015; Cusick et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2018; Wietzer, 2005). In England specifically, there have been notable drops

in prosecutions for street prostitution from 484 for 2011-12 to 57 in 2017-18, and kerb-crawling with 314 prosecutions in 2011-12 to 106 in 2017-18 (CPS, 2018).

Consequently, a change in the type of market has led to a transformation in the composition and diversity of the sex market, with new modes of selling sex online becoming attractive to people who would not have otherwise participated (Pitcher, 2015). There has also been a noted expansion of migrant sex workers in the indoor markets in major cities across England, including London, with some noting that migrants may encompass upwards of 76% of the total market (Mai, 2009; Pitcher, 2015). London has been reported to have the highest concentration of both indoor and outdoor sex workers (Pitcher, 2015). The total migrant sex worker composition has been reported to be around 36% with more than half of those being from countries from the former Eastern Bloc and current Balkan countries (Pitcher, 2015). All of these changes have been facilitated by online and digital technology that has taken transformed the online sex market. These changes have created a new environment for commercial sex services to be both marketed and experienced with many researchers now pointing to the online sector as being the largest sector of commercial sex work (Cunnnigham & Kendall, 2011; Jones, 2015; Sanders et al., 2018; Jones, 2015).

The use of technology has been noted to allow the creation of a "borderless workplace", which has created new opportunities for increased economic earning potential and has allowed spatial sex fluidity in soliciting practices (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011, p. 560). This "borderless workplace" has also produced improved working conditions, which may appeal to more people and may be a reason for the expansion of the online sex market. Technology is now used in a variety of ways by sex workers including; scheduling appointments, screening clients, and the actual performance of sexual activities (Jones, 2015). Online services have also become attractive for providers due to the reduction of police interactions (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; Holt &

Blevins, 2007; Blevins & Holt, 2009; Jones, 2015), which in turn increases sex worker's earning potential because they do not lose time and money interacting with law enforcement officials. Cunningham et al. (2017) have also noted the wide variety of different online spaces that sex workers utilize including webcam platforms, escort directories, multi-service adult platforms, dating, and hook-up platforms, customer review forums, escort agency websites, individual sex worker websites, classified websites, social media platforms and apps, sex worker forums, and content delivery platforms.

For buyers, technology has also positively impacted their purchasing techniques. Soliciting online is now associated with less risk than on the street, which equates to lower levels of arrest rates and buyers more likely to spend time soliciting online. They can also access advertisements and escort ads from anywhere with internet access with relative privacy whether that is at work or in their own homes (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011). They also have an option to choose the sex workers they like and then have conversations with them at length either through email or on the phone. All of these reasons lead to why there has been an expansion in not only sex workers working in the online sex market but also why buyers have made the change to the online market.

It is important to note that while there has been much research on the online sex market, there are still few studies on what the terrain of the market looks like. The move to online communities has allowed the market to operate in isolation without the presence of law enforcement (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; NSWP, 2015; Blevins & Holt, 2009). While most research points to the street-sex market having the highest violence, recent research has pointed to increased violence in indoor-markets and the creation of new forms of violence including digital-facilitated harassment (O'Doherty, 2011; NSWP, 2015). While rates for online sex workers are still relatively low, they still experience higher levels of work-related violence than those in other

industries (Sanders et al., 2018). It has been reported that 12.6% of respondents in a survey of online sex workers reporting work-place violence in the past year compared to only around 1.3% of workers in other industries reporting the same violence (Sanders et al., 2018).

Research into the demand for online sexual services has been undertaken in recent years but remains under-researched in regards to the diversity of the market. One of the ways that researchers explore men's reasons for purchasing sex has been to study the online commercial sex industry using entire websites (Gezinski, Karandika, Levitt, & Ghaffarian, 2016; Castle & Lee, 2008), web-based forums (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Holt & Blevins, 2007; Blevins & Holt, 2009; Holt, Blevins, & Kuhns, 2008; Horswill & Weitzer, 2018), escort reviews from websites (Pettinger, 2011; Cunningham & Kendall, 2010, 2011; Davies & Evans, 2007) or a mixture of all three (Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018; Milrod & Monto, 2012). These methods have allowed a previously under-researched area to flourish, with reasons and understanding for men's demand for sexual services to grow with it (Pettinger, 2011).

A variety of different information has been studied using the internet to investigate the online market including; overall characteristics of sex buyers, violence, price variation, socialization of buyers, and intimacy. Studying the overall characteristics of sex buyers and the sex market has been done using a variety of different methods including using websites, online reviews, forum posts, interviews, and surveys. Three studies utilized forums and websites to look at a range of different information including sex tours (Gezinski et al., 2016), displacement in the sex trade (Holt et al., 2008), and overall characteristics of the online sex market (Castle & Lee, 2008). Gezinski et al. (2016) utilized a content analysis of websites that advertise about sex tours and found three themes that sex buyers want in the tours including; (1) enjoyment and complete acceptance from sex workers, (2) a "total girlfriend experience," (3) and the exotic nature of the

"Third World" woman. Holt et al. (2008) found that sex buyers engage in a variety of different forms of displacement in the sex trade (using multiple forms) and that the internet has become a valuable source of information to identify sex workers. Castle and Lee (2008) used a content analysis of over 76 escort websites to analyze characteristics of the online sex market and found that the "typical" escort website includes information on individual escorts, average prices for sexual activities, payment options, and reviews about escorts. Finally, both studies undertaken by Cunningham and Kendall (2010, 2011) investigated the displacement in the street market and whether online sex workers utilize risky sexual behaviors that characterized the street market. Their most significant finding was that internet-facilitated sex workers are different from street sex workers and that they engage in much less risky sexual behaviors. They also provided a variety of different results in regards to the demographics of sex workers.

In order to study violence, researchers have utilized qualitative methods to code for violent discourses within online escort review and forum postings (Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018; Davies & Evans, 2007). Jovanovski and Tyler (2018) analyzed 148 buyer reviews from three Australia states looking for violent discourses within the reviews. They found that sex buyers tend to normalize their violent narratives and produce many instances of sexual objectification and harassment, unsafe sex practices, consent issues, physical and sexual coercion to extreme cases of rape. Davies and Evans (2007) utilized a United Kingdom website called *GuardianAngel* where they analyzed posts within the forum for word usage related to violence. Their most significant finding was that violence occurs within sex work, regardless of the location of the session. This finding goes against much of recent literature which discusses that the indoor sector is inherently less violent (Deering et al., 2014; Church et al., 2001; O'Doherty, 2011), although they do face a new form of digital-facilitated harassment that was unseen in the street markets (O'Doherty, 2011).

