

# **Diversity in sexual labour: an occupational study of indoor sex work in Great Britain**

by

**Jane Pitcher**

**A Doctoral Thesis**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

November 2014

© by Jane Pitcher, 2014

## **Abstract**

While there is a considerable body of academic literature on prostitution and sex work, there is relatively little research exploring the working conditions and occupational structures for men and women working in the indoor sex industry. There is a continuing tension between the theoretical position that considers prostitution as gendered exploitation and that which views commercial sex as work, although more recent studies have begun to explore different labour practices in some types of sex work. This thesis moves beyond previous analyses through framing the research theoretically as an occupational study, encompassing the experiences and transitions of female and male sex workers, as well as a small number of transgender participants, and setting these in the context of broader labour market theories and research. Using a qualitative approach, the study considers diverse labour processes and structures in indoor markets and adult sex workers' perceptions of the terms and conditions of their work. The research develops an understanding of sex workers' agency in relation to state structures, policy frameworks and varied working circumstances. It theorises the relationship of human agency to social stigma and recognition or denial of rights. It extends on existing classifications of pathways into and from sex work and develops typologies incorporating transitions between sub-sectors in the indoor sex industry, as well as temporary and longer-term sex working careers related to varied settings and individual aspirations. While the research identified gendered structures in indoor markets, which reflect those in the broader economy, the findings also contest gender-specific constructions of exploitation and agency through emphasising the diverse experiences of both male and female sex workers. I argue for development of a continuum of agency, which incorporates interlinking concepts such as respect, recognition and economic status and includes both commercial and private intimate relations. I contend that acknowledgement of sexual labour as work is a necessary precondition for recognising sex workers' rights and reducing instances of physical and social disrespect. Nonetheless, this is not sufficient to counter social stigma, which is perpetuated by state discourses and policy campaigns which fail to recognise sex workers' voices and, in doing so, create new forms of social injustice.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am immensely grateful to all the people who participated in interviews for this research and to those who remained in contact with me throughout the research process and contributed their feedback on drafts of papers and chapters for my thesis. Thank you for your openness and the interest you have taken in the research. I hope that I have represented your experiences.

I owe many thanks to the project staff who facilitated my fieldwork in parlours and gave up their time to introduce me to managers and workers in the different establishments. I am also grateful to all the organisations and individuals who publicised my research on their websites and disseminated information about my study. Thanks are also due to administrative staff in the Social Sciences Department, especially Anne-Marie Joyce and Deirdre Lombard, who provided me with back-up for logging in and out during the fieldwork.

I have benefited from the knowledge and advice of many people. In particular, I would like to thank Jo Aldridge and Paula Saukko for supervising me and guiding me through this research and for their constructive criticism and advice. I am also very grateful to Maggie O'Neill and Teela Sanders for their encouragement and support. I owe sincere thanks to my friends and family, who have sustained and encouraged me throughout this long journey. Finally, I am very grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this research (grant number ES/H012192/1).

## Table of contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
List of figures and tables.....	vii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Theoretical and policy background .....	5
1.2 Exploitation, choice and agency in sex work: competing discourses .....	8
1.3 Research questions .....	12
1.4 Thesis structure .....	13
<b>Chapter Two: Sex work in the UK: the theoretical and policy context and organisational structures .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Theoretical perspectives on prostitution .....	15
2.1.1 Prostitution as exploitation versus sex as work.....	15
2.1.2 Alternative constructions of sexuality: queer theory and sex work .....	21
2.1.3 Relating sex work to mainstream labour .....	25
2.2 The state and sex work: legal and policy frameworks in the UK..	31
2.3 The organisation of sex work in the UK .....	35
2.3.1 Definitions of sex work and markets in sexual labour .....	35
2.3.2 Diversity in sex work .....	37
2.3.3 Third parties in the sex industry .....	39
2.4 Workplace health and safety of sex workers .....	41
2.5 Recent developments in the organisation of sex work.....	42
2.6 Concluding comments .....	44
<b>Chapter Three: Sex as work: context and process .....</b>	<b>45</b>
3.1 The labour market context .....	46
3.1.1 Gendered labour markets .....	46
3.1.2 Theories of labour market segregation .....	48
3.1.3 Labour market diversity and relevance for analysis of sex markets .....	51
3.1.4 Patterns of consumption and conceptions of work.....	53
3.1.5 Globalised labour markets .....	55

3.2	Occupational structures and processes in sex work .....	56
3.2.1	Flexible working, self-employment and sex work .....	58
3.2.2	Labour processes within sex work: body work, aesthetic and emotional labour .....	61
3.3	Discussion: applying diverse theories to the current research .....	69
<b>Chapter Four: Research methodology .....</b>		<b>72</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	72
4.2	Rationale .....	72
4.3	Research design .....	73
4.3.1	Exploring diversity in indoor sex work .....	75
4.3.2	Data collection method: interviews .....	77
4.3.3	Other data sources .....	80
4.4	Sampling and access .....	81
4.4.1	Engaging sex workers: access issues .....	81
4.4.2	Sampling considerations .....	82
4.5	Ethical considerations .....	85
4.5.1	Informed consent .....	86
4.5.2	Confidentiality and anonymity .....	86
4.5.3	Data storage .....	87
4.5.4	Researcher safety .....	88
4.5.5	Research and the Internet .....	88
4.5.6	Other considerations .....	89
4.6	Analysis .....	91
4.6.1	Interview transcription .....	91
4.6.2	Stages of analysis .....	92
4.7	Reflections on the research process .....	98
4.7.1	Participant recruitment and involvement .....	98
4.7.2	Interview process .....	103
4.8	About the participants .....	104
<b>Chapter Five: Work organisation and services in different indoor settings .....</b>		<b>108</b>
5.1	Introduction and overview .....	108
5.2	Sex work in context: working structures and practices .....	109
5.2.1	Diverse settings and working arrangements .....	109
5.2.2	Geographical distribution of sex work and occupational mobility .....	112

5.3	The organisation of sex work: independent and “managed” work ...	113
5.3.1	Management arrangements and levels of autonomy .....	113
5.3.2	Work organisation and conditions in managed settings .....	118
5.3.3	Independent self-employed sex work .....	126
5.4	Services in independent and managed settings .....	131
5.4.1	Types of services and appointment lengths in different settings	131
5.4.2	Prices and working hours.....	136
5.5	Marketing strategies and self-presentation .....	142
5.6	Conclusions .....	148
<b>Chapter Six: Work trajectories, attitudes to sex work and aspirations .</b>		<b>151</b>
6.1.	Introduction .....	151
6.2.	Modes of entry and reasons for working in the sex industry .....	153
6.2.1	Reasons for participating in sex work .....	154
6.2.2	Pathways in to sex work: planned and unplanned transitions...	157
6.2.3	Individual agency and transitions into sex work .....	164
6.3	Approaches to the work and job satisfaction .....	166
6.3.1	Job satisfaction and autonomy .....	168
6.3.2	Social interaction and client relations.....	170
6.3.3	Well-being and self-respect .....	174
6.4	Aspirations and barriers to achievement.....	178
6.4.1	Interim or short-term careers .....	179
6.4.2	Mobility and multiple transitions .....	180
6.4.3	Longer term participation .....	182
6.4.4	Developing a typology of transitions .....	184
6.5	Conclusions .....	185
<b>Chapter Seven: Labour processes and skills in sex work.....</b>		<b>187</b>
7.1	Introduction .....	187
7.2	Intimate labour: embodied and emotional labour .....	189
7.2.1	Degrees of intimate labour in different settings.....	191
7.2.2	Emotional labour and gender.....	194
7.3	Managing identities: balancing commercial and non-commercial lives .....	197
7.4	Managing risk .....	203
7.4.1	Safety precautions and screening procedures.....	205
7.4.2	Attitudes to risk: health and sexual health.....	207

7.5	Managing the contract .....	209
7.5.1	Establishing terms and conditions .....	209
7.5.2	Managing the encounter .....	212
7.5.3	Addressing occupational problems and contractual infringements .....	213
7.6	Conclusions .....	222
<b>Chapter Eight: Negotiating constraints and strategies of resistance in sex work.....</b>		<b>225</b>
8.1	Introduction .....	225
8.2	Constraints to working practices and aspirations.....	227
8.2.1	Legal and policy constraints.....	227
8.2.2	The impact of stigma.....	235
8.3	Sex workers presenting themselves .....	245
8.4	Communities of support.....	248
8.5	Conclusions .....	252
<b>Chapter Nine: Conclusions.....</b>		<b>255</b>
9.1	Key findings .....	256
9.2	Understanding sex work in context.....	269
9.3	Agency and compulsion in sex work: recognising diversity .....	271
9.4	Methodological reflections and limitations .....	275
9.5	Policy implications and future research .....	277
Glossary .....		281
References .....		283
Appendix A: About the participants.....		317
Appendix B: Research instruments .....		319

## **List of figures and tables**

Figure 4.1	Top-level nodes and sub-categories in NVivo coding tree	95
Table 4.1:	Participants' work setting by gender	105
Table 4.2:	Total participants by gender and age	105
Table 4.3	Age of first entry into sex work by gender	106
Table 4.4	Ethnicity/origin of participants	106
Table 4.5:	Qualifications level by gender	107
Table 5.1:	Work characteristics in indoor settings	111
Table 6.1:	Patterns of entry into sex work	163
Table 6.2:	Transitions within and from sex work	185
Table 9.1	Comparative findings according to gender and work setting	267



## Chapter One: Introduction

There is a considerable body of literature relating to prostitution and sex work, spanning different disciplines and theoretical perspectives. Within feminist debates in particular, there is an enduring divergence between a standpoint that prostitution is a fundamental example of patriarchal relations and thus essentially a form of exploitation of women, and a view that sex work should be considered as an occupation in the informal economy, with sex workers entitled to the same rights as workers in the mainstream economy (O'Neill, 2001; Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009). This bifurcation has sometimes led to oversimplified conceptions of exploitation versus agency, rather than a consideration of the extent to which different states of being might coexist along a spectrum. While a range of studies has been undertaken on specific groups of sex workers, particularly women, there has been less systematic consideration of the terms and conditions of prostitution as work across the sex industry (Weitzer, 2005a). In recent years some academic theorists have begun to focus on the intricacies of sex work as a form of labour, particularly in relation to female sex workers in specific indoor settings (e.g. Sanders, 2005a; Brents, Jackson and Hausbeck, 2010). Nonetheless, there are different opinions regarding the product(s) being sold and the labour processes involved in commercial sex (Hardy, 2013).

Although some studies consider the evidence concerning male as well as female sex workers, few research studies have been undertaken with the express intention of comparing working conditions and occupational structures for men and women working in the sex industry and this remains a key research gap (O'Neill, 2008). Those studies which have considered gender differences in sex work have also tended to focus on specific work settings or localities. For example, a study in the USA (Weinberg, Shaver and Williams, 1999) used structured interviews to compare the working experiences of 140 male, female and transgender street-based sex workers in the San Francisco Tenderloin district. This built on an earlier study in Australia by Perkins and Bennett (1985, cited in Weinberg et al., 1999), which collated the findings from

separate studies of female, male and transgender sex workers. The study by Weinberg et al. (1999) suggested that men and women working in street-based settings have different motivations for engaging in sex work. They also found that female sex workers were less likely than male or transgender workers to report sexual enjoyment in their work. Although women in their study did not experience income inequities and there was no significant difference between male, female and transgender workers in terms of their experience of physical violence such as beatings and robbery, women were found to be more at risk of rape than their male or transgender counterparts. Nonetheless, this research related to a specific context and the experiences of street-based workers discussed here may not necessarily be generalisable to a broader study of indoor sex work as an occupation.

There is currently little comparative research into the gender dimensions of sex work in the UK. A study by Jenkins (2009), surveyed 483 male, female and transgender escorts advertising online, predominantly in the UK but also a small number in other countries, with in-depth follow-up interviews undertaken with more than 100 participants. Although the focus was on exploitation, the study also explored topics such as motivation and the purchase of sexual services. Jenkins' findings concurred with those of other studies of indoor sex workers in that the majority of respondents had entered sex work of their own volition and did not view sex work merely as a strategy for survival. Female sex workers in her study were as likely as male workers to take an entrepreneurial approach to their work. The flexibility of the job and the social aspects were the most important features of their work. The study by Jenkins is an important advance in comparative research although, as O'Connell Davidson (1998) has observed, the position of independent sex workers such as escorts differs from that of workers in some form of direct or indirect employment. With this in mind, in the current study I aimed to broaden the research focus through considering not only differences according to gender, but also diverse forms of work organisation within indoor-based sex work.

Certain studies have compared sex workers in different forms of work, particularly street-based and indoor workers, although these have tended to

focus on female sex workers alone. For example, Jeal and Salisbury (2007) undertook a cross-sectional survey into the health and service needs of parlour-based compared with street-based workers. Their research also investigated the social background and personal characteristics of respondents, finding that parlour workers tended to have had a more stable childhood and subsequent home environment, higher levels of qualification and lower levels of drug use than street-based workers. They were also more likely to be engaged in education and to have entered sex work at an older age than their street-based counterparts. Other studies have reviewed the literature to examine sex work as an occupation, again focusing primarily on female sex workers. For example, Brewis and Linstead (2000a: 232) stress the importance of context in sexual labour and conclude that ‘it is difficult to represent prostitution as entirely like, or as entirely unlike, other forms of wage labour’. They observe that street-based work often displays a changing population, with a high proportion of casual workers, and that indoor occupations vary in their nature and conditions. Sex workers seeking career development tend to move into indoor work, including parlour and independent work. Brewis and Linstead distinguish between “business careers”, reflected in more traditional upward mobility, and “moral careers”, which relate to the processes of becoming involved in the sex industry and the ways in which sex workers manage their working and private lives. Theorists such as Sanders (2005b) have also considered the ways in which female sex workers in different indoor occupations manage their personal and working identities. A number of recent studies (including Abel, 2011; Walby, 2012; Brents and Jackson, 2013) explore the emotional as well as physical labour performed by workers in indoor occupations, sometimes comparing sex work with other forms of service work. The majority of these studies have focused on either female or male sex workers separately, or on sex workers in specific settings rather than across diverse occupational groups.

Taking into account the factors discussed above, my starting point for the current study was to explore direct sex work<sup>1</sup> as a labour market activity

---

<sup>1</sup> Often used as alternative to “prostitution”: see section 1.1 for discussion of terminology.

across the broad spectrum of indoor-based work, principally from the perspective of sex workers, but also capturing where possible the experience of others working in the sector. In considering sex work as an occupation, the study aims to address research gaps in relation to indoor-based sex work in Great Britain, through investigating the working experiences of different groups of adult sex workers in diverse settings and contextualising these experiences within broader labour market developments. Approaching sex work from an occupational perspective enables a multi-layered analysis of organisational structures, working relationships and diverse conditions within the indoor sex industry. I also position adult sex work in relation to other service sector occupations, drawing on the experiences and perceptions of research participants with a range of working backgrounds. Through situating the study in the context of wider labour market theories, I aim to explore how these theories may relate to sexual labour, which I take here to incorporate the broad range of processes involved in sex work. I consider diverse experiences within sub-sectors of the indoor sex industry to draw out themes relating to comparative agency, job satisfaction and work autonomy, emphasising gender differences where they occur, but also illuminating similarities in perspectives or working practices where appropriate. I also explore how sex workers' experiences are shaped by factors such as their human capital, background and individual approaches to work generally, as well as sex work specifically.