15

A limited amount of studies have looked at how sex buyers socialize with other buyers and how they educate novice buyers (Holt & Blevins, 2007; Horswill & Weitzer, 2018; Blevins & Holt, 2009). The most common analytical technique for these types of research studies was utilizing qualitative methods by coding escort reviews or discussion forum posts. All three studies stressed the importance of the forums in socializing new buyers. Holt and Blevins (2007) discussed how sex buyers navigate different issues and post about information regarding sexual services, prostitutes, sexual acts, costs, and managing detection. These online discussions are a valuable resource for johns and are used to learn how to solicit sex workers and manage risks surrounding the purchase of sex including avoiding law enforcement. Horswill and Weitzer (2018) also utilized a discussion forum to investigate what novice buyers are taught throughout posts on these forums. They found that the most common postings included communication, screening issues, location and scheduling, money, privacy, safety and scams, health practices, and sex and attraction. Lastly, Blevins and Holt (2009), analyzed how sex buyers use online spaces, like discussion forums, to solicit. They also provided an overview of the wide variety of vernacular that sex buyers utilize within the reviews and the definitions for the terms.

Price variation is a theme that has been researched using online data and is one of the few areas of the online market where quantitative methods are utilized. Two studies used strictly quantitative methods, specifically hedonic pricing methods, to study price variation of reviews and condom wage penalty (Moffat & Peters, 2004; Adriaenssen & Hendrickx, 2012) while others used a mixed methods approach (Rao et al., 2003; Gertler et al., 2005; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007). Moffat and Peters (2004) found that the most important determinant for price variation was the duration of the encounter and that age (of provider) has little if any, effect on pricing variation. Other important impacts on price included arrangement location and geographic location, with

London listed as the most expensive location to purchase sexual services. Levitt & Venkatesh (2007) utilized interviews with pimps and prostitutes in the United States, to gather transactional data for around 2,000 activities performed by 160 prostitutes. A significant finding was that price tends to vary across sexual acts with the most critical factor for price variation being the presence of anal sex during sexual activity. Anal sex was also reported to be the most expensive compared to manual stimulation, which was the cheapest sexual act offered. They reported a condom use penalty ranging from $2 to $12, which was also found by Rao et al. (2003), Gertler et al. (2005), and Adriaenssen and Hendrickx (2007) when they surveyed Indian, Mexican, and Belgium sex workers respectively.

Intimacy within paid sexual sessions is a topic that has only recently been researched and understood. It was commonly assumed that men paid for sex to avoid emotional commitments and have to invest time in romantic relationships with significant others (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012) but recent research surrounding intimacy has not found support for that idea (Pettinger, 2011; Milrod & Monto, 2012; Huff, 2011; Jones & Hannem, 2018; Milrod & Weitzer, 2012). Milrod and Weitzer (2012) analyzed reviews from *TheEroticReview* where they found that over one-third portrayed discussion relating to emotional intimacy and the need for an emotional connection during sexual encounters. They also pointed out that there is a spectrum of different experiences that buyers felt ranging from counterfeit intimacy to an authentic emotional bond. Pettinger (2011) analyzed *PunterNet* and coded for erotic and emotional labor. They found that most reviews equate good service with the provider's appearance, personality, behavior, and sexual acts performed. Although, intimacy was the most crucial factor in regards to good service. The other three studies also found that intimacy was an incredibly significant factor and has been increasingly seen in recent paid sexual sessions (Milrod & Monto, 2012; Huff, 2011; Jones & Hannem, 2018).

<center>Theoretical Framework</center>

Recently, sex work has transitioned from an idea that it can only be characterized as economic labor to the awareness that emotional labor can encompass it as well (Sanders, 2018; Bernstein, 2007; Boris et al., 2010). Emotional labor incorporates the idea of "deep acting" (Hochschild, 2003) where providers make clients feel like the experience is real and not a paid transactional experience. In order to do that, sex workers must ensure that the labor not only felt meaningful to the client but also to themselves. "Bounded authenticity" is an important result of the "deep acting" that providers incorporate into their sessions (Goffman, 1978). It relates to the act of a genuine emotional and sexual experience, where the client believes that the interaction was a true intimate experience (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012). In order for clients to feel "bounded authenticity" sex workers must partake in this emotional labor, or the experiences may not feel authentic to the clients (Bernstein, 2007). With the understanding that there are aspects of emotional and economic labor weaved with the idea of "bounded authenticity," within commercial sex work, symbolic interactionism is an effective theory to explain the commercial sex market.

Symbolic interactionism analyzes the meanings and ideas that individuals give to events, objects, and behaviors. Society is understood to be socially constructed through interpretation of one's actions and meanings. Social bonds are formed through the ways in which people learn to interpret one another's behavior. As described by Herbert Blumer in a discussion of George Herbert Mead's ideas (1969), social interaction is a vital aspect of social life. When humans interact with one another, they have to take into account what the other person is doing and then change their conduct to reflect a similar behavior (Blumer, 1969). This interaction can be seen in

<center>18</center>

the first few minutes of paid sexual sessions where the sex worker has to evoke "deep acting" in order for buyers to believe that what they are experiencing is genuine (Hochschild, 2003).

This idea is also constructed through the two levels of social interaction that Mead identifies including "conversation of gestures" and "use of significant symbols" (Blumer, 1969, p. 65). The first gestures that the sex workers do including greeting the buyers with a smile and a hug or a kiss on the lips, sets the tone for the rest of the session. These gestures taken at surface level can be considered the "conversation of gestures," then if the buyers believe actions/gestures are legitimate and take them to be examples of authentic intimacy, they partake in the "use of significant symbols" (Blumer, 1969). The buyer responds to those gestures because they know that they are generally understood as symbols of intimacy. Thus, they believe that the rest of the session is an authentic date and a "girlfriend experience." A shared meaning of these gestures flow into Mead's triadic nature of meaning (Blumer, 1969) where the gestures of intimacy (smiles, greeting, hug, full kissing, touching, etc.) signify what the buyer is directed to do (return gestures in kind), what the provider making the gestures plans to do (provide an authentic paid sexual experience), and the joint action that arises after both individuals equally attribute the same meaning to the acts (paid sexual experience where the buyer believes they are in an authentic, intimate relationship).

Goffman's idea of dramaturgy, in which social life is a series of performances, is another idea that fits into the interactions with sex workers (Carter, O'Connell, & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012; Goffman, 1978). Goffman posits that individuals create a sense of self through social interaction and that they continue to engage in performances as they go through their daily lives. Individuals partake in these performances to evoke impression management or a way of controlling how other individuals see them. They rely on props and other materials like costumes to convince

19

their "audience" to believe their performances. These ideas are highlighted in paid sexual sessions where sex workers not only look the part but they also act the part by partaking in "deep acting" that leads buyers to believe that they are in an authentic relationships (Hochschild, 2003).

By publishing the reviews online, the buyers take paid sexual sessions that are usually hidden or invisible and take them from the "backstage" to the "front stage" as Goffman would label it (Carter et al., 2012; Goffman, 1978). The "backstage" for these reviews is the writings within them that discuss the preparations that the buyers took before the session and the activities that they practice and partake in for future sessions. The "front stage" is the review itself, because the reader gets an overview of what occurred during the session or the "performance" as stated by Goffman (Carter et al., 2012; Goffman, 1978). Although, one could argue that we do not see the "front stage" because the reviews are all from the view of the buyer and we only see the perceptions that they had during the session which could be completely inaccurate and false compared to what occurred.

Through interactions with sex workers during the sessions, some clients believe that they are experiencing legitimate intimacy or "bounded authenticity" (Bernstein, 2007). They construct these authentic, intimate moments through interactions that one would find in a real legitimate relationship. Sex workers who incorporate kissing, touching and mutual sexual services enable their clients to feel like they have authentic romantic feelings for them. Some examples from the sample include the following from a reviewer who said, "Karen has a *great attitude* and genuinely seems to enjoy her work, she was very receptive and very accommodating" and "Chanelle came into the room, smiling and welcoming… Her experience shone through, with lovely mutual oral, and great sex. I am an older man who was made to feel like a *real lover*!"

20

The sex buyers in the current study can be characterized as symbolically believing that the experiences they are feeling are real from a variety of different factors (kissing, touching, mutual sexual activities) throughout the session. From the examples above, we can see that the buyers perceive that not only do the providers enjoy their work, they legitimately enjoy spending time with the punters and that they are "real lovers" as one punter describes it.

<div align="center">Current Study</div>

The current study utilizes quantitative methods, chi-square analysis, and a binary logistic regression, to study the online commercial sex market in England. The research question aims to explore what factors influence positive review recommendations in online escort reviews. The variables analyzed were intimacy, condom usage, the presence of a climax, type of sex worker, length of session, cost of the session, total sexual acts, and a variety of sexual acts performed during the session (oral, anal, vaginal, and manual). The vast majority of research done in this area has been done qualitatively while looking at violence, intimacy, price variation, and the overall characteristics of the market (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Pettinger, 2011; Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018; Holt, Blevins, & Kuhns, 2008; Holt & Blevins, 2007; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007). Methods for studying the online market have ranged from utilizing surveys and interviews, to using content analysis to investigating escort review websites. The only research that has been done quantitatively to investigate the online market has utilized review websites to see if there are price variations in condom usage or other market characteristics (Moffat & Peters, 2004; Adriaenssen & Hendrickx, 2012). Thus, this research study fills a gap in the literature due to the rarely used quantitative research method for analyzing what factors influence the presence of positive reviews on escort review websites.

CHAPTER THREE: DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The current research study is exploratory. Exploratory research is most appropriate when very little is known about the topic and researchers are unaware of what they will find (Morse, 2004). The most appropriate and most used method for researching the online commercial sex market is to utilize escort review websites to get an understanding of the sex buyer. For these reasons, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on an escort review website focused on the English online commercial sex market (Maruna, 2010).

Data

Data for this study were drawn from *Punternet*, a public website where buyers, also known in the UK as punters, can review sex workers and discuss other aspects of the commercial sex market. *PunterNet* is focused on the commercial sex market in England, Scotland, and Wales. The reviews utilized for this study were only taken from sessions that occurred in cities throughout England. Websites like *PunterNet* have become popular for both clients and providers because they create an environment that avoids fraudulent behaviors by sellers and clients alike and allows for free advertising. Websites like these also create strong incentives for providers to offer quality services. Using ethnographic interviews, Cunningham and Kendall (2011) found that sex workers consistently emphasize the importance of having positive reviews on these websites. One of the reasons that market demand has increased is that online review services provide a reduced probability of arrest for both the client and the provider (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011).

Sample and Study

PunterNet was created in 1999 and was one of the first review websites created along with *TheEroticReview* (focused on the US market). Currently, *PunterNet* has over 127,623 published reviews available for viewing. The vast majority of reviews are from London followed by Milton Keynes, Manchester, and Birmingham with many other cities represented. *PunterNet* was chosen over websites based in the United States like *TheEroticReview* and *AdultWork* because these sites were shut down after the 2018 FOSTA (Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act), and SESTA (Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act) were implemented, and they now cannot be accessed for review (Campbell et al., 2018).

Sample data for this research project were obtained on *PunterNet.com* between January 2015 and December 2017 which yielded a total of 4,442 reviews. The target number of reviews is between 1,200 and 1,600. A large sample was utilized because between those numerical ranges, theoretical saturation will have been reached and new data and concepts will likely not appear (Morse, 2004). To obtain the target number of reviews, a systematic random sample was undertaken. Using this technique, 804 reviews were obtained for this period and were used for the analysis.

Coding

An Excel data collection spreadsheet was used to record information from the website and then transferred to SPSS to undertake the statistical analysis portion of the project. To ensure inter-coder reliability, the first one hundred cases were coded by two other individuals to ensure that similar codes were found between multiple researchers. Similar codes were found in each of the four categories on the coding spreadsheet. To understand the variety of different vernacular used

by the buyers, research by Holt and Blevins (2007) was utilized which defined many of the common words written by online sex buyers. The coding sheet was created after doing initial research on the specific escort website to determine the typical information that was provided in the reviews by the sex buyers.

Five categories of information are included in the data collection and coding sheet. The first category, "Punt Overview" includes items related to the review number (so the review could be found later if needed), review month, review day, and review time. The second category, "Punter Information," includes the punter's name (pseudonym), their total number of reviews, their lifetime paid total for purchases, and the average price paid per visit. The third category is "Punt Information," which records the city, location (flat, house, sauna, parlor, etc.), type of visit (incall or outcall), length of session (minutes), cost of session (GBP), price per minute, and whether the punter recommended the provider or not. The fourth category is "Provider Information," which gives the provider's name, age (if known), ethnicity/race (if known), specific escort agency they work with, and whether the visit was with a repeat customer. The last category is "Activity" which includes whether the review included a threesome, oral activities, anal activities, vaginal activities, combo activities, the presence of a climax on the part of the punter, girlfriend experience or intimacy, condom usage, and other activities. Each review was coded for a wide variety of variables including time, place, type of visit, cost, recommended type, provider name, provider age (if known), provider race/ethnicity (if known), escort agency, sexual activity (oral, vaginal, anal, manual, and group sex), intimacy level (girlfriend experience), and whether a condom was used.