Although a study of sexual labour by its nature challenges discourses of prostitution as an exemplar of patriarchal exploitation, it is important to emphasise that my theoretical position stems from the perspective that adult commercial sex should be considered a form of legitimate work. An approach which considers sex work as a labour market activity does not foreclose an exploration of gender segregation and inequalities in institutions and relations, but rather enables a more nuanced picture to emerge which takes into account interrelated factors such as social class and economic power, and considers the aspects which contribute to or detract from a productive working environment. Prior to outlining the aims and structure for this thesis, I discuss the theoretical context to the study.

## **1.1 *Theoretical and policy background***

It is important to locate an occupational study of sex work in the context of current legal systems and policy approaches to prostitution and sex work. The regulatory framework helps to shape cultural and social meanings of commercial sex and can have a substantial impact on working conditions in the sex industry. While academic research may be moving towards explorations of diversity in sexual labour, the policy approach and legal reforms relating to prostitution in the UK in the twenty-first century have been described as being influenced by an “abolitionist” perspective that constitutes prostitution as exploitation and violence against women (Phoenix, 2009). This position ignores the fact that, while women represent the largest proportion of sex workers, many men and some transgender people also work in the sex industry. It also does not take into account the diverse experiences of sex workers. While the notion of relative choice remains a contentious issue, it can be argued that many adult sex workers have taken a decision to engage in the work, primarily for economic reasons (O’Neill, 1997; Sanders, 2005a). Arguably, this motivation is shared by many people who engage in paid labour.

In identifying prostitution as a form of work and sex workers’ agency in entering and remaining in sex work, this does not mean it should be viewed as unproblematic. While treating sex work as an understandable response to economic need within the context of consumer culture, authors such as O’Connell Davidson (1998), Phoenix (1999), O’Neill (2001), Scoular (2004a) and Sanders (2005a) highlight the socio-economic processes and structures that shape involvement in the sex industry and note the social and political inequalities that underpin sex markets. The research design for this study thus also draws on theories of labour market segregation, taking into account not only gender differences, but also other factors such as class and relative economic power. The study also considers the labour processes involved in sex work, set in the context of theories of intimate and emotional labour. The role of stigma and the law in contributing to the marginal status of sex work are also important considerations.

My research is informed by feminist theories and approaches to research practice. This is complicated by the fact that there are multiple feminist theoretical paradigms, drawing on specific political ideologies and philosophies (Jagger, 1983). The radical feminist conception of prostitution as an archetype of patriarchal relations, for example, is in direct opposition to the conception of commercial sex as work, which emanated from the sex workers' rights movements in the 1970s. The concept of sex as work may also be broadly associated with a liberal, rights-based feminist tradition, which sees the removal of discriminatory laws as a means to equality (Sloan and Wahab, 2000). Nonetheless, there are also disagreements within such broad political and theoretical traditions and, as Zatz (1997: 282) observes, the lines between different approaches to prostitution/sex work are 'blurry at best'. There are also differences in opinion regarding what is being sold in the sex work contract, which influence the way in which sex as work is constructed. While my starting point is the assumption that sex work should be researched as an occupation, which reflects a broad liberal tradition viewing adult prostitution as a form of work, this does not preclude drawing on aspects of other feminist theories which are pertinent to an analysis of work, as well as to issues such as power and autonomy within the work and wider social contexts. As Brace and O'Connell Davidson (2000) have commented, it is important to move beyond the generalised assumptions underpinning different feminist theories of gendered power relations and to situate analyses within the context of social structures and interrelated factors such as race and social class.

While my research locates adult prostitution firmly within the world of work, my concern is to draw on sex workers' understandings of their work and different practices within varied contexts. I also explore how participants situate their work in relation to conditions in the wider labour market and their perceptions of the factors constraining or facilitating them, in order to develop broader conceptualisations of relative power and agency within their social context. In drawing on the voices of sex workers, my research approach is informed by feminist standpoint epistemology (Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1990; O'Neill, 2001). Feminist standpoint theorists stress the importance of experiential knowledge in developing an understanding of the world and social relations.

While early standpoint theory has been criticised as being obsolete and partial, it has been argued by theorists such as Harding (2004) that it continues to have relevance today, particularly in its aims of understanding relationships between social structures and institutions and the lives of women and other marginalised groups. Kathi Weeks (1998) has shown how certain models of standpoint theory are pertinent to analyses of the labour market, particularly in terms of considering working practices in the context of gendered and racial divisions of labour. These interpretations make standpoint theory highly relevant to studies of sex work. As my study draws on research not only with women, but also men and transgender people working within the sex industry, my concern is with the way in which social structures and power relations shape the experiences and perspectives of sex workers in different ways.

In order to broaden the research beyond sex work alone, I draw on the literature in the sociology of work, to consider contextual issues such as work in the informal economy, theories of labour market segregation by gender, comparisons of employed and self-employed status and factors contributing to job satisfaction. Recent theories of gender, sexuality and the body which have emerged over the past few decades are also relevant to analyses of discourses surrounding sex work. For example, queer theory, which is concerned with the social production and regulation of sexuality, contests moral conceptions of acceptable forms of sexuality and notions of deviancy which contribute to the social exclusion of groups such as sex workers (e.g. Pendleton, 1997; McKay, 1999). Other studies of relevance, such as that by Oerton and Phoenix (2001), have focused on the discursive constructions of sex, gender and the body.

It is important to specify that the focus of my research is on direct commercial sexual services, often defined as prostitution. I refer to this as “sex work”, which has become an established term in much academic writing, as it reflects the preference of many people working in the sex industry and is seen as less stigmatising than “prostitution” (Sanders et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the term “sex work” extends to a wide range of commercial sexual services and can also encompass indirect services such as exotic dance, which I have not

included in this study because they are subject to a different regulatory framework in Great Britain. Direct and indirect sex work also involve distinct labour processes, levels of intimacy and types of bodily interaction with customers (Cohen et al., 2013). Categorising prostitution as “sex work” is significant for this study, however, because it acknowledges that sexual labour may be viewed as work. Bindman and Doezema (1997) argue that redefinition of prostitution as sex work is an essential step towards enabling people in prostitution to enjoy the same human and labour rights as other workers. Nonetheless, as Weeks (2011) observes, while substituting “sex work” for “prostitution” moves the debate away from a moral to economic discourse and is important for inclusion of sex workers as citizens, it does not challenge the problems inherent in work itself. In drawing comparisons between sex work and other occupations in the mainstream economy, this research highlights that some of the problematic issues associated with sex work reflect working relations in the broader economy, although the legal and social contexts surrounding sex work continue to exclude it from analyses of waged labour.

## ***1.2 Exploitation, choice and agency in sex work: competing discourses***

A central concern of my study is exploration of relative agency experienced by sex workers, in the context of social and economic constraints to action. The question of whether, or to what degree, sex workers are able to exercise agency is a significant feature in the key feminist debates concerning prostitution and sex work. These relate primarily to female sex workers, focusing on the issues of coercion and exploitation and the notion of “choice” within sex work. Two polarised perspectives have tended to dominate policy discourses on the regulation of sex work, neither of which represents the complex nature of sex work nor the socio-economic structures influencing people’s decisions to engage in commercial sex (Sanders et al., 2009). On one side of the divide, prostitution is viewed as an exemplar of patriarchal oppression of women and on the other, the sale of sexual services is seen as a form of work comparable to jobs in the mainstream economy. The former



perspective emanates from a radical feminist “abolitionist” discourse, which defines all prostitution as male violence, with female sex workers seen as victims of gendered oppression (Jeffreys, 1997; Farley, 2004). From this perspective, women cannot consent to their own oppression and therefore those who assert that they have chosen to engage in sex work or, moreover, do not find it degrading, are experiencing a form of false consciousness (Kesler, 2002). In the abolitionist account, sex workers are overwhelmingly female and the experiences of male and transgender workers are ignored (Comte, 2013). At the opposite end of the theoretical divide, sex-positive feminists contend that consensual adult commercial sex has emancipatory potential when sex workers are afforded the same labour rights as other workers (e.g. Queen, 1997). As noted earlier, between these two stances there is a growing body of academic literature which presents a more nuanced appraisal of working practices and structures in sex work. Nonetheless, the way in which the debate is currently framed in policy deliberations makes it difficult to move beyond simple dichotomies of force versus choice. As I discuss below, treating volition and compulsion as oppositional categories does not allow for consideration of context. Furthermore, concepts such as power, control and freedom are themselves disputed notions which are culturally shaped and value-dependent (Lukes, 2005).

Critics of the radical feminist abolitionist perspective have argued that it reduces women to victims and negates their capacity to exercise agency, either when taking the decision to enter sex work or within their working relationships (Matthieu, 2003; Phoenix and Oerton, 2005). Moreover, both extremes of the ideological debate fail to account for the material conditions which shape transitions into sex work. For women and migrant workers in particular, their entry into sex work may be viewed in the context of broader labour market changes, which include an increase in low-paid service sector occupations and non-standard forms of work that offer relatively little economic security (Agustín, 2003; Bruckert and Parent, 2006). While lack of alternatives and economic constraints may often be motivations for engagement in sex work, some people may actively decide to sell sex in preference to other employment options, for a range of reasons (Perkins and Lovejoy, 2007;

Sanders et al., 2009). Many scholars therefore suggest that there are considerable arguments for treating commercial sex as a form of work, and for setting analyses of labour processes and workplace relations in sex work in the context of broader social and economic trends (Sanders, 2005a; Brents and Hausbeck, 2010; Hardy, 2013).

The theoretical divide partly hinges on disagreement regarding what is commodified in sex work. Feminist abolitionist writers such as Jeffreys (2009: 61) hold that it is women's bodies or selves which are sold in prostitution, in a market premised on the "male sex right", and thus prostitution can never be considered a voluntary transaction. In this interpretation, prostitution is often equated with slavery (Weitzer, 2007). In contrast, those who contend that sex work is a form of labour maintain that the product being sold is sexual services, not sex workers' personhood, and that the sale of sexual services does not necessarily imply relinquishing all control (Kesler, 2002).

Nonetheless, while it may be argued that what is sold in the sex work transaction is sexual labour, there are certain features of the sex work encounter which distinguish it from most forms of labour, particularly in the interaction between worker and client (Brents and Jackson, 2013). While workers' bodies are implicated in the labour process more broadly, therefore, sex workers' bodies are involved in a particular way (Cohen et al., 2013). Nonetheless, it is possible to recognise that sex work may have certain characteristics which differentiate it from other occupations while at the same time acknowledging that it is also a form of paid labour.

While taking a view that sex workers are selling their services or labour, and not themselves, this does not necessarily lead to a conclusion that the exchange is always mutual or between two equal parties. There are structural implications to be taken into account in an analysis of sex work, which relate to the way in which the sex industry is shaped by inequalities of class, gender and race. Although some of these structural inequalities are raised by the radical feminist critique, acknowledgement of these does not entail acceptance of the essentialist conclusions emanating from the abolitionist position. As suggested by Korczynski, Hodson and Edwards (2006), it is possible to

acknowledge structural constraints while also allowing space for the agency of individual actors. These constraints are also context-specific, depending on factors such as the institutional setting, power structures in those settings and relationships with others (Young, 2005). In the case of sexual labour, an important consideration is the way in which broader social divisions and institutions influence relationships of power, the organisation of work and the position of individuals within the sex industry. Many accounts which draw on the experiences of sex workers challenge the construction of prostitution as inherently non-consensual, and suggest that degrees of agency vary according to the context in which people sell sex and their individual circumstances (e.g. Bernstein, 2007a; Koken, 2010). Moreover, there is not always a clear separation between forced and “free” labour, particularly when considering exploitative conditions and degrees of economic compulsion (O’Connell Davidson, 2006a; 2014). Exploitation and coercion take many forms and, as Weeks (2011) has noted, the workplace may often be a key site of inequality and domination. Furthermore, defining an entire institution as intrinsically exploitative forecloses any consideration of degrees of exploitation or of ways to address specific instances of coercion or mistreatment.

Although it is important to set analyses of the sex industry in context and to acknowledge the gender and ethnic dimensions of sex work, a consideration of relative agency within sex work also needs to move beyond simple binaries of “exploitation” versus “choice” and to explore the circumstances which may facilitate or hinder people’s capacity to take decisions about their lives. While some elements of the sex industry may involve unequal gendered relationships, power and control within the industry is also relative to specific individual circumstances and work settings (Brents et al., 2010; Petro, 2010). The experiences of people who enter sex work as adults, for example, may be very different from those of young people, whose transitions into selling sex may often be driven by a number of interlocking factors which can include homelessness, a background in the care system and neglect or abuse in the home (O’Neill, 2001). Similarly, street-based sex work tends to be associated with a range of structural problems, including poverty and social exclusion (Pitcher et al., 2006). As scholars such as Sanders (2005a) have argued,

working conditions and sex workers' experiences in indoor and street sectors tend to be markedly dissimilar. There are also differences between indoor sectors, with independent sex workers generally experiencing greater autonomy than those working for a third party, where there is greater potential for exploitation (O'Connell Davidson, 1998; Chapkis, 2000). The regulatory framework also influences power relations in the sex industry and a context in which sex work is criminalised allows for no distinction between supportive or coercive management practices in establishments (Sanders, 2009).

Proponents of the abolitionist discourse argue that recognising sex work as a labour market practice legitimates the harms inherent in prostitution. While there are important considerations relating to sex work as an institution and the extent to which gendered as well as racialised relationships of power are entrenched in sex markets globally and nationally, however, it is also pertinent to take into account the role of individual circumstances and structural variations within the industry. As this thesis will demonstrate, approaching sex work as an occupation, rather than occluding the nature of exploitative practices within the industry, allows for consideration of the factors which reduce or enable people's capacity to exercise agency across diverse contexts within sex work; and also for comparisons to be made in this regard between sex work and other occupations in the informal or mainstream economies.

### **1.3    *Research questions***

This study aims to explore indoor-based direct sex work in diverse settings and to consider labour market structures, occupational characteristics and conditions. It considers the extent to which there are similarities and differences between workers in different occupational categories.

The main research question is: what are the working experiences of adult sex workers in indoor locations in Great Britain and how do they perceive the terms, conditions and nature of their work?

The study broadens the scope of current debates through drawing on the experiences not only of female, but also male and, to a lesser extent, transgender sex workers<sup>2</sup>, as well as capturing the perspectives of a small number of third parties in managed establishments. It locates analysis of prostitution as work within the wider socio-economic context. The research explores the nature of agency, choice and exploitation and whether gender differences apparent in other labour markets are replicated in the commercial sex industry. The study also considers the extent to which sex work may be viewed as comparable to other forms of labour, or whether there are aspects of this work that differentiate it from mainstream occupations.

In examining sex work as a multi-faceted occupation undertaken by individuals with diverse backgrounds and in varied circumstances, this research aims to test some of the prevailing political and moral perspectives on prostitution. A further aim of the research is to consider the processes by which meanings and understandings in relation to sex work are created and sustained.

#### **1.4 *Thesis structure***

The remainder of the thesis takes the following format:

Chapter Two reviews the literature concerning theoretical and policy frameworks relating to prostitution and sex work. It considers competing discourses, the role of the state in regulating sex work and the organisation of the indoor sex industry in the UK.

Chapter Three develops the discussion on sex work as labour, considering labour market theories, particularly in relation to diversity and disadvantage, globalisation and consumption. It explores the relevance of these theories to occupational structures and processes in sex work.

---

<sup>2</sup> This reflects both difficulties in recruitment and the smaller number of transgender, compared with female and male sex workers in Great Britain, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Four sets out and explains the research design and the methodological approaches informing the study. It discusses data collection methods, research processes and data analysis and reflects on the ethical and practical considerations relating to the research.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the research regarding the organisation of work in different indoor settings, the diversity of services provided and ways in which sex workers market their services. It explores differences between business practices and working conditions in independent sex work and establishments managed by a third party, as well as considering the gendering of sex markets. The relevance of external constraints structuring sex work and their relation to individual agency is a consistent theme throughout the analysis.

Chapter Six draws on the interviews to discuss trajectories into sex work, mobility between different sectors, factors influencing relative job satisfaction and participants' aspirations. It develops typologies of transitions linked to initial reasons for entry, aspirations and approaches to the work.

Chapter Seven explores the labour processes and skills involved in sex work from participants' perspectives. It considers diversity according to gender and working context, discusses the ways in which sex workers manage the contract with clients and how agency may be diminished in certain circumstances.

Chapter Eight considers sex workers' responses to external constraints, including legal and policy restrictions on their working practices and the impact of social stigma. It draws on the interviews and participants' online activities to discuss how sex workers present themselves and develop strategies of resistance to dominant discourses.

Chapter Nine draws together the key themes and outcomes from the research, presents policy recommendations and offers suggestions for future research directions.

## **Chapter Two: Sex work in the UK: the theoretical and policy context and organisational structures**

The focus of this thesis is on the occupational processes and structures in sex work and its comparability to sectors in the formal economy. Nonetheless, any discussions on sex work tend to be framed by theoretical and ideological concerns and therefore it is important to review the arguments relating to *whether* prostitution can be perceived as a form of work, as well as the rationale behind the “sex as work” discourse. This chapter sets out the main competing theoretical paradigms, particularly those emerging in the late twentieth century, considers relatively recent theoretical developments which have some bearing on normative conceptions of sexuality and the sale of sexual services and presents arguments for setting sex work within a labour market framework. The factors which may distinguish it from occupations in the mainstream economy are also considered. The organisation of sex work in the UK and recent developments are set within the legal and policy context framing the sale and purchase of sex, which has a significant influence on structures and working practices in the industry.

### **2.1 *Theoretical perspectives on prostitution***

#### **2.1.1 Prostitution as exploitation versus sex as work**

Social meanings of the consumption and sale of sex are influenced by different factors, including legal and political frameworks and social, historical and economic contexts (Harcourt, Egger and Donovan, 2005). Historically prostitution has not always been viewed as deviant behaviour and early forms of prostitution took place in temples and were associated with goddess worship (Sanders et al., 2009). Nonetheless, in symbolic representations of the (female) prostitute over time, a contradictory picture has emerged of someone who is morally reprehensible, because by selling her body for sex she is trading something which cannot honourably be sold, while at the same time, the “whore” has been a subject of fantasy for many. These competing

discourses serve to sustain the status and representation of the female prostitute (O'Neill, 2001).

There has been considerable debate on sex markets and sex workers, particularly in the UK, USA and Europe, over the past few decades. As Kotiswaran (2011) comments, conceptions of prostitution are often presented in exaggerated terms, with theoretical stances seen as broadly fractured along two oppositional lines: prostitution as violence versus sexual commerce as work. At one extreme, the abolitionist radical feminist perspective argues that prostitution is essentially non-consensual and exploitative of women and the aim should therefore be its eradication, because women cannot consent to their own oppression (e.g. Jeffreys, 1997; Farley, 2004). From this perspective, any social acknowledgement of prostitution as work is seen as legitimising what are essentially relations of exploitation and violence (Weitzer, 2005b). Towards the opposite end of the theoretical spectrum, the self-defined "sex-positive" feminists argue for a radical sexual politics which recognises the emancipatory potential of sex work when it represents a conscious choice. For example, Queen (1997) argues that sex-positive thought does not demonise any form of consensual sexual expression and treats sex work as a "worthy" form of sexual labour. In this interpretation consensual sex work may be liberating and represents a challenge to normative conceptions of femininity and sexual relationships. A sex-positive feminist perspective understands that:

....we value our work when it allows us autonomy, free time and a comfortable income; we often like living outside the narrow circle society circumscribes of ladylike behaviour; we are not "good girls", nor do we aspire to be. (Queen, 1997: 135)

These oppositional extremes have been criticised for simplifying the complexities of prostitution or sex work. The position that all prostitution is violence against and/or exploitation of women, for example, has been challenged by other branches of feminist thought and by sex workers' rights groups, who argue that this stance represents women as passive victims



(Mathieu, 2003; Phoenix and Oerton, 2005). From this perspective, any concept of sex workers' agency is denied and those sex workers who argue that they experience agency are suffering from false consciousness. As Kotiswaran (2011: 29) comments of the radical feminist perspective: 'Objectification and commodification in and of themselves constitute harm and inequality while precluding sex workers' consent, so the context in which sex work is performed is immaterial'. Critiquing the "pro-sex" perspective, Miriam (2005) argues that this is based on an "expressivist" model of individual freedom, which makes the conceptual leap from recognition of prostitution as work to sex work as an actualisation of sexual identity. At a very basic level, therefore, these two polarised interpretations represent two extremes of agency: from an emphasis on very limited, or no agency, to relatively high levels of agency leading to self-empowerment. Neither of these positions reflects the socio-economic context which frames people's entry into sex work, nor, arguably, the experience of many of those working in the sex industry (O'Neill, 2001). Nonetheless, they may be seen as illustrating two extremes of a continuum of agency, which is relevant to the current research study.

Arguing in favour of the radical feminist position, Miriam (2005) points to the individualist nature of the liberal approach to sex work, which, she contends, ignores the social relations of domination. In doing so, she draws on the theories of Carole Pateman, particularly regarding the "sexual contract". Approaching the issue from the perspective of the "prostitution contract", Pateman (1983; 1988) argues that assertions that prostitution is a free contract or equal exchange ignore problems of domination and subjection. Changes to the legislative context will not improve the circumstances of prostitutes, as the relationship between prostitute and "client" is essentially one of control and submission. Thus, for Pateman (1983: 561):

The central feminist argument is that prostitution remains morally undesirable, no matter what reforms are made, because it is one of the most graphic examples of men's domination of women.

Pateman (1988) argues that it is not simply a contingent fact that most prostitutes are women and most customers men, but that prostitution is an essential product of patriarchal capitalist society. In this sense she concurs with the abolitionist view described above. Thus for Pateman:

When women's bodies are on sale as commodities in the capitalist market, the terms of the original contract cannot be forgotten; the law of male sex-right is publicly affirmed, and men gain public acknowledgement as women's sexual masters – that is what is wrong with prostitution.

(Pateman, 1988: 208)

As Hardy (2013) observes, the theoretical divides also rest on different understandings of what is commodified in prostitution or sex work: at one extreme, women are selling their bodies and/or selves; at the other they are selling services or a form of labour. In a later work, Pateman distances herself from those who consider prostitution to be a form of slavery, and notes that she views it rather as a form of civil subordination (Pateman, 2007). As such, it can be considered similar to employment in some ways. Nonetheless, in her view the sexual contract is also intrinsically different from the traditional employment contract because the way in which women's bodies are commodified in prostitution cannot be considered equal to the way in which people use their bodies and labour power in employment relations. While legal and social reforms might improve the conditions in prostitution, Pateman contends that the prostitution contract essentially lacks reciprocity and therefore cannot be an equal exchange. While this does not deny the agency of individuals who enter prostitution, they are nonetheless entering an institution which is fundamentally unequal in its nature. This raises some important questions regarding contractual relations in sex work, as well as its uniquely embodied and intimate nature, which will be explored further in this thesis.

A further problem with both the radical feminist discourse and Pateman's position outlined above is that they presuppose that all prostitution relations are structured according to male entitlement under patriarchy. A fundamental

basis of abolitionist theory is that women's bodies are supplied in the capitalist market in order to meet men's demands for sexual access (Miriam, 2005). As discussed earlier, this proposition is problematic because it is premised on a gendered assumption about sex workers and their clients, either ignoring the existence or the relevance of male or transgender sex workers, or female clients (Outshoorn, 2004). While Pateman (1983) acknowledges that some men also sell sexual services, her view on this is that 'it is not immediately clear that homosexual prostitution has the same social significance [as female prostitution]' (Pateman, 1983: 564). In neglecting the situation of male sex workers, this theoretical position appears to ignore the complexity of power differentials and relative freedom beyond a particular gendered construct. Rather than male sex work being irrelevant to theories of gendered subordination, it can equally be argued that its existence counters the assertion that the purpose of prostitution is to enforce the subjection of women (Satz, 2006). Gaffney and Beverley (2001) argue that male sex workers are also disadvantaged through hegemonic and heterosexist societal discourses. While sex work as an institution may be seen as gendered, reflecting wider labour market structures, it is important not to ignore other social and economic inequalities in pursuance of one particular social relation. In analysing the occupational nature of sex work in the current research, I draw on the experiences of male as well as female sex workers to explore these issues further.

One of the key concerns of those arguing against the radical feminist/abolitionist discourse is that there appears to be no space for differentiating between consensual contractual sex and situations of violence or rape, which are clearly non-consensual. O'Connell Davidson (1998: 122) points to the danger of defining all prostitution as violence against women, not only because it obscures variations in power relations and ignores the contractual nature of transactions, but also because it implies that, if all prostitution is rape, 'it is logical to define prostitutes as women who are publicly available to be raped'. Miriam (2005: 12) argues that from a radical feminist position this is precisely the implication: 'if prostitution is an institution that entitles men to have sexual access to women, the view of prostitutes as

unrapeable is an effect of the institution itself rather than a distorting view of the institution'. This argument appears circular, however, as it only obtains if the original premise on which it is based is accepted. Such an acceptance would also have implications for contractual relations more widely, both in a commercial and non-commercial sense. Taken to its logical conclusion, it would appear to imply that consent under one set of circumstances leads to presumption of consent under *all* circumstances, yet no clear argument is presented as to why prostitution should be essentially different from either private sexual relations, or other occupations which are defined on a contractual basis. As Day (2007) comments, this conception of prostitution is strongly contested by many of those working in the industry, who are able to specify the difference between consensual and non-consensual acts. If one does not accept the deterministic viewpoint that prostitution necessarily legitimises men's unconditional sexual access to women, then it is possible to explore further the conditions relating to contract and consent in sex work.

Between the two extreme positions outlined earlier sits a range of academic literature, which both acknowledges gender inequalities in the industry and the economic circumstances influencing involvement in sex work (O'Neill, 1997; Sanders, 2005a). O'Connell Davidson (1998) observes that while there is considerable variation within prostitution in terms of relative power and individual freedom, with a particular distinction between independent sex workers and those controlled by a third party, prostitution is also shaped by a range of factors, including economic pressures, the role of third parties and broader ideological and political contexts. She argues for a more nuanced perspective which takes into account factors such as gender, sexuality, race and relative economic circumstances. While there is a growing body of feminist academics presenting diverse perspectives on the sex industry which embrace neither of the two polarised positions outlined above, there are nonetheless different understandings of the nature of sex work and whether, or where, it should be situated in relation to the world of work (Kotiswaran, 2011). In the current research study, I aim to explore these issues further, through considering the way in which sex workers make sense of and relate to different working contexts. Factors which impinge on relative agency and job

satisfaction, including the industry structures and external constraints, are also important in developing an understanding of sex work as a form of labour.

### **2.1.2 Alternative constructions of sexuality: queer theory and sex work**

Recent theories of sexuality and sexual identity such as queer theory bring a further dimension to discourses of sex work. These theories challenge notions of (hetero)normativity, scrutinise societal taboos and constraints on sexual citizenship, thereby offering an alternative to traditional binary conceptions of sexuality, gender identity and family relationships based on heterosexual norms (Stein and Plummer, 1994; J Weeks, 1998). Queer theorists argue that gender and sexuality are fluid and contingent, enacted through particular discourses or scripts. Butler (1993: 2) contends that cultural norms work to produce, or “perform” constructions of sex and gender which ‘materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative’. Butler uses the notion of performativity in more than one sense: in relation to actual performances, such as drag, which subvert and parody normative configurations of gender and sexuality, and also, drawing on the work of philosophers such as J. L. Austin, in terms of performative acts or linguistic practices that exercise power through their usage. Performatives:

...not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse. (Butler, 1993: 225)

For Butler, the construction of gender norms is through a combination of naming and processes or actions which reinforce those norms. These then lead to notions of “insiders” who conform to these norms and “outsiders” who present other forms of sexuality viewed as deviant. Hubbard (2002) describes the way in which queer theory contests moral conceptions of acceptable forms of sexuality premised on a simple divide between “good” and “bad”:

While dominant notions of sexual citizenship serve to spatially exclude lesbians and gays from visible space, this interpretation has latterly been extended to consider the way that a *particular* notion of heterosexuality is implicated in this process. Specifically, it has been stressed that the distinction between good and bad sexuality is not simply drawn between heterosexuality/homosexuality, but also between monogamous/polygamous, procreative/commercial and polite/perverted hetero-sex. (Hubbard, 2002: 368)

Theorists such as Rubin (1999: 151) have also noted the 'hierarchical system of sexual value' adopted by modern Western societies, which places marital reproductive heterosexuality at its pinnacle, with other forms of stable monogamous relationships below. Sex workers and other socially marginalised groups are at the bottom of the hierarchy:

The most despised sexual castes currently include transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries. (Rubin, 1999: 151)

Glick (2000) notes a degree of convergence between the "pro-sex" feminist movements of the 1980s and queer theory. The pro-sex movement argued that the representation of women as disempowered objects presented in much radical feminist theory failed to acknowledge women as 'sexual subjects in their own right' (Glick, 2000: 20). Nonetheless, Glick also questions the way in which queer theorists and sex positivists appear uncritically to valorise sexual transgression.

Queer theory has been viewed as applicable to sex work because of its perceived potential to destabilise heteronormativity (Pendleton, 1997; McKay, 1999). As Pendleton (1997) notes, the "good wife" as a social concept cannot exist without its opposite, the "whore", which can include not only prostitutes but other fallen women such as teenage mothers. Queer theory's challenge to heteronormative discourses of the sexual (and social) world confronts the

traditional binary divides between purity/impurity in relation to womanhood, or good versus bad sexual relations, offering an alternative construction of sexuality which presents sex workers as neither deviants nor victims, but as one group within a world of diverse sexual actors. Pendleton argues that female sex workers challenge heterosexual norms, by being paid to perform and parody the stereotypical heterosexual feminine role. McKay (1999) sees queer theory as consonant with a construction of prostitution as work, where the traditional economic exchange between (heterosexual) women and men is subverted. Pendleton (1997: 79) argues that the act of making men pay for sexual services 'reverses the terms under which men feel entitled to unlimited access to women's bodies'. Nonetheless, as Pendleton acknowledges, this stance and the implicit contractual relationship is not necessarily understood or appreciated by some male customers, who may feel resentment at having to pay for sex. As I will discuss later, it is also questionable to what extent the performing of traditional sexual roles challenges or reinforces sexual norms.