<u>Variables</u>

Punternet has a variety of information within their review system that can be utilized when trying to understand the online commercial sex market. The current study focuses on specific variables that would impact whether an individual writes a positive review. These include the presence of intimacy within a review, or whether the provider made the session feel like a real intimate moment rather than a paid sexual experience. The presence of a climax on the part of the reviewer which generally means that the experience was "successful." Whether a condom was used in the session is another variable as is whether the provider was an escort who worked for an escort agency. Location variables were also given in the reviews, and the city of London was used as a reference group for the analysis. Cost and length of the session were reported within the reviews in minutes and Great British Pounds (GBP). Finally, the total number of acts and whether specific sexual acts (oral, anal, vaginal, manual, and group sex) happened during a session were also reported.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable utilized for this research was recommended or whether the reviewer gave a positive recommendation towards the provider. The research question for the current study was what factors influence the result of positive recommendations in online escort reviews. The variable was initially coded as "1" yes, "2" no, and "3" for neutral. The variable was recoded so that it could be used to conduct a binary logistic regression. *Recommended (REC)* was recoded as "1" for yes, "0" for no. Milrod & Weitzer (2012) utilized a variable similar to this one when they studied what elements of a sexual encounter illicit positive responses on online reviews

on *Punternet*. They found that emotional intimacy and connection were important factors in whether reviewers viewed the experience as positive.

<center>*Independent Variables*</center>

The independent variables that were used for this analysis were intimacy, climax, condom usage, escort, London, cost of session, length of session, total sexual acts, and the type of sex act including oral, anal, vaginal, manual stimulation, and group sex.

Intimacy. The variable that was used for intimacy was GFE ("0" no, "1" yes, "99"missing). It was recoded so that the presence of intimacy or a girlfriend experience was the reference group (1 = 1, 0 = 0, all others = system missing) and the missing responses were eliminated from the analysis. Girlfriend experience can be defined as an encounter with a sex worker that does not make it seem like a paid relationship, but rather consensual sex in a relationship (Blevins & Holt, 2009). Various researchers (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Pettinger, 2011; Castle & Lee, 2008) have found that intimacy is an incredibly important element in whether buyers have positive experiences in their paid sexual encounters. Milrod & Weitzer (2012) found that a third of buyers discussed the need for emotional intimacy and connections in their experiences even though they still understand that these encounters are not completely real. Pettinger (2011) also found that a provider's personality, behavior, and intimacy level were important factors in whether they received a positive review.

Climax. The variable that was used for the presence of a climax within a review was the CLIMAX ("0" no, "1" yes, "99" missing). The only change when recoding the variable was that the missing responses were eliminated from the analysis. Climax is an important variable because it generally signifies a successful session because it has been shown that most people solicit sex

<center>26</center>

workers for the actual sexual activities instead of having a girlfriend experience (Cunningham & Kendall, 2010).

Condom Usage. The variable used for condom usage was CONDOM ("0" no, "1" yes, "99" missing). The variable was recoded so that no condom use became the reference group (0 =1, 1=0, 99=system missing). Within the reviews, buyers generally report whether the sexual act was protected or unprotected using a variety of different terms for the word condom. Condom usage is being studied because of a wage penalty that is reported by various researchers which suggests that unprotected sexual activities are more desirable possibly because it adds the intimacy and creates an illusion of an authentic relationship (Sanders, Connelly, & King, 2016; Adrianssens & Hendrickx, 2012; Rao et al., 2003; Gertler, 2005; Cunningham & Kendall, 2010).

Escort. The variable used for whether a provider is an escort or not is the TYPE (1 = independent, 2 = escort, 3 = massage) variable which also has other categories for if the provider is an independent sex worker or worker who works at a massage parlor. The variable was recoded, so escort workers became the reference group (1 = 1, 2-3 = 0, all others = system missing). It has been shown that women who work with other individuals tend to make more money. Thus, escort sex workers are the reference group for this research (Cunningham & Kendall, 2010; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007).

London. The variable used for whether the encounters took place in London or outside of greater London was GREATLONDON (1 = yes, 2 = no). The variable was recoded so that reviews that took place inside the region of great London became the reference group (1 = 1, 2 = 0). Reviews report the location that the session occurred and a secondary location. Location has continuously been noted as a variable that has an impact on not only price variation but positive outcomes of the sexual acts (Pettinger, 2011). It has been noted that Greater London encompasses

a large percentage of the sex work industry in England and tends to have higher earnings for those working in the industry (Moffat & Peter, 2004).

   Price. The variable used to see whether the price of the sessions has an impact on the presence of positive reviews was the *COST* variable. It is a scale variable that ranges from £0 to £6,000 English GBP. The reviews reported the cost in the original currency, and it was kept that way throughout the analysis. The mean cost spent per session was 159.83 GBP. Price variation has been investigated by various researchers with the conclusion being that those who pay more tend to receive higher quality services and most likely more positive reviews from clients (Moffat & Peter, 2004; Cunningham & Kendall, 2010; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007).

   Length. The variable used to see whether the length of the session impacts positive reviews was the LENGTH variable. It is a scale variable that is measured in minutes which ranges from 10 to 2,880 minutes. The average session length was about 64 minutes. Duration is an important variable in research regarding price variation for sexual services, and we would expect that it also has an impact on the outcome of positive reviews as well (Moffat & Peter, 2004).

   Total Acts. Total acts is a scale variable that adds up the total sexual acts (oral, anal, vaginal, and manual) reported for each review. The scale ranges from 0 (no acts) to 10 (three acts in each category and manual stimulation). The range of responses reported were 0-7 with a reported mean of 2.65 sexual acts.

   Oral, Anal, Vaginal, Manual, and Group Sex. The last five variables relate to whether a specific sexual activity occurred in the review including oral, anal, vaginal, manual, and group sex (three or more individuals). The following variables were all coded the same with "0" being no presence of that specific sexual act, "1" being that there was the presence of the specific act and "99" for unknown or missing which was recoded to system missing and eliminated from the

analysis. Research has shown that there are variations in desired sexual activities with anal activities being the most desirable with manual the least desirable, but the price variation between these activities impacts the number of times they occur during a session (Cunningham & Kendall, 2010; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007; Moffat & Peter, 2004). This would suggest that different sexual activities may impact the presence of a positive review.

<div align="center">Analytic Strategy</div>

The statistical method utilized for this analysis was a bivariate chi-square analysis and a multivariate analysis. Frequencies were first conducted to ensure no errors were present within the data and to get an idea about what the data look like overall. Descriptive statistics were utilized to understand basic information about the variables. A chi-square analysis was run next to investigate whether there were relationships within the discrete variables that could have a negative impact on the final results. Independent discrete variables were used for this analysis and were compared to the dependent variable of whether reviews were recommended.

Preliminary sensitivity analyses were run on three variables that had a high number of missing cases including age, foreign-born, and condom use. After conducting the analysis, two of the variables (age and foreign) had results that showed that their missing cases would impact the rest of the variables. Thus, both variables were removed from the overall analysis. The sensitivity analysis on condom usage showed no potential issues for the missing cases impacting the other variables, and it was kept in the analysis. Variance Inflation Factors were run to detect multicollinearity in the regression analysis. No such issues were present in the report because the values were lower than 4 and ranged from 1.09 to 3.88 (Fisher & Mason, 1981).