Queer theorists also present a critique of theoretical perspectives on prostitution as exploitation, arguing that these perspectives themselves are based on both patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions which perpetuate the exclusion of sexualities seen as deviant. For example, Pendleton (1997) comments on the way in which some liberal feminism, rather than supporting sex workers' rights to self-determination, allows for rehabilitation of deviant sexual "others" only if they change their lifestyle in accordance with traditional heterosexual norms. This critique is echoed by McKay (1999), who notes that certain radical feminist discourses which deny sex workers a voice are in effect upholding the patriarchal societal norms which they claim to contest, thereby disempowering sex workers.

The critiques of heteronormativity discussed above are pertinent for this current study, as they represent a challenge to stigma and to specific feminist theoretical perspectives which see prostitution as exploitation, and firmly place sex work within the world of commerce, seeing the paid sexual exchange as a signifier of sexual and economic independence for sex workers. They also potentially allow for consideration of transgender and male-to-male sex work,

rather than focusing solely on female sex workers with male clients. Nonetheless, writers who have applied queer theory to sex work have to date largely limited their analysis to a relatively small aspect of sex work, namely the way in which female sex work disturbs traditional notions of female sexuality and male-female relations within the heterosexual context. In relation to transgender sex workers, Hossain (2010) describes the way in which *hijras*<sup>3</sup> in Bangladesh challenge binary sexual identities both through being a “third sex”, but also, through selling sex, shaping their own identities. He suggests that the earnings from sex work give the *hijras* economic independence and that the act of selling sex also gives a sense of value to a body that is socially stigmatised. While many queer theorists have discussed the way in which male gay sexualities transgress normative conceptions of sexual relations, only a few have extended this debate to male sex work. Walby (2012) suggests that Butler’s notion of performativity fails to accommodate multiple sexualities, or the material nature of bodies and encounters between men who have sex with men. Drawing on research with male Internet escorts, he argues for the need to incorporate the role of bodies and corporeal contact in theorising sexuality, as well as for research linking performativity to the labour process.

As Young (2005) has noted, while deconstructive approaches to queer theory have worked to destabilise traditional conceptions of sex and gender identity, it is not clear how they can be used in practice to develop a broader understanding of people’s experiences. She argues that feminist and queer theories need to be set within the context of social and institutional structures and processes, which create opportunities for some while constraining others. A key concern here is the sexual division of labour and the way in which it intersects with normative heterosexuality, as well as with gendered structures of power and privilege. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three, which focuses on labour market theories and their applicability to sex work. Certain questions also arise in relation to consideration of sex work as an occupation, for example: to what extent is sex work “transgressive” to sex workers

---

<sup>3</sup> Hermaphrodites or intersexuals.



themselves, or is it seen as a job, as mundane as many mainstream sector alternatives? Does this vary according to gender or sector? To what extent are sex workers “performing” gender as a subversive act or, rather, conforming to gender expectations and as such, having gendered norms “performed” on them? And finally, what is the role of agency here? These questions will be explored in the analytical chapters of this thesis. In the following section I consider debates regarding the extent to which sex work can be compared with labour processes in the mainstream economy.

### **2.1.3 Relating sex work to mainstream labour**

While many recent theorists have put a strong case for considering sex work as a form of labour, its location with regards to the mainstream economy remains contested. O’Connell Davidson (1998), for example, sees prostitution as distinct from other forms of work, not only because of the stigma attached to it, but because of the relative nature of choice and compulsion in prostitution compared with other forms of employment. She argues that although the client-prostitute transaction appears consensual, this does not necessarily make the exchange mutual, because within the transaction the prostitute is “socially dead”:

....the essence of the transaction is that the client pays the prostitute to be a person who is not a person. Clients thus get to have sex with a real live, flesh and blood human being, and yet to evade all of the obligations, dependencies and responsibilities which are implied by sexual ‘fusion’ in non-commercial contexts. (O’Connell Davidson, 1998: 134)

Pateman (1988) also stresses the unequal power relations in the prostitution contract, not only because of what she sees as the integral relationship between the body and the self, but also because the (male) customer contracts to buy sexual use of a sex worker’s body for a given period. Thus the corporeality of the exchange, and the fact that clients are contracting for the provision of sexual services from a *specific* person (woman) differentiates the paid sexual contract from other employment contracts. In Pateman’s view,

essential distinctions between prostitution and traditional employment relations mean that it cannot simply be viewed as a variant to other forms of paid work. Ultimately, this precludes it from consideration as a valid or acceptable form of wage labour.

While others would agree that human capital is not the same as other forms of capital, in that a person's relationship with their body and capacities is more intimate than their relationship with external material objects, they question the extent to which this differentiates the sale of sex from other forms of labour that may temporarily relinquish some control over the body to others. For instance, Satz (2006) notes that the sale of intellectual or creative capacities, which are also closely tied in to the notion of "personhood", does not necessarily entail slavery or "social death". In citing the example of airline stewards who have to maintain good humour regardless of the degree of offensive behaviour exhibited by customers, she notes: 'Some control of our capacities by others does not seem to be ipso facto destructive of our dignity' (Satz, 2006: 405).

Overall (1992) rejects certain contentions for viewing prostitution as intrinsically different from other forms of work: for instance, the issue of relative choice to enter prostitution compared with other forms of monotonous paid labour within capitalist societies such as factory work and domestic service; or the notion that women who say they choose to engage in such work are suffering from "false consciousness". She notes that: 'The presence of coercion and the absence of consent arguably are features of many of women's activities and roles' (Overall, 1992: 712). Nonetheless, Overall argues that there remains a fundamental distinction between prostitution and these other forms of feminised work, in that the latter may be reversible: for example, men could equally perform domestic cleaning for women or other men. In the case of prostitution, however:

Unlike other forms of labor mostly performed by women, prostitution is dependent both for its value and for its very existence upon the cultural construction of gender roles in terms of domination and submission. While

women are taught to render sexual services for recompense and often to regard that rendering as part of what it means to be a woman, men are encouraged to seek and expect sexual services and, indeed, to regard the acquisition of sexual services as part of what it means to be a man. (Overall, 1992: 719)

Thus for Overall, the commercial sexual exchange is essentially tied in to our notions of masculinity and femininity and also linked to the unequal degree of social stigma attached to the purchase and sale of sex: 'While the sale of sex helps to define woman, it also condemns her; the purchase of sex also helps to define man, but it does not condemn him' (Overall, 1992: 720). Overall argues that the combination of patriarchy and capitalism lead to inherent inequalities in sex work, with those who are socially disadvantaged providing services to the more privileged in society. Although some men may also work in the industry, it is predominantly women providing a service to men. Nonetheless, while Overall makes important points about sexual inequalities in society and the gendered construction of sex work, there are some fundamental flaws in her argument, taken up by Shrage (1994). For instance, Overall fails to account for the sale of sex outside the context of capitalism and considers the features she attributes to sex work as pertaining equally across all capitalist patriarchal societies, whereas there are variations according to the social and cultural contexts in which sex work takes place. As Shrage (1994) notes, there are many distinctions in the social meaning of sex work across a range of patriarchal capitalist societies. She cites examples of postcolonial societies where sex work may involve:

... customers who are disadvantaged by gender but socially privileged by race and class (first world, bourgeois white women) and prostitutes who are privileged by gender but disadvantaged by race and class (third world, proletarian men of color ...). (Shrage, 1994: 566)

While O'Connell Davidson (1998) notes that female sex tourism is far less prevalent than its male counterpart, she also illustrates the relational nature of power through examples where affluent white Western female tourists

purchase sexual services from local men and boys in poorer countries. Shrage (1994) suggests that the arguments put forward by Overall also ignore situations where the economically disadvantaged sell to others who are equally economically disadvantaged. Undoubtedly sex work is a feminised occupation, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, but it is important to explore not only its gendered nature, but also related factors such as class, ethnicity and global inequalities, as well as the legal and policy context influencing work organisation. In the current study, through interviewing female, male and transgender sex workers and considering work structures and relationships in different indoor settings, I aim to build on previous studies to explore the way in which gender intersects with other factors, including age, work experience, qualifications and individual aspirations. The structural constraints influencing people's participation in the broader labour market are also important considerations when discussing transitions into the sex industry. While there may be ways in which sex work is distinctive from other forms of work, as I argue later, this does not preclude its consideration as an occupation *per se*.

The discussions above also raise some interesting questions regarding the nature of intimacy and the relationship between commercial and non-commercial intimate exchanges. Zelizer (2005) has commented that the view of the sale of sex as a forbidden activity stems from the belief that the economy corrupts intimacy and vice versa. In considering the perspective that simulated feelings can be corrosive because of their lack of authenticity, she notes that this view is premised on the notion of a single "self":

The closer we look at intimacy, however, the more we discover two flaws in this reasoning. First, no single "real" person exists within a given body; feelings and meanings vary significantly, understandably, and properly from one interpersonal relationship to another. In fact, the feelings and meanings that well up regularly in mother-child relationships can seriously hinder relationships between lovers. Second, simulation of feelings and meanings sometimes becomes an obligation, or at least a service, in some sorts of relationships. Just consider intimate relations between adult

children and their aging parents, or between nurses and their terminally ill patients. (Zelizer, 2005: 17)

Intimacy, Zelizer observes, is not always benign. Harmful uses of intimacy include date rape, blackmail and malicious gossip. Thus intimacy 'ranges from damaging to sustaining, from threatening to satisfying, from thin to thick' (Zelizer, 2005: 18). We therefore have different moral formulae for different forms of intimacy. Historically, many cultures have combined intimate social transactions and economic activity and the two have been mutually compatible. Zelizer gives examples of the convention of payment for personal services, such as babysitting or nannying, as well as parents subsidising their children. As she notes, many migrants support their families in their home country through sending them money earned while in the host country. Thus, across a wide range of intimate relations, which can include sexual relations, people integrate monetary transactions into larger networks of mutual obligation and support, without destroying the social ties involved. 'Money cohabits regularly with intimacy, and even sustains it'. (Zelizer, 2005: 28).

Zelizer notes that there are three main clusters of thought relating to intimacy and economic activities: those who hold that there are distinct arenas for economic activity and intimate relations, with the two "hostile worlds" corrupting one another when they come into contact with each other; the "nothing but" theorists, who argue that the co-mingling of the two spheres is nothing more than a version of market activity; and a third group, with which Zelizer associates, which contends that people can blend intimacy and economic activity and in so doing are engaged in constructing and negotiating 'connected lives' (Zelizer, 2005: 22). In considering the exchange of sex for money, she argues that the "nothing but" advocates may be on different sides of the ideological divide: at one end, those who reduce prostitution to nothing but the result of exploitative patriarchal structures and the sexual subordination of women; at the other, those who argue that the sale of sexual services is no different from other bodily-mediated exchanges, with the sex act separate from individual sexual identity. Hostile worlds theorists contend that a monetary transaction corrupts sexual intimacy, whereas Zelizer maintains that the world

of prostitution incorporates considerable diversity in working settings, transactions and conditions, with well-bounded intimate relations being possible. Rather than a division between separate spheres, Zelizer presents a relational world where individual relationships and social settings vary along a continuum from intimate to impersonal, in which economic activity is present throughout, both supporting and reproducing the relations and settings. Injustice, cruelty or damage to the individual occur, Zelizer argues, not as a result of combining financial transactions and intimacy, but because of an improper exercise of power.

Feminist writers such as Satz (2006) and O'Neill (2001) argue that the key factors that distinguish prostitution from other mainstream occupations are its negative stereotyping by society and the way in which it is shaped by cultural meanings, particularly relating to male and female sexuality. Selling sex is not listed as a type of work in standard occupational classifications and in dominant ideologies there is conflation between the public and private self of sex workers: 'in effect, prostitutes are not fully human because they lack both a legitimate private and public self' (Day, 2007: 41). Boris, Gilmore and Parreñas (2010) suggest it is important to move beyond the binary distinction between prostitution as sexual slavery and "sex work" as a legitimate form of labour and to consider the labour processes involved within their socio-economic context. Brents and Hausbeck (2010) observe that, in common with many other occupations, factors such as workplace autonomy and control over working conditions are related to relative job satisfaction in sex work. The individual freedoms experienced by sex workers and their relative status within the sex industry are thus important factors. Bindman and Doezema (1997: 3) differentiate between permanent employment relationships and the temporary commercial sexual transaction, where the client 'does not have enduring power over the worker'. Nonetheless, as Kotiswaran (2011) has observed, there is considerable diversity within and between sex markets and modes of organisation, with varying degrees of autonomy and exploitation for sex workers, which raises questions regarding appropriate regulatory approaches for different forms of work, as will be discussed in this thesis.

## **2.2    *The state and sex work: legal and policy frameworks in the UK***

There are three broad forms of strategy utilised by modern-day states to regulate prostitution: legalisation, which is the formal recognition and regulation of prostitution as a legitimate sphere of market activity, involving licensing of specific forms of work or practices; prohibition or criminalisation, of either or both the seller or purchaser of sexual services, as well as third parties in the industry; and decriminalisation, which essentially removes the criminal penalties from adult sex work, regulating it in the same way as other forms of work (Bernstein, 2007a). Some states may have elements of more than one approach, such as partial decriminalisation of some aspects of the industry combined with prohibition of others (Harcourt et al., 2005). For instance, some countries in Europe, including Sweden and Norway, have adopted what has come to be known as the “Nordic” model, which criminalises the purchase of sexual services (Skilbrei and Holmström, 2011). There have been mixed responses regarding the effectiveness of the law in Sweden, but there is a growing body of research evidence which suggests it has resulted in displacement of sex workers, increased stigma towards them and poses threats to their safety, through denial of their labour rights and prevention of working practices which could reduce the risk of violence (Scoular, 2004b; Hubbard, Matthews and Scoular, 2008; Dodillet and Östergren, 2011; Jordan, 2012). As Scoular (2010) also notes, apparently contrasting legal approaches such as criminalisation and legalisation can produce similar consequences, particularly regarding the marginalisation of more visible forms of sex work.

Despite the divergence of theoretical interpretations of sex work, predominant policies have consistently concentrated on the female “prostitute body”, within the context of constructions of women’s sexuality (O’Neill, 2001; Scoular, 2004a). Within public policy in the UK<sup>4</sup>, female sex workers have historically been portrayed as a public nuisance or social evil, and, more recently, as

---

<sup>4</sup> While some legislation discussed in this section relates specifically to England and Wales, and Scotland and Northern Ireland sometimes have separate Acts relating to prostitution and sexual exploitation, similar provisions often apply across the different states.

victims in need of rescue. The general perception reflected in policy and legislation is of the degradation of this form of work (Kantola and Squires, 2004; Scambler, 2007). Various authors note that moral panics about the imagined “white slave trade” and fears around sexual health in the late Victorian period brought about legislation which raised the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16 (1885 Sexual Offences Amendment Act) and generated new forms of regulation and control for working-class women more generally (Phoenix, 2009; Scoular, 2010).

The 1864, 1866 and 1869 Contagious Diseases Acts created a legislative framework that forced medical examinations and treatment on women suspected of being prostitutes. The result was the symbolic and literal segregation of women in prostitution. (Phoenix, 2009: 13)

Although selling sex is not itself illegal in Britain, the many laws relating to working practices of people in the industry place a number of conditions on sex workers, which make it difficult for many, particularly women working on the street, to undertake their work (Phoenix, 1999; Pitcher et al., 2006). The Report of the Wolfenden Committee justified the control of street prostitution because of its visibility, which represented an ‘affront to public order and decency’ (Home Office, 1957: 82). Its recommendations resulted in the Street Offences Act, 1959<sup>5</sup>, which introduced a cautioning system for the “common prostitute” found soliciting or loitering, with the maximum penalty being a fine. Since the late 1990s, the British state has sought to regulate and control female sex workers in particular, and more recently their male clients, through a series of legislative measures (Phoenix and Oerton, 2005; Scoular et al., 2007). For example, the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, led to the increased criminalisation of street sex workers (Pitcher et al., 2006; Sagar, 2007).

The impact of the UK legislation on sex workers’ labour rights and their ability to organise their work to enhance their safety and working conditions was a

---

<sup>5</sup> Relating to England and Wales, although similar systems also exist in Scotland.



topic explored in the current study. With regards to indoor-based sex work, relevant legislation relates to activities such as brothel-keeping or assisting in management of a brothel, which was made illegal under the Sexual Offences Act 1956.<sup>6</sup> This was amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2003<sup>7</sup>, which, in addition to introducing new clauses relating to causing, inciting or controlling prostitution for gain, added new definitions to cover premises such as saunas and adult clubs, where people go for non-commercial sexual encounters.<sup>8</sup> Although there have been campaigns to change the law to allow up to three sex workers to work from the same premises for reasons of safety, and this possibility was considered in the Home Office *Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* (2006), the legislation was not changed to accommodate this suggestion. Working in small groups and offering mutual support is an option that might appeal to many sex workers, as will be discussed later, but, as Carline (2011) has noted, this may be problematic because of the criminal justice implications. The Policing and Crime Act 2009, sections of which relate to the regulation of sex workers, markets and clients of sex workers, have further consequences for many sex workers.<sup>9</sup> Sanders (2009) suggests that recent UK strategies have failed to recognise the heterogeneity of indoor sex markets and differential organisational practices within them and have ignored evidence of the existence of more supportive management practices in some contexts. The Home Office strategy appeared to have been based on limited consultation with sex workers or managers of indoor premises, or with groups promoting safer practices within indoor settings (Sanders, 2009).

It has been argued that recent UK policy discourse has been influenced by the perspective that prostitution is inherently violent and exploitative of women (Weitzer, 2010). This is reflected in Home Office publications produced under

---

<sup>6</sup> In England and Wales, although similar provisions applied in Scotland.

<sup>7</sup> Which updated legislation in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> CPS guidance:

[http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p\\_to\\_r/prostitution\\_and\\_exploitation\\_of\\_prostitution/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/prostitution_and_exploitation_of_prostitution/) [Accessed 06/06/13].

<sup>9</sup> The relevant sections of the Act, which applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, are Part 2: sections 14, 16-19, 21 and 27, relating to: paying for sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force; amendment to offence of loitering etc. for purposes of prostitution; orders requiring attendance at meetings; rehabilitation of offenders (street offences); closure orders for premises with activities related to certain sexual offences; and regulation of lap dancing and other sexual entertainment venues.

the previous Labour Government (Home Office 2004, 2006) and in the legal framework surrounding prostitution in the UK. Despite what is known about the diversity of the sex industry and sex markets, the current policy focus in the UK and some other countries has been on the more visible aspects of the sex industry, particularly female street sex workers and their clients and, more recently, trafficking of women into sexual labour, resulting in a very narrow definition of the industry (Agustín, 2005, 2007; Sanders et al., 2009). There have been recent proposals in parts of the UK to criminalise the purchase of sexual services, which appear to be based on similarly limited evidence and which have failed to reflect the experiences or concerns of sex workers (Pitcher and Wijers, 2014). Little consideration has been given to the situation of male and transgender sex workers or the diversity of conditions and working practices in sex work. Male sex workers continue to be notably absent from most policy measures in the UK and the law displays a lack of clarity with regard to male sex work (Ashford, 2008; Whowell and Gaffney, 2009). In exploring the experiences of male and female sex workers I not only intend to consider the similarities and differences between their approaches to their work, but also the implications for policy formation.

Scoular and O'Neill (2007) note that prostitution policy reform in the UK has seen a shift towards welfarism since the late 1980s, which reflects a general change to the state and the way in which it governs and controls its subjects. Within the context of neo-liberalism, political power is no longer concentrated through a sovereign body, but is exercised through networks of alliances, with individuals being treated not merely as the "subjects" of power, but themselves seen as instruments of self-regulation (Rose and Miller, 2010). This can be seen as informing governmental responses to sex work, with a model of intervention emerging under New Labour which Phoenix (2009: 20) terms a strategy of 'enforcement plus support', which is underpinned by a focus on "exiting". Scoular and O'Neill (2007) argue that the neo-liberal New Labour model, while claiming to offer an integrated approach to exiting prostitution and "social inclusion", has been based more on individualistic and responsibilising social interventions. While purporting to protect "victims" in the sex industry, as well as communities, it removes itself from any role in the process of social

exclusion of sex workers, while at the same time 'extending its control over subjects' through a wide range of professional interventions (Scoular and O'Neill, 2007: 769). This leads to a conditional citizenship, which is contingent on sex workers' agreeing to reform and comply with requirements of rehabilitation (Scoular et al., 2009). If they do not accept the offers of "support", they are seen as recalcitrant and deviant.

Viewing sex work through the lens of gendered exploitation also precludes self-organisation of sex workers. As Zatz (1997) notes, certain forms of state regulation frame prostitution in a way that prohibits its inclusion within the concept of work. While many sex workers perceive themselves as performing a job of work, therefore, they are not afforded the same rights and protection as workers in other occupations. Current policy debate allows little scope for considering sex workers as individuals and rational agents (Sanders et al., 2009). The degrees of agency experienced under different personal and working circumstances are key areas to be explored in the current research.

## **2.3 *The organisation of sex work in the UK***

### **2.3.1 Definitions of sex work and markets in sexual labour**

When attempting to categorise different occupational types of sex work, it is necessary to consider the nature of sex work and the structures and relations operating within the sex industry. There are differences of opinion regarding what constitutes "sex work" and, indeed, whether it can be seen as a term that is interchangeable with "prostitution". The term "sex work" was originally coined by Carol Leigh (aka Scarlot Harlot), a feminist and sex worker activist. She noted that the word "prostitute" does not in fact relate to selling sexual services, but taken literally means "to offer publicly", although the term has become associated with shame and stigma (Leigh, 1997). In her view:

The concept of sex work unites women in the industry – prostitutes, porn actors, and dancers – who are enjoined by both legal and social needs to

disavow common ground with women in other facets of the business.  
(Leigh, 1997: 230)

Thus Leigh widened the concept beyond legal definitions to include workers in other sectors of the sex industry. Agustín (2005) notes that many sex establishments and businesses are not traditionally classed within “prostitution”. Bernstein (2007a) points to different markets in sexual labour, which also have different meanings and practices. Sanders et al. (2009) divide sexual services between “direct” and “indirect”:

Direct sexual services refer more specifically to types of commercial sex where physical contact of a sexual nature is exchanged for money. This involves some aspect of genital contact, although does not always mean penetrative intercourse. (Sanders et al., 2009: 18)

Sites of direct sex work include the street and a range of indoor working arrangements and settings which are the focus of this study, including:

- escorts<sup>10</sup> on outcalls to hotels and private homes, or doing in-calls in their own home (either independently or through agencies);
- private flats/houses or premises rented for business by individual sex workers or groups of sex workers in collective arrangements;
- licensed saunas or massage parlours (which also offer sexual services);
- brothels (including unlicensed saunas/massage parlours and smaller working flats, usually with one or two sex workers and a maid/receptionist, and sometimes with a security guard).

Indirect sex work includes lap dancing or exotic dancing, stripping, bondage and domination, erotic telephone lines and “hospitality work” in clubs and bars.

---

<sup>10</sup> The term “escort” is often used for independent or agency sex workers, although some prefer to describe themselves under the broader term of “sex worker”, which can encompass a wider range of services.

### **2.3.2 Diversity in sex work**

There are no comprehensive statistics showing the number and distribution of sex workers in the UK. A much-cited figure of 80,000 sex workers relates to a survey of 16 organisations providing services to sex workers in England and Scotland (Kinnell, 1999). A more recent study by Cusick et al. (2009) updated this estimate, drawing on numbers of male and female sex workers in Scotland and England in contact with specialist services. They estimated there were up to 101,625 sex workers working in the UK, using a multiplier derived from the earlier study by Kinnell. Pitcher (2010) investigated the approximate distribution of female, male and transgender sex workers in different sectors of the industry in England, Scotland and Wales, drawing on both actual numbers of service users in 47 projects and respondents' estimation of numbers of total sex workers in their area. This study produced an estimate of around 86,000 sex workers in Great Britain. The proportions of female, male and transgender project service users were 92 per cent, 7 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. Nonetheless, this reflects the focus of project provision: the majority of respondents provided services to female street-based workers. As Kinnell (1999) notes, relying on data from projects alone is likely significantly to underestimate the number of male and transgender sex workers. This is confirmed by some targeted studies, such as that by Whowell, who encountered 40 young men working on the streets in one city alone (Whowell and Gaffney, 2009).

The majority of female sex workers are based in indoor locations. Studies in the UK, the USA and Australia have estimated that female street-based sex workers form no more than 10-20 per cent of all female sex workers (Sanders, 2005a; Satz, 2006; Perkins and Lovejoy, 2007). A report by Scot-Pep (TAMPEP, 2007), estimated that indoor-based workers formed 72 per cent of the UK sex working population and this proportion was similar to that found by Pitcher (2010), although again because of the research methods used, the proportion of indoor-based workers is likely to be underestimated. Research has shown a slightly older age profile for women working indoors compared with those working on the street (Sanders, 2006a; Jeal and Salisbury, 2007).

Street-based work is sometimes viewed by those in other sectors of the industry as inferior to indoor work, with a distinction being made between “professional” and “unskilled” work (Bernstein, 2007a). Nonetheless, as Bernstein (2007a) notes, there are also differences between types of street-walker in cities such as San Francisco, depending on the location of their work, including class differences according to the “strolls”<sup>11</sup> in which they work and a contrast between “career prostitutes” in some strolls and the survival sex observed in others. Some sex workers prefer to work on the street rather than indoors, as they see it as giving them greater independence (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Pitcher et al., 2006). There is also considerable occupational mobility within the industry (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003).

Compared with the literature on female sex work, there is relatively little on male sex work and few studies exist on transgender workers. Although earlier studies of male sex workers tended to be on street prostitution, more recent evidence shows that indoor work is far more prevalent, apart from certain urban centres and outdoor spaces for public sexual exchanges (Gaffney and Beverley, 2001). Spaces of male indoor work include brothels, independent or agency escorting, with advertising through the gay press and on Internet websites (Gaffney, 2007). The majority of adult males selling sex identify as gay (Whowell and Gaffney, 2009). Many male sex workers started selling sex before the age of 18 (Connell and Hart, 2003), although many also acknowledge engaging in consensual sex before the age of 16 (Davies and Feldman, 1997; Gaffney, 2007). As Whowell and Gaffney (2009: 101) note, while some male sex workers may be coerced into the industry and a small number may achieve substantial earnings from their work, most engage in sex work for a short period and most would not consider themselves to be abused or exploited: ‘.....as with any distribution within a population, the majority sit somewhere in the middle, just ‘normal’ men who make a choice to sell sex’.

In some cities such as London, there have been increasing numbers of migrant women and men working in the sex industry since the 1990s, mainly in

---

<sup>11</sup> The recognised area of streets for soliciting, also known as “beats” in the UK.

indoor work (Agustín, 2006; Gaffney, 2007). There is a lack of data on the distribution of migrant workers within different indoor settings in the UK, although a London-based study of migrant workers in the sex industry (Mai, 2009) found that female interviewees tended to work across different indoor settings, whereas male and transgender participants were more likely to work independently than in other forms of work. Although many migrants to the UK and other countries may make a rational decision to work in the sex industry as an alternative to other forms of labour which may be lower-paid and sometimes more abusive, many reports on which policy is based make the mistake of conflating migrant workers with “victims” of trafficking, raising questions about consent (Agustín, 2006; Outshoorn, 2004). While there is also trafficking into other areas of work, prostitution is the only occupation so completely conjoined with slavery in policy discourses (Day, 2010).

### **2.3.3 Third parties in the sex industry**

The role of third parties is not as straightforward as depicted in discourses of exploitation and violence. While some young people and adult women, particularly those working in street markets, may be managed by a third party, this is less common than portrayed in the stereotype of the prostitute controlled by her pimp (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; May, Harocopos and Hough, 2000). Nonetheless, there are situations where women working on the street may be controlled emotionally and physically (O'Neill, 2001).

Sometimes sex workers may choose to hire a third party for protection (Day, 2007). Sex workers' partners may also play a role in supporting their work, often keeping watch while they are working, particularly on the street; and in some cases partners may be reliant on the income from sex work to support their own drug dependency (May et al., 2000). While it is sometimes assumed that anyone in a relationship with a sex worker is by definition a “pimp”<sup>12</sup>, this inscribes the notion of control and coercion into any intimate relationships sex workers may form outside their working context (Phoenix and Oerton, 2005). Extending the definition of “pimping” in this way also means that many sex

---

<sup>12</sup> For example, the Home Office (2004) report *Paying the price* frequently associates the term “partner” with “pimp”.

workers who would consider themselves as working independently, but who have a partner or family member who may at times benefit in some way from their earnings, would be classed as being “pimped”. As O’Connell Davidson (1998) observes, analyses which incorporate such broad definitions of pimping and assign a central role to the pimp in prostitution limit our understandings of the social and economic relations in sex work and the complexities of third party involvement.

Within the indoor industry third parties include managers of saunas/parlours, many of whom are women, who see themselves as performing a traditional managerial role, including recruitment, payment, human resource management and providing a secure working environment (May et al., 2000). Many parlours have strict rules about working practices, only employing adults aged 18 or above and not allowing drug use on the premises (May et al., 2000; Sanders, 2005a, 2009). Parlours range from small to medium-sized businesses. The owners of sex work venues may often have been sex workers themselves (Jenkins, 2009). As Jenkins also observes, agents as well as managers of establishments can be variable in their management practices and her research found instances where agencies had been reported to be unreliable, in some cases even placing escorts with potentially dangerous clients. Nonetheless, the extent to which the actions of sex work agencies differ from the behaviour of employment agencies in the formal economy is an issue which has not been explored.