For the multivariate analysis, a binary logistic regression was utilized. This was done to investigate whether the odds that a reviewer gave a positive review of a provider, based on a variety of different independent variables ranging from activities within the session, e.g., total acts, oral, anal, vaginal, manual, climax, condom usage, to outside factors like location, cost, and length of the session. Research has indicated that the presence of a positive review recommendation may be connected to various other variables including specific sexual acts (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007) and since the recommended is a discrete variable in this research, binary logistic regression is the most appropriate statistical method to utilize.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Considering the exploratory nature of this research, frequencies were run on various other variables that were not used in the binary logistic regression analysis. These data are reported in Tables 1 and 2. Other than coding for the variables used in the analysis, coding was also undertaken regarding the days, cities, location, and agencies that the sessions occurred. The time and type of session were also reported (incall or outcall). Incall and outcall relates to where the session occurred, with incall representing a session that occurred at the providers' residence, brothel, or massage parlor; while outcall sessions are where the provider goes to the buyers' residence or hotel. Various other characteristics relating to the providers, including their reported age and their nationality status. These are all reported in Table 1. Table 2 reports the frequency results for the sexual activities that occurred throughout all the reviews including the most popular oral, anal, and vaginal activities.

The vast majority of the sessions were incall, meaning that the buyer went to the provider's residence. Weekdays were the most likely time of the week that the sessions occurred with Friday being the most common with 19.4% of sessions occurring on that day followed by Thursday (16.9%) with Sunday being the least common with 8.2%. The mean time that the sessions occurred at was around 2:30 in the afternoon with the range occurring throughout the day. The most common city was London with 49.8% of sessions occurring there. Within London, the boroughs of Inner London were the most common locations to be visited with around 82% of visits, and the city of Westminster was the most popular of the inner London boroughs. Milton Keynes was the next most popular location for the sessions to occur at with it encompassing 18.7% of the session locations. 40.7% of the sessions took place at an escort agency with House of Divine in London

the most popular agency encompassing 10.6% of the visits. In regard to information about the providers, 14% of the providers were reported to be Romanian with another 39.8% reported being Eastern European. Providers who were characterized as "young" (29 and under) were the most common age category with 70.3%.

Throughout the sample, 1,970 sexual acts occurred including oral, anal, and vaginal activities. Oral activities were the most common with 49.4% of the sample participating, followed by vaginal with 44.9%, and anal with 5.5%. Of the oral activities to occur, blow jobs (protected or unprotected) were the most common activity occurring 58.9% of the time, followed by reverse oral 23.9% of the time. The most popular anal activity was anal simulation or anal rimming which encompassed 50.7% of the anal activities followed by anal doggy style with 39%. Various vaginal activities were quite common throughout the sample with cowgirl being the most common at 29%, followed by missionary with 28.7%, and vaginal doggy style at 20.7%.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Sociodemographic Variables

	Mean/ Proportion	Standard Deviation	N
Weekday	.792	---	804
Friday	.194	---	804
Sunday	.082	---	804
City			
London	.498	---	804
Milton Keynes	.187	---	804
Location			
Escort Agency	.408	---	804
Illegal Establishment	.039	---	804
Agency			
House of Divine (London)	.106	---	804
Annabellas MK (Milton Keynes)	.087	---	804
Foreign Born	.779	---	348
Romanian	.140	---	271
Eastern European	.398	---	271
Age			
Young (29 and under)	.703	---	380

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Total Sexual Activities

	Mean/ Proportion	Standard Deviation	N
Sexual Activity			**1970**
Oral	.494	---	974
Anal	.055	---	110
Vaginal	.449	---	886
Oral Activities			**974**
Blowjob	.589	---	582
Reverse Oral	.239	---	233
Anal Activities			**110**
Stimulation	.509	---	56
Doggy Style	.390	---	43
Vaginal Activities			**886**
Cowgirl	.290	---	257
Missionary	.287	---	254
Doggy Style	.207	---	183

Descriptive statistics for the variables are shown below in Table 3. The total sample size for the model was 804 cases or reviews. Roughly 88% of the reviewers gave the providers a positive recommendation. The average number of sexual acts that occurred during a session was 2.65 with oral activities being the most common with an occurrence rate of 84.1% followed by vaginal with 74%, manual with 23.3%, and anal activities occurring only 12.6% of the time. Session activities with three or more individuals occurred only 4.5% of the time. The average length of a session was roughly around 64 minutes with a standard deviation of 150.13. The shortest session lasted 10 minutes while the longest session lasted 2,880 minutes (or 48 hours). The average cost of a session was £159.38 GBP with a standard deviation of 306.86 which.

Intimacy occurred in 68.6% of the reported sessions with reviewers reporting that the providers made the session feel like a real intimate experience. Ways in which providers made

session feel more intimate include full kissing, talking before and after the session, providing refreshments, paying attention to the reviewer and their needs, and making the session not feel physically or emotionally forced. London was the most popular location for the reviews to take place with 49.8% of the sample taking place in the city. Escorts who worked at an escort agency encompassed 54.7% of the sample. Reviewers climaxed approximately 95.9% of the time during the sessions with the most common reasons for not climaxing being physical impairments. Lastly, 41.4% of the sessions included unprotected sex.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

	Mean/ Proportion	Standard Deviation	N
Total Sexual Acts	2.65	1.54	804
Oral	.841	---	760
Anal	.126	---	760
Vaginal	.740	---	760
Manual	.233	---	763
Threesome	.045	---	804
Length of Session	64.24	150.13	804
Cost of Session	159.83	306.86	804
Intimacy	.686	---	761
London	.498	---	804
Escort	.547	---	804
Climax	.959	---	804
No Condom Use	.414	---	454

Table 4 shows the results for the Pearson chi-square analysis along with the percent proportions for the various discrete independent variables compared to the recommended variable (*REC*). A significant chi-square result indicates that the variables being compared are statistically dependent of each other. Results that are not statistically significant mean that no relationship

exists between the variables because they are statistically independent of each other. *Intimacy* chi-square was shown to be significant with .26% of individuals who did not recommend the review had perceived intimacy during their sessions, while 68.3% of people who did recommend received intimacy during their sessions. This suggests that providers who incorporated intimacy, or perceived intimacy, within their sessions were more likely to receive a positive review. The climax chi-square was also significant and showed that 9.1% of those who did not recommend the provider had a climax and 86.8% of those who recommended the provider had climaxed during their session. Those who recommended the provider were more likely to have climaxed at least once during their session. *No Condom*, *Escort*, and *London* were all not shown to be statistically significant when associated with review recommendations.