Some independent sex workers recruit others to act as paid employees or agents (O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Bernstein, 2007a). Jenkins (2009) notes the importance for escorts of finding reliable people to support them in their business, so they can balance work and domestic roles. This support could include placing advertisements, linking sex workers with potential clients and performing other administrative services. In some situations, indoor sex workers employ a maid/receptionist to screen clients and take bookings, which may also provide additional security (Jenkins, 2009). Because of the legal situation, receptionists may risk prosecution (offences could include brothel-keeping, procuring or controlling for gain) and Jenkins notes that some may



charge relatively high rates to compensate for this risk. As West and Austrin (2002) note, the police, corporate capital and the state are also heavily involved in prostitution, either through exercising control or benefiting in some way, for example, through the proceeds, and these factors need to be taken into account when analysing the sex industry. The current research study explored sex workers' relationships with third parties and also investigated interactions with police and other agencies, as well as the role of the state in governing the organisation of sex work.

## **2.4 *Workplace health and safety of sex workers***

Many studies of sex work discuss occupational health and safety, particularly in relation to sexual health and physical and/or sexual violence. Research studies indicate differential experiences for indoor and street-based workers. Women working on the street are more likely than their indoor counterparts to use drugs and experience problems such as homelessness (O'Neill and Campbell, 2001; Hester and Westmarland, 2004). Because of their higher public visibility, street-based sex workers may encounter greater levels of stigma and violence than workers in indoor locations (Church et al., 2001). Studies comparing groups of street-based and indoor sex workers have found that indoor sex workers are considerably less likely to experience physical and sexual violence than their street-based counterparts (Weitzer, 2005a; Jeal and Salisbury, 2007).<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, indoor sex workers, particularly those working alone or in vulnerable circumstances, may sometimes face work-related violence such as robbery or verbal abuse (Sanders et al., 2009). While much of the literature focuses on violence against female sex workers, evidence shows that male sex workers may also experience abuse and physical or sexual violence, particularly those working on the street, but also men working in brothels (Connell and Hart, 2003). Violence against male sex workers may also be related to homophobia (Marlowe, 2006). Although there

---

<sup>13</sup> For example, two studies in the UK and Canada found that street-based workers were four times more likely than indoor workers to report experiencing crimes such as robbery or sexual assault, and more than six times as likely to report kidnapping; and similar disparities have been found in studies in other countries (Weitzer, 2005a).

has been limited comparative research on the topic, Jenkins (2009: 186) found in her study of escorts that the incidence of violence in sex work was highest for transgender sex workers (40.9 per cent), with levels reported by female or male participants being considerably lower (15.7 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively). Jenkins notes that violent incidents reported by participants had occurred primarily when they were new to sex work, particularly when working for a third party such as an agency, rather than later in their career as independent escorts. Kinnell (2006) argues that violence is not an inevitable consequence of sex work, although current law enforcement strategies in the UK, combined with lack of social acceptance of sex work, increase sex workers' exposure to harm.

Evidence from the legal brothels in Nevada, where systems are in place for protecting sex workers and regulating establishments, shows that violence has been reduced (Brents and Hausbeck, 2005). This suggests, as Nussbaum (1998) argues, that legalisation or decriminalisation of prostitution may lead to an improvement in working conditions and workplace safety. In a climate where sex work is criminalised, sex workers are also often reluctant to report violence against them to the police, for fear of the potential repercussions for them due to the illicit nature of their work (Sanders et al., 2009). This is borne out by recent cases in the UK, for example, where a woman running a small escort agency reported a robbery and was subsequently charged with brothel-keeping as a result (ECP, 2011; Carline, 2011). This raises the question as to whether recent legislation relating specifically to indoor working might be regarded as contributing to sex workers' job insecurity, which is also considered in the current study.

## **2.5 *Recent developments in the organisation of sex work***

Over recent years the Internet has transformed the way in which many sex workers operate, particularly those working independently in indoor locations, reflecting developments in the global economy and information technology (Sanders, 2005a; Bernstein, 2007a). While statistical data on workers in

different sectors of the sex industry are limited, street-based work is seen to have declined recently, partly as a result of enforcement practices and also because mobile phones and the Internet provide new ways of making contact with clients (Sanders, 2005a; Pitcher et al., 2006). Studies on use of the Internet for commercial sexual transactions and advertising by sex workers show that this has not only changed the way sex workers and clients make contact with and relate to one another, but also their social relationships, with the development of “cyber communities” of both sex workers and customers (Sharp and Earle, 2003; Sanders, 2005b). Yet the impact of new technologies on commercial sexual transactions is ignored in current policy (Ashford, 2008). The representation of sex workers as victims or perpetrators of incivilities, seen in Government publications such as *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* (Home Office, 2006), is also in stark contrast to the rise of sex worker activism, and to the way in which certain groups of sex workers represent themselves (Weitzer, 2010).

The presence of the Internet is seen to have led to renewed sex worker activism, with the development of groups such as the UK-based International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) (Ray, 2007). Within the UK, the IUSW formed a branch of the GMB trade union, which has begun to work towards establishing contractual rights for sex workers, including a code of conduct in table dancing clubs for workers, managers and clients (Lopes, 2006). The Internet has become an important means of linking independent sex workers, many of whom have not previously had access to mechanisms for information-sharing and mutual support. In common with other marginalised groups, sex workers have thus been able to form “virtual” communities (Ashford, 2009). This has led to the development of an active and collective voice, led by sex workers, presenting opposition to recent Government policies and dominant representations of sex workers. Access to the Internet tends to reflect a class divide, however, with more affluent and middle-class groups making use of the technology (Bernstein, 2007b); although a minority of street worker activists also contribute their views (Ray, 2007). The legal and social frameworks surrounding much sex work present barriers to more formal labour organising (Gall, 2007; 2012). While the role of collective workplace organisation is not a

central focus of the current study, it relates to consideration of sex work as an occupation and was an issue raised by some participants. It is considered in Chapter Eight in relation to legal and policy constraints.

## **2.6 *Concluding comments***

It is evident that the sex industry is far more diverse than indicated in some theoretical/ideological perspectives and policy debates, which often focus on limited sub-groups of sex workers, rather than considering the spectrum of settings and working experiences. It is heterogeneous both in its organisation and in the range of individuals working within it, which poses challenges for research and classification of occupational structures. It also displays variable working conditions comparable to other mainstream sectors. While one ideological position refuses to recognise prostitution as a form of work, there are strong arguments for considering the sale of sexual services as a form of labour, which will be explored further throughout the current study. Viewing sex work in the context of broader labour markets also enables consideration of variable practices and structural inequalities within the sex industry. The role of the state in regulating sex work, as well as wider societal stigma, is pertinent to any study of sexual labour. In the next chapter, I consider how a theory of sexual labour may be contextualised within wider debates on labour market structures and processes.

## **Chapter Three: Sex as work: context and process**

As the discussion in Chapter Two demonstrated, there are significant reasons for considering sex work as a form of labour. In framing the analysis in this way, it is important to consider where it might be situated in relation to labour market theories and occupational categorisations, how it varies between settings and its comparability with other forms of labour. While sex work is not formally recognised as an occupation and thus is rarely analysed in relation to wider labour market patterns, it reflects gender divisions in the broader labour market. The bodily and emotional as well as sexual labour involved has led to sex work being located alongside other occupations within the broader service and care industries in some analyses (e.g. Wolkowitz et al., 2013).

The current study explores the extent to which sex work bears similarities to other forms of labour, while at the same time considering whether there are features which distinguish it from other service or social care occupations. In common with much work in the service and social care sectors, sex work is a female-dominated occupation and thus it is pertinent to set the analysis in the context of theories of labour market segregation. At the same time, as outlined in Chapter Two, other social inequalities which influence wider labour market participation also shape entry into sex work and thus it is important to consider broader labour market developments, including the influence of patterns of consumption and globalisation of markets. This chapter sets out some of the main changes to the labour market in recent years and considers their relevance to developments in the sex industry, drawing on theories of gendered labour market segregation and precarious or contingent labour. It explores the literature on structures and processes in sex work, linking this with the aims of the current study. Finally, it considers the relevance of diverse labour market theories to the current research and the questions they raise for the subsequent analysis.

### **3.1    *The labour market context***

#### **3.1.1    Gendered labour markets**

It is generally recognised that men and women in Western societies tend to have different patterns of labour market participation and representation across occupations and sectors (Blackburn, Jarman and Brooks, 2000; Browne, 2006). In winter 2003, for example, there were more than twice as many women than men in personal service, sales and customer service occupations, whereas the proportions were reversed in skilled trades occupations (Begum, 2004). There has been a developing recognition that these differentials are associated with social inequality, although there are many different explanations of the causal factors related to the diverse labour market experiences of men and women (Kreimer, 2004).

The gendered division of labour, or between paid and unpaid work, has not been a constant factor in Western societies. With the industrial revolution, the introduction of mechanisation and the separation of production from the home, however, women became excluded from industries and relegated to the domestic sphere which was seen as their “natural” area of work (Abbott, Wallace and Tyler, 2005). It has been noted that the subsequent bifurcation between the public space of work, occupied by men, and the private domestic sphere of women was intensified by a developing Victorian morality which viewed women who worked as unnatural and negligent homemakers, taking jobs from men (Hartmann, 1976). Women who engaged in paid work were restricted to a relatively narrow range of occupations, or at the lower end of occupational hierarchies (Kreimer, 2004). The state has been seen as playing a major role in promulgating gender segregation in the labour market, for example, through introducing regulations restricting women’s entry into employment or access to welfare payments during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with women being viewed as dependents rather than social citizens in their own right (Crompton, 1998). As Walby (1990) notes, the state has more recently shifted its mode of intervention in women’s favour, for example, through the introduction of legislation such as the Equal Pay Act

1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The feminist movement and campaigns by liberal feminists for educational and employment opportunities for women have played a role in the development of equal opportunities policies and legislative changes (Jagger, 1983). Nonetheless, gender divisions in the labour market have persisted despite regulatory and policy changes and thus further explanations have been sought for continuing inequalities. Trade unions have also played a part in limiting women's employment, initially through excluding them and subsequently through introducing restrictive practices which favoured male workers (Rubery, 2009). Although trade union policies have changed, some sectors such as care work have lesser trade union infiltration, which may contribute in part to persistent lower rates of pay and poorer working conditions (Hakim, 2007; Young, 2010).

The growth in service sector occupations over the past few decades has been accompanied by an increase in women's labour market participation, particularly in part-time, but also temporary occupations, which tend to offer fewer benefits and less job security than full-time or permanent employment (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990; Browne, 2006). This is partly a result of deregulation and flexibilisation, which have led to a weakening of restrictions and barriers to women's entry, but at the same time have created greater degrees of insecurity in employment (Crompton, 1998). The intersection of the labour market and the welfare state are relevant to an analysis of sex work, particularly in relation to women's participation. It has been argued that the conditionality attached to welfare benefits, as well as a shift in emphasis of provision may disproportionately affect certain groups, such as lone mothers (Dwyer, 2004). As Macleavy (2007) has argued, welfare policies designed to encourage women's labour market participation, combined with women's continued responsibility as primary carers, have helped to reinforce low pay because of the limited work opportunities available. These policies, together with a contracting welfare state, may be linked to the decision of some women with domestic responsibilities to enter sex work rather than alternative, lower paid options available (Bruckert and Parent, 2006; Cruz, 2013).

The increasing feminisation of the economy due to the rising labour market participation of women has been accompanied by the development of new forms of work, including an expanding market for care and domestic tasks, which have altered the nature of the labour market (Macleavy, 2007). The lives of women and their participation in the economy have also changed as a result of labour market expansion and the inclusion of women in increasing numbers (Power, 2009). Other developments in the late twentieth century, such as globalisation of industry and rapid technological change have in addition led to a need to reappraise the way in which we seek to understand society and economies (Giddens, 1987). The development of information technology and evolution of the Internet have had a substantial impact on the organisation of work, leading to different skills requirements and occupational restructuring. There continue to be differentials according to factors such as age, gender and ethnicity, however, as well as relative educational and skills levels (Castells, 2010). As Adkins (2001) has also argued, while traditional gender binaries may have shifted, new patterns are emerging. The opportunities provided by global cultural and economic changes and technological developments, as well as structural constraints influencing patterns of labour market participation, are also relevant to an understanding of the contemporary sex industry, as will be discussed later.

### **3.1.2 Theories of labour market segregation**

There are a number of different political and theoretical interpretations of the sexual division of labour, which, although they may not be sufficient alone as explanatory models, have a bearing on considerations of participation in sectors such as the sex industry. Traditional neoclassical interpretations of labour market divisions, based on supply-side analyses<sup>14</sup>, have explained women's differential labour market participation in terms of their lower attachment to work, with an underlying assumption that gendered behaviour is biologically-driven (Browne, 2006). Human capital theory, for example, argues that it makes sense for men to invest in their human capital through the

---

<sup>14</sup> Focusing on the supply of labour, rather than macroeconomic concerns.



acquisition of skills, qualifications and experience. Women are generally not seen as similarly motivated, as their primary focus is on childcare and the home, with employment often being secondary to their domestic responsibilities. This perspective of “natural” roles has been used to explain occupational segregation (Polachek, 1981). Human capital theorists argue that women choose those occupations for which their lesser skills will give the best rewards and in which they are less penalised for their intermittent work patterns over their lifetime (Walby, 1988). Women’s comparatively lower output, combined with discouragement to invest in their human capital because of their domestic responsibilities, is seen by some economists to explain their lower wages (Becker, 1985). Human capital theory is premised on the notion that people make rational choices about their actions through weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of different options (Becker, 1985, 1993).

It has been argued by some feminist theorists that these conventional economic theories tend to neglect the social construction of gender as a central factor in influencing the labour market experiences of women and men (Figart, 2005). Human capital theory fails to explain enduring disparities between labour market outcomes for women and men, despite the narrowing of the gap between their educational levels and increased employment participation, and the introduction of strategies to combat inequality and discrimination (Browne, 2006).<sup>15</sup> Barnard (2008) notes that pay differentials in sectors such as manufacturing may in part be attributed to factors such as women working in less skilled occupations, although it may also be evidence of discrimination. Women also predominate in part-time jobs, which are often lower-paid (Bellamy and Rake, 2005). Crompton (1998) observes that the relatively low wages and limited work opportunities available to women are partly the result of a liberal welfare state, which gives little assistance with childcare, and a labour market which has become increasingly deregulated. Persistent structural factors such as employers’ recruitment patterns also need to be taken into account (Rubery, 2009).

---

<sup>15</sup> Although the pay gap between men and women has decreased, the gender pay differential was still 16 per cent in 2006 (Barnard, 2008).

There are diverse feminist perspectives on the causes of gender inequalities and the ways in which they are sustained. The predominant theories relating to power differentials and inequalities in the labour market, emanating from the 1970s onwards, are Marxist feminist, liberal feminist and radical feminist perspectives (Jagger, 1983). To some extent, these reflect the political concerns of the various feminist movements of the period, with different explanations being sought for women's oppression, whether relating to class, a lack of rights, or patriarchal systems such as the institution of marriage (Bradley, 1996).

Hakim (2004) maintains that early theories of patriarchy fail to explain *why* men discriminate against women, or how some male-dominated jobs receive lower remuneration than some female-dominated occupations. More recent formulations of patriarchy have endeavoured to accommodate notions of difference and diversity emerging from postmodern and post-structuralist theories (Crompton, 1998). Theorists such as Walby (1990) and Bradley (1996) have suggested that it is important to consider intersecting influences on labour market segregation and the complexities of societal structures. Nonetheless, Crompton (1998) observes that many later theories of patriarchy still contain the elements of essentialism that made them problematic in their earlier incarnations, that is, that patriarchy as conceived implies that men's domination of women is an inherent feature of societies. Pollert (1996) argues that the notion of patriarchy should not be seen as an overarching principle and that "gender relations" as a concept allows for analysis of changing social relationships, while also accommodating consideration of persistent male domination. Bradley (1996) also suggests the importance of allowing for variations in gendered power relations and incorporating a conception of agency. Feminists therefore need: '... to develop a theory of power which can handle the complexities of post-industrial social relationships and avoid the crude view of women as victims' (Bradley, 1996: 105). Considering the theoretical perspectives on sex work outlined in Chapter Two, this is highly pertinent to analyses of sex work as an occupation, as it suggests a more nuanced approach is required to analyse differential power relations in the sex industry.

Browne (2006) argues that there continues to be a lack of fit between predominant explanations of labour market gender segregation, and contemporary empirical evidence. Flax (1990) suggests that understanding gender as a social relation is crucial to identifying different forms of domination and oppression within societies. As theorists such as Ken (2007) have argued, there is also a need to develop further understanding of the relationships between race, class and gender and their intersection with structures of domination. Glucksmann (2009: 892) maintains that it is important to make connections between different theories of the division of labour, in order to take into account more recent socio-economic developments: 'Gender, 'race' and ethnicity, migration, globalization, consumption, and rights are all implicated in work and vice versa'. This is pertinent to the consideration of power structures and agency in relation to sex work, given the diversity within the industry both in relation to varied settings and also amongst workers, not only in terms of gender relations, but also patterns of migration and other factors such as age and experience.

### **3.1.3 Labour market diversity and relevance for analysis of sex markets**

Labour markets can be segregated both vertically and horizontally. The former relates to a hierarchical separation between different levels within an occupation and the latter to the concentration by gender in specific occupations. Although vertical segregation generally entails men holding more advantaged positions than women, the converse might also be true. Blackburn et al. (2002) argue that although vertical segregation measures inequality, horizontal segregation measures difference without necessarily implying inequality. As Browne (2006) also observes, segregation may possess a combination of both vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Given the comparatively lower pay and status in feminised sectors, the transition of men to these areas is less common than movement of women into traditional male jobs, even in times of high unemployment (Jacobs, 1993). Nonetheless, there are substantial numbers of men employed in traditionally

feminised sectors such as social care.<sup>16</sup> Bagilhole and Cross (2006) found that men had a range of reasons for entering feminised sectors, including potential job satisfaction, commitment to the work, and/or career ambition. For some, the loss of jobs in traditional male industries presented an opportunity rather than being seen as a limitation. When men enter some feminised sectors, a gendered division of labour may sometimes endure, for example, where different specialisms are adopted by men and women within the same sector (Abbott et al., 2005). Thus certain vertical forms of labour segregation may persist in female-dominated occupations. These are relevant factors when analysing the occupational structures of sex work, which may reflect some elements of traditionally feminised sectors of work, while at the same time demonstrating certain distinctive characteristics. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters in this thesis, the indoor sex industry displays a degree of gender stratification, which may relate to a combination of factors, such as relative demand as well as wider constraints relating to women's position as primary carers in the domestic sphere.

Sex work is based in the informal economy because of its quasi-criminal status. As shown in Chapter Two, it is also generally accepted that it is a feminised occupation, although because of the limited data available, particularly on numbers of independent sex workers, it is difficult to assess the proportions of male and transgender workers. As Bimbi (2003) notes, male sex workers have been documented from the time of the Greeks and Romans and thus men selling sex is not a new phenomenon. The customer base differs for male and female sex workers: clients of the former group tend to be gay men or, less frequently, heterosexual women, whereas the clients of female sex workers are predominantly heterosexual men and, in some cases, lesbian women (Sanders et al., 2009). There may also be different approaches to the work and differential power structures within male compared with female sex work. In a study of men working as strippers, Tewkesbury (1993: 168) comments that men adapted the stripping role to 'emphasize the traditionally masculine ideals of success, admiration, and

---

<sup>16</sup> In 2004, for example, there were 50,000 male nurses and 40,000 male care assistants and attendants (Bagilhole and Cross, 2006).

respect'. Thus, he argues, men working within this female-dominated occupation are able to exercise a form of patriarchal power not available to women working in a similar role. He also found other differences between male and female strippers, including the extent to which they elect to enter this work, their engagement in prostitution and their relationships with colleagues. Tewkesbury's study suggests there may be persistent divisions between men and women working in similar occupations within certain parts of the sex industry. Nonetheless, sex work may not always reflect traditional patterns seen in feminised service sector occupations and, as will be discussed later, there are not always distinct gender divisions in approaches to the work and services provided. Sex work also differs from other service sector occupations, due to the fact that women in the industry tend to earn more than their male counterparts (Rosetta, 2009). While the reasons for this disparity are not always clear, Jenkins (2009) relates this to levels of demand.

The labour market theories discussed above have relevance to the consideration of sex work as an occupation. For example, the concept of rational choice is pertinent in some instances, as it might be argued that many adult sex workers take an economic decision to enter sex work because it offers greater flexibility and higher earnings than other unqualified jobs to which they might have access. Sex work cannot be analysed in the absence of external factors, however, including the regulatory context, gendered labour markets and lack of available options for unqualified workers and thus feminist labour market segregation theories also have analytical significance.

#### **3.1.4 Patterns of consumption and conceptions of work**

An analysis of sex work may also be set in the context of technological and structural transformations in the global economy. These processes, alongside persistent high unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s, have led to changing conceptions of what it is to be a worker (Du Gay, 1996). The growth of consumer culture has brought tensions between the "Protestant ethic" of delayed gratification and the language of fun, hedonism and sexual fulfilment

(Bell, 1976). Alongside traditional discourses of hard work and individualised self-help, sit: 'images and sites of consumption which endorse the pleasures of excess' (Featherstone, 1990: 14). The language of the free market and valorisation of enterprise emerging in neo-liberal discourses in the UK and certain other Western states from the late twentieth century have been accompanied by the formulation of the "sovereign consumer", 'with 'civic culture' gradually giving way to 'consumer culture' as citizens are reconceptualised as 'enterprising consumers' ' (Du Gay, 1996: 77). A feature of the growth in service sector work is that the traditional separation between "production" and "consumption" no longer holds. As Korczynski (2013: 29) comments, service work 'involves simultaneous production and consumption. What the worker does is part of what the service-recipient consumes'. Thus work-based and consumption-based identities have become blurred as a result. Bernstein (2007a) has commented on the implications of these social and economic shifts for contemporary intimate relations and markets in sexual labour, particularly those in indoor sectors. Hardy (2013) argues that considerations of the commodification of sexual labour should be set within analyses of commodification of labour and exploitative relations more generally. The current research aims to build on this through drawing out comparisons between sex work and other forms of labour and highlighting power relations and imbalances in different settings.

Featherstone (1990) notes that the growth of leisure and consumption activities in Western societies may be seen by some to lead to greater opportunities for individual freedom and diminution of social barriers, while others see the potential for new forms of social classification and rules. As Miller and Rose (1995) have observed, neo-liberal discourses have led to a new image of the self-actualising and self-regulating individual worker. Through the individual's desire for self-improvement and fulfilment have emerged new forms of social control, based on shared norms and values rather than more direct management devices. At the same time, as Rose (2000) has noted, those individuals in society deemed incapable of self-governing according to these norms are treated as "outsiders" and regulated

accordingly through strategies of state control. As discussed in Chapter Two, the implications of such strategies have been seen in relation to sex workers.

### **3.1.5 Globalised labour markets**

Commercial globalisation has resulted in a flow of migrant labour, particularly into service industries, in both formal and informal economies in the UK and other Western countries. While the globalisation of production and markets and the rapid development of information and communication technologies have opened up new opportunities in the knowledge-based economy, it has been argued that there has also been an increase in demand for “generic” flexible and disposable labour, for tasks which receive low levels of remuneration, with women filling the majority of these jobs (Sassens, 2002; Castells, 2004). Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002: 3) have commented that, although some female migrants have the opportunity to become independent earners and to improve the lives of their families by moving to Western economies, typically: ‘Third World migrant women achieve their success only by assuming the cast-off domestic roles of middle- and high-income women in the First World...’. As Kofman (2004) notes, however, such accounts of stratification tend not to acknowledge the migration of women into skilled sectors, such as education and health. Castells (2004: 27) comments that a feature of the changing organisation of work has been to increase flexible labour and job insecurity for men as well as women: ‘... rather than women workers rising to the level of male workers, most male workers are being downgraded to the level of most women workers’. Nonetheless, despite changes to labour market structures, as discussed earlier, inequalities have persisted.

As Agustín (2003) observes, socio-economic changes in Western countries, with increasing demand for personal services, have created work opportunities for migrant women, not only in domestic and caring occupations but also within the sex industry. Brennan (2002) also notes that sex workers in popular tourist sites may see this work as opening up the opportunity to leave a life of

poverty, for example, through migration to more prosperous European countries and possibly marriage, although sex work as a strategy for advancement may often be a temporary measure. Many of the jobs available to migrant workers are located in the informal sector and it is important to set analysis of sex work and migrant labour within the context of the labour market opportunities available to women more generally. Mai (2012) points to the diverse trajectories and patterns of participation of economic migrants working in the UK sex industry. As he comments, the “trafficking discourse” fails to capture the complexity of their experiences, or the circumstances associated with their involvement in the global sex industry.

### ***3.2 Occupational structures and processes in sex work***

This section examines the processes involved in sex work and its similarities to and differences from other service work. In situating prostitution within the context of work and acknowledging the agency of many engaging in sex work, it is important also to recognise that workers in some markets for sexual labour may have relatively limited options available to them. Bernstein (2007a) argues for a more comprehensive analysis of the global inequalities leading women in particular into sexual labour; and the ways in which specific practices and policies both create and sustain these inequalities. The legal framework and policing practice also help to shape sex markets and have significant bearing on the conditions of people within the sex industry (Zatz, 1997). While taking into account these constraints, it has been argued that prostitution should be viewed as a commercial, contractual relationship between buyer and seller (Brooks-Gordon, 2006; Sanders, 2006a). As Bruckert and Parent (2006: 98) observe, while the regulatory and social backgrounds are relevant considerations, it is also important to situate studies of sex work in the context of post-industrial labour markets, labour market segregation and the development of “precarious” service sector labour: ‘It is within the context of these constraints and alternatives that women are “choosing” to work at McDonald’s, in the retail sector – or in the sex industry’.



Some theorists have concluded that the sex industry displays the same structural diversity and variety in job content as other occupations in the formal economy. For example, Brewis and Linstead (2000a) note that the sex industry is influenced by both local labour markets and global economic forces, it displays variety in organisational and occupational structures comparable with many other industries, and the job of the sex worker requires a range of skills. They list marketing, business and financial knowledge and planning, political awareness, counselling and human resource management among these skills. Brents and Hausbeck (2010: 16) argue that these commonalities with occupations in the formal economy have implications for research into the sex industry:

Work in the sex industries, while stigmatized in ways unlike other jobs, has elements that are very similar to mainstream work. As such, it makes little sense for scholars to continue to examine sex work as if it were unlike other forms of work.

As Agustín (2003: 386) also observes, ‘the isolation of paid sex from other services assumes that the *only* thing that happens in a sexual service is a sexual act’. She points to various social activities involved during the provision of sexual services, which sex work has in common with other personal service sector occupations. Thus, while the provision of sexual acts is a distinct element of the service, in the same way that the central components of childcare differ from, for example, those of domestic cleaning, when considering these occupations in a broader context, they all have the common feature of being personal services. Nonetheless, it has also been noted that sex work is distinct from most other service sector occupations in its interactive nature, which also has implications for the way in which sex workers set boundaries (Walby, 2012; Brents and Jackson, 2013; Hardy, 2013).

West and Austrin (2002: 487) have highlighted the way in which sex workers are often seen as “outsiders”, excluded from the mainstream economy through the discourses surrounding gender relations and identity: ‘While feminists have emphasized *embodied* work, prostitutes have emphasized their own embodied

work, they have struggled to secure recognition as legitimate workers'. They argue that this results from a focus on gender relations and identity in isolation, rather than consideration of the ways in which they are produced through economic processes, wider industrial structures, work organisation and networks which cut across organisations and markets. Forms of work organisation and practices in the sex industry also evolve in response to market demands and legal constraints. Brents and Hausbeck (2010) note, for example, that legal brothels in Nevada are under market-driven pressures to organise themselves more like mainstream businesses in order to remain competitive, which includes improvements to the way in which they treat their employees. At the same time, indoor-based sex work may be compared with other forms of "non-standard" work, particularly in relation to the large numbers of men and women working as self-employed independent or Internet sex workers (Walby, 2012; O'Connell Davidson, 2014). Even within managed establishments, because of the criminal context, individual workers have no employment rights or protection and have the paradoxical status of being both self-employed and "disguised" employees (Bruckert and Parent, 2006). The fact that sex work is composed of large numbers of self-employed workers does not necessarily differentiate it from other informal sector work, but the scale and structure of the sex industry, with voluntary self-employment appearing to represent the apex of the profession, may distinguish it from other mainstream and informal sectors. Nonetheless, this does not preclude its incorporation within a framework of service sector work.

### **3.2.1 Flexible working, self-employment and sex work**

Considerations of developments in the wider service sector have relevance to an analysis of sex work. The service sector tends to be characterised by more flexible working practices, part-time jobs and casual employment, for example, in areas such as retail, care work and hospitality work, where women predominate (Game and Pringle, 1984; Macleavy, 2007). These "precarious" jobs tend to be less secure, lower paid and generally offer fewer benefits than more stable, permanent employment (Young, 2010). As Snyder (2004) notes

in relation to a study in New York, however, while external forces such as unemployment and discrimination may force people into the unregulated sector, many make an informed choice to take up informal work arrangements. This may be for a range of reasons, including the desire to combine earning a living with childcare responsibilities or having a specific economic goal, but also in order to develop a specific work or career identity. Informal work encompasses a variety of jobs, including low-paid casual homework, street vending, artistic and other professions, which in some cases may lead to business development. Some people may combine work in the formal sector with informal work. Snyder (2004) identifies four types of worker in the informal economy in her study. One is “Occupiers”, whose work in the informal sector is a means to an end. “Entrepreneurs”, however, ‘rely on their informal job as their main source of income, and it is a central part of their career identity’ (Snyder, 2004: 227). A further group is “Allowance seekers”, who may have jobs in the formal economy but have additional informal jobs to earn extra money. The final group Snyder identifies is “Avocationalists”, who enter the informal economy to pursue a role they desire without being hampered by regulations. The categories identified by Snyder may also be associated with the organisation of sex work in the informal economy. While the first three categories may have more relevance here, the final group may have some resonances in the writings of “sex positive” sex workers, who argue that they make a rational choice to enter sex work and value the work for the advantages it offers (e.g. Queen, 1997). For sex positive sex workers, their work becomes an affirmative aspect of their identity. Nonetheless, the income secured from sex work is an important element of the work and in this they differ from “Avocationalists”, who in Snyder’s study did not rely on the earnings from their informal work.