Of the sexual activities, *Oral*, *Anal*, and *Vaginal* were all shown to be statistically significant. *Oral* showed that 8.02% of individuals who negatively recommended their provider had received at least one oral sexual activity during their session and 76.1% of individuals who positively recommended their provider had received an oral activity during their session. This suggests that sessions with at least one oral activity were more likely to receive positive recommendations. *Anal* was also significant and showed .79% of individuals who did not recommend their provider during the session had received an anal activity and 1.5% of those who recommended their provider had an anal activity during their session. Anal activities were somewhat rare throughout the reviews which is why the numbers are relatively low compared to the other sexual activities. *Vaginal* was also significant with 8.16% of those who negatively reviewed their providers receiving a vaginal sexual activity and 65.8% of those who positively recommended receiving a vaginal session activity. *Manual* and *Group Sex* were statistically insignificant; therefore, they are not a part of the review recommendations for these analyses.

35

Table 4. Chi-Square Results for Review Outcomes

	Chi-Square	Yes Rec % (n)	No Rec %(n)
Intimacy	214.312***	68.3% (520)	.26% (2)
Climax	102.988***	86.8% (687)	9.1% (72)
Condom	1.598	35.2% (160)	6.2% (28)
Escort	.307	48.5% (390)	6.21% (50)
London	.496	43.4% (349)	6.34% (50)
Oral	32.017***	76.1% (578)	8.02% (61)
Anal	3.924**	1.5% (90)	.79% (6)
Vaginal	4.250**	65.8% (500)	8.16% (62)
Manual	.541	20.1% (153)	3.28% (25)
Threesome	.025	3.98% (32)	.49% (4)

$*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .0$

Table 5 shows the results for the multivariate analysis that was conducted using a binary logistic regression. Results show the odds that reviews were recommended (positively) based on sexual activities (total acts, oral, anal, vaginal, manual, group sex) and other characteristics related to presence of a climax, condom usage, provider type (escort), location (London), and session cost and length. The total sample size for the model was 427 cases with a total number of missing cases for this analysis being 377. The most likely reason for the missing cases was that a review did not include specific details regarding the activities that occurred during the sessions, thus most categories were then coded as missing. The regression analysis indicated that the model was statistically significant with the model showing the results of the recommended dependent variable regressed on the various independent variables. The model was significant at the .000 level with a chi-square model statistic of 182.801. The pseudo R square values for the model summary were .288 (Cox & Snell) and .538 (Nagelkerke), respectively.

Four variables were found to be statistically significant including *Intimacy* (b = 5.180, p < .01), *Climax* (b = 2.853, p < .01), *Escort* (b = -1.225, p < .05), and *Manual* (b = -1.096, p < .05), with a marginally significant result for *Total Sexual Acts* (b = .421, p < .10).

Two of the sexual activity variables were found to be significant, *Total Sexual Acts* and *Manual*. The odds of having a positive review increased by a factor of 1.523 for every one unit increase in the total sexual acts scale. An increase in the total number of sexual acts offered relates to an increased likelihood that the provider will receive a positive review recommendation. The odds for a positive recommendation were 50.3% lower when the provider offered manual services compared to those that did not partake in manual sexual activities. Providers who offered manual services had lower odds of receiving a positive recommendation compared to those that offered oral, anal, or vaginal services. Four other specific sexual activities including *Oral*, *Anal*, *Vaginal*, and *Threesome* were not significant.

Three variables related to the session and the provider were found to be significant including *Escort*, *Intimacy*, and *Climax*. The odds of a positive recommendation was 70.6% lower when the provider was an escort compared to those who were not escorts, including independent sex workers and those who worked in massage parlors. The odds that a provider received a recommendation was higher by a factor of 177.69 when the reviewer felt that the session included intimacy compared to those that were characterized with no intimacy. Session *Length* and *Cost* were both found to not have significance as well as sessions that occurred in *London* and those where *No Condom* was used. The odds that a positive recommendation was given were higher by a factor of 17.343 when the reviewer had at least one climax during their session compared to those who did not climax.

Table 5. Binary Logistic Analysis Predicting the Odds of a Positive Review (1) Compared to a Negative Review (0)

Independent Variable Variable	Model B/Exp (SE)
Total Sexual Acts	.421/1.523 (.242)*
Oral	-.259/.772 (.581)
Anal	.484/1.623 (.757)
Vaginal	-.156/.855 (.607)
Manual	-1.096/.334 (.497)**
Threesome	.343/1.409 (.830)
Length of Session	.001/1.001 (.004)
Cost of Session	.000/1.00 (.003)
Intimacy	5.180/177.69 (1.06)***
London	-.491/.612 (.400)
Escort	-1.225/.294 (.442)**
Climax	2.853/17.343 (.762)***
No Condom Use	.674/1.962 (.505)
Constant	1.914
N	427
X^2	182.801
Cox & Snell R^2	.288
Nagelkerke R^2	.538

Cell entries are given as logistic regression coefficients/odds ratios with the Standard errors in parentheses. *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The results of a rarely used method for examining online escort reviews, quantitative analysis, reveal interesting findings regarding what factors contribute to the presence of positive reviews for commercial sex workers in England. Four variables were found to be significant including *Manual*, *Escort*, *Climax*, and *Intimacy* and one variable being marginally significant (*Total Sexual Acts*). These findings suggest that there are factors that create better or worse odds for a provider to receive a positive review.

Results for sexual activity were similar to those found by others with oral being the most common and anal being the least common (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007). Oral activities encompass 49.4% of the total sample, which was most similar to 46% found by Levitt & Venkatesh (2007) and 50.3% reported by Cunningham & Kendall (2011). Results were also similar for vaginal activities with 44.9% of the present sample and Cunningham & Kendall (2011) who found that 45.7% of the sexual acts were vaginal. Anal activities were also relatively similar with the current study (5.5%) and Cunningham & Kendall (2011) with 3.9% and Levitt & Venkatesh (2007) who found 9% of their total sample engaged in anal acts. Finally, the finding of 4.5% of acts including group sex was similar to the finding by Cunningham & Kendall (2011) who reported 5.7%.

The association analysis indicated that five variables and their relationships with the dependent variable were significant including *intimacy*, *climax*, and three sexual activities (*oral*, *anal*, and *vaginal*). One important finding indicated that 68.3% of individuals who gave a positive recommendation had experienced intimacy during their sessions while .26% of individuals who gave a negative recommendation reported intimacy. This suggests the importance of intimacy

within reviews. They are more likely to occur during positively rated sessions, and if they did occur during sessions that were rated negatively, they were a rare occurrence. The importance of intimacy is supported throughout the literature, with the suggestion that it has become an important and reliable indicator of positive reviews (Pettinger, 2011; Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Sanders, 2008). The other interesting finding was that the vast majority of individuals (86.8%) who had at least one *climax* during their session gave their provider a positive recommendation while only 9.1% of individuals who gave a negative recommendation had climaxed. This suggests the importance of having a least one climax during a session, but it also shows that having a climax does not guarantee that a session will be considered positive and that other elements may just as important (Pettinger, 2011).

For the multivariate analysis, five variables were found to be statistically significant, four of them have results that are similar to those found throughout the literature. For the *Manual* variable, the odds for a positive recommendation were 50.3% lower when manual services were offered compared to those that did not partake in manual services. As previously stated, the most popular sexual activities offered by sex workers tend to be oral or penetrative activities (anal or vaginal) with manual activities offered less by escorts and more by workers in massage parlors (Cunningham & Kendall, 2010). Also, when manual services were offered, they were usually only offered in conjunction with massage services and no penetrative sexual services.

For *Climax*, the odds that a positive recommendation was given was 17 times higher when the reviewer reported at least one climax during their session compared to those who did not report a climax. This is a finding that one would expect because a climax generally means that the session was successful, as that is the most typical reason that individuals solicit prostitutes. *Total Sex Acts*

40

was found to be marginally significant. The results showed that the odds of having a positive review increased by a factor of 1.523 for every one unit increases in the total sexual acts scale. This suggests that providers who offer more sexual services are more likely to receive positive reviews compared to individuals who provide less.

If the provider was characterized as an *Escort,* was also found to be significant with an odds ratio of receiving positive reviews decreasing by 70.6% if they were an escort compared to the other two types of sex workers including independent and massage parlor workers. This result was an unexpected finding as most research finds that escorts, who are on the higher end of the sex worker ladder, tend to make more money than independent workers and thus have more positive reviews (Cunningham & Kendall, 2010; Levitt & Venkatsh, 2007). One reason for this finding might be that they encompassed a majority of the given sample with 54.7% of the sample being escorts compared to 30.5% who were independent sex workers and 14.8% who worked at a massage parlor. Another explanation could be that there is a variation in the types of escorts including high-end call girls to lower-end escorts, while the data was coded as any individual who works in a brothel as an escort. Thus, the coding in the present study does not account for this variation in the types of escorts which can explain the unlikely result.

The most important finding was for the *Intimacy* variable, which showed that providers who partake in intimacy during their sessions were 177 times more likely to receive a positive recommendation than individuals who did not provide intimacy. While this is a large number, the finding that intimacy is an incredibly important aspect during paid sexual experiences is a finding that has been supported throughout the literature (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Petting, 2011; Gezinski et al., 2016; Castle & Lee, 2008; Milrod & Monto, 2012; Holt & Blevins, 2007; Blevins & Holt,

41

2009; Huff, 2011; Bernstein, 2007). Sex during these sessions is coupled with companionship and mirror authentic and intimate moments that one would expect in a real relationship. They usually incorporate engaging conversations and a diverse array of sexual activities (full kissing, touching, caresses) rather than simple sexual activities like oral or sexual intercourse. These types of GFE (Girlfriend Experience) sessions are generally more wanted by buyers and, thus, more expensive which makes sense why there would then be such a high incidence of positive reviews for perceived intimacy and a true girlfriend experience. This type of form encompasses what Bernstein (2007; 484), calls "bounded authenticity" or "emotional and physical labor of manufacturing authentic (if fleeting) libidinal and emotional ties with clients, endowing them with a sense of desirability, esteem or even love."

The multivariate result for intimacy can also be interpreted as seeing a change in the market of sex work. Generally, it has been understood that buyers solicited prostitutes purely for sex and a desire for a physical release and to avoid the emotional aspects and time commitment that romantic relationships generally involve (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012). Combining the multivariate analysis result for intimacy and other characteristics of the sessions including length and types of sexual activities, we can see the importance of intimacy. The average length of a session was around 65 minutes which is longer than general sessions where only sexual activity occurs. Sessions that are longer (over 30 minutes) generally incorporate aspects of the "girlfriend experience" including touching, kissing, and refreshments and chit chat at the beginning of the session (Milrod & Weitzer, 2012; Pettinger, 2011). These results illustrate that the outlook of the market may be changing and that intimacy may now be a more important factor in the market for paid sex than originally thought.

<u>Limitations</u>

While this research includes significant findings, there are still some limitations to the current study. One issue is selection bias in which the reviews may not be representative towards all sex buyers. Not every buyer who purchases sexual services reviews providers on this website and the most likely people to review providers tend to be those who are regular users of purchasing sexual services (Moffat & Peters, 2004). Also, since the data from the reviews is self-reported, there could be possible issues with measurement error. The buyers could have misreported some of the variables within the reviews including price and age. Another limitation is similar to the halo effect, which states that individuals make initial assessments of others based off of only a few attributes and then decide whether they are good or bad (Asch, 1940; Anderson, 1974; Nisbett & Dechamp Wilson, 1977). Seeing an individuals with favorable traits, encourages the other person to think of them as favorable as well even though they may only know a few things about them. In order to be equated as a "good" or favorable punter in the eyes of other individuals (i.e. buyers) on the forum, buyers may tend to give only positive attributes of themselves and exaggerate their abilities and the reactions of the providers. Thus, this is a limitation because buyers might with exaggerate and underplay aspects of the sessions, with reviewers wanting to positively represent themselves to fellow buyers.

Lastly, it is important to note that while sex work may be a concern globally, the present data focuses on the sex market, specifically the online sex market, in England. As such, it might not be applicable elsewhere, especially given the widely varying cultural and legal frameworks in which sex work operates today and their impact on the nature of the market (Cunningham & Kendall, 2010).

Future Research Consideration

While there are inherent limitations with the data, it is unlikely that these problems can be avoided by using other methods. This is because there are very few, if any, other methods that can be used to study a hidden population like sex buyers. Thus, compiling the data from escort reviews is one of the ways to study this population with the least number of limitations. Future research in this area could be to utilize the reviews that have already been coded and investigate them through a qualitative lens. Various researchers have found that a significant portion of the reviews include instances of violence and objectification of women (Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018; Holt & Blevins, 2007; Blevins & Holt, 2009; Pettinger, 2011), so it would be interesting to look at the same reviews and see if there are violent acts discussed within the reviews. Another area to take this project would be to see if there are differences in how buyers view providers depending on whether they received intimacy during their sessions. Moving forward, continual research needs to be conducted in the area of sex work, especially since the findings from this study suggest that there might be a possible shift in the type of labor occurring during sessions. Finally, future studies could explore the idea of intimacy, since the present research found a greater importance on intimacy during the sessions than has previously been recorded in the past.

APPENDIX:
CODEBOOK

Reviews Codebook

REV: Review
REVNUM: Review number in the system
YEAR: Year of review
MONTH: Month number
DATE: Date of the month
DAY: Day of the week (written out)
DAYNUM: (1) Sunday, (2) Monday, (3) Tuesday, (4) Wednesday, (5) Thursday, (6) Friday, (7) Saturday
TIME: Time of the review

Punter Information:
- PUNTNAME: Punters name
- TOTALREVS: Total number of reviews on the punters page
- PAIDTTL: Total amount of money they have paid while visiting providers (in pounds)
- PAIDAVG: Average price per visit. Total amount paid divided by the amount of review they have.

Punt Information:
- City:
  o (1) London, (2) Milton Keynes, (3) Sandown, (4) Bexley, (5) Sheffield, (6) Luton, (7) Birmingham, (8) Woking, (9) Slough, (10) Bristol, (11) Manchester, (12) Ipswich, (13) Croydon, (14) Crewe, (15) Enfield, (16) Northhampton, (17) Leicester, (18) High Wycombe, (19) Watford, (20) Bromley, (21) Maidenhead, (22) Dewsbury, (23) Wigan, (24) Mansfield, (25) Marlyle Bone, (26) Reading, (27) Highbridge (28) Gerrards Cross, (29) Leeds, (30) Nottingham, (31) Woolwich, (32) St. Albans, (33) Leystone, (34) Southend on Sea, (35) Hounslow, (36) Whitchurch, (37), Welling, (38) Blackheath, (39) Doncaster,(40) Lutterworth, (41) Hatfield, (42) Shrewsbury, (43) Stoke on Trent, (44) Portsmouth, (45) Bedford, (46) Bradford, (47) Coventry, (48) Warwickshire, (49) Folkestone, (50) Ossett, (51) Basildon, (52) Sudbury, (53) Gravesend, (54) Oxford, (55) Stourbridge, (56) Stockton on Tees, (57) Middlesbrough, (58) Canterbury, (59) Loughbrough, (60) Luto, (61) Rochester, (62) Epsom, (63) Maidstone, (64) Wakefield, (65) Bath, (66) Peterborough, (67) Newcastle, (68) Hertfordshire, (69) Colchester, (70) Apsley, (71) Downham, (72) Cheshire, (73) Worchester, (74) Scarborough, (75) Plymouth, (76) Stevenage, (77) Brighton, (78) Morecambe, (79) Preston, (80) Berkshire, (81) Hitchin, (82) Welwyn Garden City
- LONDON: (1) Inner, (2) Outer, (3) Not applicable, (99) Missing
- GREATLON: (0) No, (1) Yes
- LOC: Location of the punt. Type of establishment.
  o (1) Escort Agency, (2) Shared Apartment, (3) Flat/Apartment, (4) Shared House, (5) House, (6) Hotel, (7) Punters
- TOV: Type of visit, whether the visit was an in call or outcall visit.
  o (1) In call, (2) Outcall
- LENGTH: Duration of the visit in minutes
- COST: Cost of the visit in GBP
- REC: Whether the punter recommended the provider or not.

- o (0) No, (1) Yes, (2) Neutral

Provider Information:
- PROVIDERNAME: The name of the provider on the review.
- AGE: Age of the provider reported by the punter.
  - o Words used by the punters
- AGE2: Age reported by the provider
  - o 1: Younger
  - o 2: Older
  - o 99: Missing
- ETHRACE: Ethnicity/race reported by the punter.
  - o Words used by the punters
- FOREIGN: (0) Yes, (1) No, (99) Unknown
- ESCORTAG: Escort agency reported by the punter
- TYPE: (1) Independent, (2) Escort Agency, (3) Massage Parlor, (4) Other

Sexual Activity
- THREESOME: Sexual activities with three or more individuals
  - o (0): No, (1) Yes
- Oral
  - o (1) BBBJ (Bare back blow job, or oral sex without condom)/ Southern France/French Without/OWO (Oral sex without a condom)
    - ▪ BBBJTC (Bare back blow job to completion, or oral sex without a condom to orgasm)/ CIM (Cum in mouth, orgasm to completion in a sex worker's mouth)
    - ▪ BBBJTCWS (Bare back blow job to completion with swallowing)
    - ▪ BBBJWF/Face Painting/Facial/Pearl Necklace (Bare black blow job with facial) or (Sex act where a man ejaculates on a woman's neck and/or chest)
  - o (2) BJ (Blow job, or oral sex on a man)/ Deep Throat (Oral sex where the whole length is "swallowed")
  - o (3) Reverse Oral/RO (Male performs oral sex on the provider) French (Oral sex on either party)
  - o (4) BLS (Ball licking and sucking)
  - o (5) CBJ (Covered blow job, or oral sex with a condom)
  - o (6) Sixty Nine, 69 (Partners perform oral sex on each other simultaneously)
- ORAL: Whether at least one oral activity occurred during a session
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes, (99) Missing
- Anal
  - o (1) Analinus/Asian (Oral simulation of anus) or (Anal rimming)
  - o (2) CDS/Doggie/DS (Covered doggy style)(Intercourse where the man inserts his penis while the girl is on her hands and knees)
  - o (3) Greek/Mediterranean (anal sex)
  - o (4) RCA (Reverse cowgirl anal, or anal sex where the female is on top facing away from the male)
- ANAL: Whether an anal activity occurred during a session
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes, (99) Missing
- Vaginal
  - o (1) Bareback/Uncovered/Raw (Any sex without a condom)
    - ▪ BBFS (Bare back full service, or vaginal sex without a condom)

- o (2) CFS/Covered (Covered full service, or sex with condom or dental dam)
- o (3) Cowgirl/Reverse Cowgirl (Sex with the sex worker on top facing the customer) or (Vaginal sex where female is on top facing away from the male)
- o (4) FS (Full service, or complete vaginal intercourse)
  - ▪ Full Meal Deal (Vaginal intercourse to completion)
- o (5) Mish (Sexual intercourse in the missionary position)
- o (6) CDS (Vaginal)
- VAGINAL: At least one vaginal activity during the session
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes, (99) Missing
- MANUAL
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes
- TOTALACTS: Scale variable adding up all sexual acts during the session
- CLIMAX: At least one climax during the session
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes, (99) Missing
- GFE: Whether intimacy occurred during the session
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes, (99) Missing
- CONDOM: Whether a condom was used during the session
  - o (0) No, (1) Yes, (99) Missing
- Other
  - o (1) BDSM (Bondage, discipline, sado-masochism)
  - o (2) BS/Massage (Body slide, a sexual service offered in massage parlors where woman may slide her body on the clients using oil)
  - o (3) DFL/DFK/FK (Deep French or full kissing)
  - o (4) Water Sports (Urination play, also golden shower)

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