Theories of labour market segregation and flexibility are often premised on particular modes of employment and have focused less on newer working relations, including self-employment (Tremblay, 2008). While self-employment is sometimes included with casual or precarious work, it has certain differentiating characteristics, and it has been argued that self-employment spans both the informal and formal sectors (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). As

with Snyder's (2004) diverse reasons for entering the broader informal economy, researchers have documented a range of factors influencing entry into self-employment. For some, it offers new challenges and opportunities ("pull" factors), whereas others may move into self-employment because of lack of other options ("push" factors) (Hughes, 2003). While self-employment has previously been a route taken primarily by men, over recent years there has been an expansion in women entering self-employment (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). The main disadvantages reported by self-employed workers include the uncertainty of future work, financial insecurity, lack of social benefits and paid holidays. As Tremblay (2008) notes, however, these disadvantages are greatest for the "involuntary" self-employed, who did not actively choose this form of work. Working long hours and assenting to clients' demands is also often characteristic of self-employed workers. For many, especially those who intentionally sought self-employment, these disadvantages are outweighed by the advantages, which include greater independence, more control over their work and greater flexibility (Tremblay, 2008). For women in particular, self-employment may enable them more effectively to combine work and family commitments (Tuttle and Garr, 2009). Job satisfaction appears to be greatest for those who have actively chosen to enter self-employment or informal sector work. Nonetheless, while constrained economic choices and personal circumstances may force individuals into a particular route, it does not mean they are unable to create a meaningful work identity for themselves (Snyder, 2004). Thus it may be argued that, even when opportunities are limited, individuals in these circumstances are still able to assert their agency.

Because of the semi-legal status of prostitution in the UK, sex workers tend to operate in the informal economy (Sanders, 2008a). Some may be registered as self-employed and paying taxes. One of the defining features of sex work, certainly for some indoor-based work, is the comparatively high remuneration compared with other work in the informal sector or jobs requiring no formal qualifications (Sanders et al., 2009). As Nussbaum (1998) notes, a woman working in prostitution can expect to earn more than a factory worker and may have better working hours and more control over her working conditions.

While economic necessity may be a primary push factor for entering sex work, therefore, it appears that for some people, sex work also offers additional benefits comparable to those experienced by other workers who are independently self-employed and/or working in the informal sector. In other senses, however, sex work bears similarities to other precarious work, in that the majority of sex workers are women, the conditions of work are generally unstable and it may offer limited long term security. As with other self-employed or casual work, sex workers are likely to experience fluctuations in income. Sex workers also tend to have additional business costs, including advertising, rent for working premises, payments to support staff and in some cases specialised equipment. Illegal workers might also face fines and payment of protection money (Day, 2007). The criminal penalties sometimes associated with sex work thus contribute to its disadvantages. Nonetheless, as Chapkis (2000: 183) notes, although the problems with the sex industry include its semi-criminalised status in some environments, leading to what she terms “legal harassment” from agencies such as the police, for many sex workers it still offers greater flexibility and control than alternative forms of employment available to them. An important issue, therefore, is the extent to which sex workers are able to exercise control over the labour process.

### **3.2.2 Labour processes within sex work: body work, aesthetic and emotional labour**

The concept of “body work” in relation to paid labour has only relatively recently been addressed in sociological theory. As Wolkowitz (2002) has noted, such work incorporates a wide range of service occupations, including beauticians, hairdressers, medical practitioners, physiotherapists and sex workers. Work focusing on the human body can comprise unpaid as well as paid labour and includes not only work directed towards the control of the social body but also: ‘work that takes the body as its immediate site of labour, involving intimate, messy contact with the (frequently supine or naked) body, its orifices or products through touch or close proximity’ (Wolkowitz, 2002: 497). According to Wolkowitz, the labour market in body work demonstrates

segregation by race, gender and class, similar to that found in the wider service industry.

Oerton and Phoenix (2001), comparing sex work with other forms of body work such as therapeutic massage, note that sex workers do not necessarily perceive their work as sexual or erotic, but more a matter of a business transaction. In drawing comparisons between the two occupations, they observe that, while the body work involved in each is different, 'the two often get elided' (Oerton and Phoenix, 2001: 389). They argue that sex can be "de-coupled" from the body and bodily practices and that conceptions of sexuality are discursively created. As with other forms of body work, sex workers are able to draw boundaries regarding which acts are permissible and which parts of the body can be touched. Because of its intimate and interactive nature, it has been argued that boundary work is particularly important for sex workers (Brents and Jackson, 2013). The need to draw boundaries can also be associated with the stigma attached to sex work. As Sanders (2002: 565) comments:

The fact that women who sell sex have to expend so much energy creating meanings and barriers to safeguard themselves reflects how this group of women continues to be stigmatized and marginalized from the inclusion and protection of mainstream society.

In the study by Oerton and Phoenix, female sex workers interviewed understood the commercial sexual encounter as being primarily to do with work rather than "having sex" within the context of intimate relationships. Nonetheless:

Although their work can be construed as routine economic exchanges in which clients/punters buy outlets for their physical needs, to see either prostitute women or women massage practitioners simply as workers doing a job and getting paid for it is clearly too simplistic. (Oerton and Phoenix, 2001: 396)

Some of Oerton and Phoenix's interviewees noted a body/self demarcation and "switching off" during commercial sexual encounters, and a distancing of their private emotions from their public encounters with clients. Rather than being viewed by the outside world as a strategy of resistance, Oerton and Phoenix argue that sex workers' emphasis on their work as "not-sex" in fact helps 'to sustain the connotations of their work with immorality and disreputability' (Oerton and Phoenix, 2001: 408).

Although some recent texts on commercial sex have narrowed the discussion to prostitution and its relation to body parts and specific sexual acts, historically the sale of sex has involved wider personal and social attributes, such as in the elite brothels of San Francisco in the early twentieth century, or in Paris in the eighteenth century:

The widespread range of such cases suggests that the "Taylorized sex" featured within the paradigm of modern-industrial prostitution may constitute an exception rather than the rule. (Bernstein, 2007a: 171)

Although there may be differentiation between sub-sectors of the indoor sex industry, sex work, as with other service sector occupations, involves a requirement for certain interpersonal skills and attributes, particularly those traditionally associated with femininity. Abbott et al. (2005) note that the personal attributes and "natural" skills associated with women have become commodified in a range of occupations, particularly jobs in the hospitality and caring sectors such as waitressing, bar work and nursing. Some academics have made direct comparisons between elements in the work role of sex workers and those of staff in hospitality, or health and social care occupations, such as the emotional management required in working closely with individuals and the manufacture of a specific work identity as part of a business strategy, or the pampering that goes with an occupation such as beauty therapist (Oerton and Phoenix, 2001; Sanders, 2005b). In some countries, sexual services may be closely connected with hospitality work in the tourist sector (Cabezas, 2006).

A further element of certain front-line service sector occupations is their demand for aesthetic labour skills, which Pettinger (2005) argues are premised on particular attributes relating to gender, ethnicity, age and class. While the products being sold reflect the specific customer base, so also are the workers required to possess certain social and cultural capital, as well as the requisite skills. As Williams and Connell (2010) comment, aesthetic labour relates not so much to acquired skills, but more to specific embodied dispositions or Bourdieu's concept of "habitus". This may be particularly the case in relation to clothing retail, but may also have pertinence for other sectors, including sex work, where personal appearance and social attributes are often of importance.

While some authors have argued that aesthetic labour is not necessarily gendered, as both men and women may be required to display the appropriate attributes, Pilcher (2007) notes that while this may be the case, employers' expectations tend to relate to particular ideals of masculinity and femininity. Thus gender roles are often reproduced and labour divisions perpetuated. Relating this back to Butler's (1993) conception of the "performativity" of gender discussed in Chapter Two, an analysis of indoor sex work needs to consider the extent to which the aesthetic labour required of male as well as female sex workers destabilises the heterosexual norms of the industry, or whether they introduce a different, but equally gendered set of norms. As suggested by Tewkesbury (1993) particular masculine ideals may be enacted in some forms of male sex work, which serve to distinguish it from its female counterpart. This is an important consideration for the current study, which will be explored in the analysis of labour processes in Chapter Seven.

Hakim (2010) argues that aesthetic, social and sexual attributes, as well as emotional labour, are components of "erotic capital". She contends that women have a longer history than men of developing and exploiting their erotic capital, for example, within marriage markets, although more recently some men, such as professional footballers, can also be seen to be cultivating their erotic capital through devoting more time to their appearance. Hakim argues that due to the imbalance in supply and demand in sexual markets, women in



particular are able to exploit their erotic capital in the sex industry. Nonetheless, because erotic capital has traditionally been considered a feminine attribute, it has tended not to be accorded the same value as other forms of capital. Hakim's theory of erotic capital is problematic in that it appears to reinforce normative constructions of gender and sexuality to explain demand for sexual services and fails to incorporate an analysis of structural constraints influencing participation in the sex industry. She does, however, point to the way in which the erotic labour performed by female sex workers tends to be socially condemned, whereas male sex workers are not equally stigmatised.

The notion of emotional labour in relation to the role of the sex worker has been discussed by a number of authors, including Lever and Dolnick (2000) and Sanders (2002). In Hochschild's (1983) conception of emotional labour, she draws on theorists such as Goffman (1959) who maintained that individuals enact a performance when encountering others, in order to present themselves in a certain way. Hochschild describes this conception of performance as "surface acting", where people assume a particular demeanour as a means of influencing others, which she compares with "deep acting", where people work on their emotions in order to evoke empathy with others' situations. Hochschild notes that the emotional management once confined to private relationships is now incorporated in many roles involving contact with the public. She argues that employers in some parts of the service sector, such as the airline industry, have come to expect front-line workers, particularly women, to simulate or enact certain emotional dispositions in order to influence the states of mind of customers. Thus feeling has become commodified and emotional meaning an expected element of many services. In Hochschild's view, emotional labour can be damaging to the individual worker, as it creates a separation of the private self from the public persona and ultimately alienation from the "true" self.

Hochschild's original conception of emotional labour has been criticised for being overly simplistic. Bolton and Boyd (2003) note that Hochschild overemphasises the dichotomy between public and private emotional self-

management. They observe that emotion work may be tedious and exhausting, but employees may also gain job satisfaction and a sense of reward from the emotion work they perform. Grandey (2003) found that deep acting in particular was associated not only with greater customer satisfaction, but also increased job satisfaction for workers. Workers may also resist and subvert management's demands on their emotional performance. For example, in Taylor and Tyler's (2000) study, lesbian flight attendants played with sexuality and gender constructions through acting out a parody of the heterosexual role. Cabezas (2006) observes that hospitality workers not only complied with management's expectations of emotional and sexualised labour, but were able to use these to their own benefit, including forming relationships with hotel guests that provided financial gains and potential opportunities for migration. Wouters (1989) also comments that Hochschild's analysis is restricted to jobs where emotional labour is monitored by managers. Yet many people supervise their own emotional labour and display a relatively high degree of control over their working lives. This is especially pertinent in relation to sex work, as I will discuss later when considering differences in labour requirements between independent sex workers and those in indirect employment relationships.

As Sanders et al. (2009) note, services offered from indoor sex markets in particular may involve far more than simply sexual acts, including a mirroring of other elements of traditional heterosexual partnership relations:

What is termed 'the girlfriend experience' – a service that involves kissing, cuddling and intimacy that is traditionally associated with conventional male-female interactions - has become a popular request by men who seek out escorts. (Sanders et al., 2009: 19)

While this role is mentioned mainly in relation to escorts, it may be that demands for the girlfriend experience (GFE) are becoming more widespread in other sectors of the indoor industry, and this is an issue that will be explored further. Setting sex work within the context of transformations in private intimate relationships, the labour market and consumer culture in the post-

industrial world, Bernstein (2007a) argues that there has been a transformation in parts of the sex industry, with customers pursuing a form of emotional genuineness as part of the paid sexual transaction that she terms “bounded authenticity”. In place of the exchange of money for immediate sexual release, which typifies street prostitution, ‘.... has emerged a brave new world of commercially available intimate encounters that are subjectively normalized for sex workers and clients alike’ (Bernstein, 2007a: 7). This also reflects developments in the private sphere, where the ‘postmodern individual tends toward ever-increasing autonomy and mobility, unfettered by any form of binding or permanent social ties’ (Bernstein, 2007a: 175). Nonetheless, the purchase of sexual services also remains a central component of the commercial interaction.

There are varying views on the impact of emotional labour on sex workers. For example, Wood (2000) found that the emotion work used in stripping involved a “suppression of feeling” comparable to that noted by Hochschild (1983), although workers also used emotional labour to engage in strategies of resistance to masculine power. Wood argues that strippers, similar to other workers in the sex industry, do not sell emotional labour to managers but are normally independent contractors, which complicates the power dynamic. Deshotels and Forsyth (2006) use the concept of “strategic flirting”, described as an aspect of emotional labour, to challenge the dichotomous view that sex work is either empowering or exploitative for exotic dancers. They suggest that the performance of femininity enacted by dancers does not necessarily lead to a position of subordination and that dancers in their study considered themselves to exercise power over male customers. For some participants, however, ‘the emotional labor of the job impeded their ability to create an authentic self and in particular an authentic sexual self’ (Deshotels and Forsyth, 2006: 234).

Sanders (2005a) describes how sex workers perform both surface acting, through manifesting a representation of particular feelings to influence the response of clients, and deep acting, where they suppress or shape their own feelings to distance themselves from unwanted emotions during the process of

their work and separate these from the emotions experienced in private interactions. Sanders (2005b: 325) argues that sex workers' emotional management strategies serve to protect them from the potential stresses of commercial sex: 'Sex workers therefore create pragmatic, symbolic and psychological defence mechanisms to manage the tensions of selling sex'. They also "perform" the role of sex worker as a conscious business strategy to appeal to high-paying customers. Such strategies are not unique to the commercial sex industry. Sanders (2005b) notes that some of her interviewees drew parallels between their role and that of an actor. Creating a particular role enables the worker to elicit the desired response from the customer, similar, she argues, to the way in which restaurant waiters present a particular persona to reflect perceived customer demand. As Agustín (2003: 385-6) also observes, a simulation of caring is not limited to sex work: 'babysitters and carers of grannies may pretend to care, too, by smiling on demand, listening to boring stories, or doling out caresses without feeling affection'. While sustaining a manufactured workplace identity can become arduous at times, Sanders sees this identity as 'an example of a resistance strategy that enables sex workers to control the workplace' (Sanders, 2005b: 337). Walby (2012: 126), however, challenges what he sees as a false binary between "feigned" and "real" intimacy: in his account, certainly for male Internet escorts, 'the boundaries between working life and sex life are more porous'. Brewis and Linstead (2000b) have also suggested that not all sex workers wish to maintain a strict demarcation between their working and private lives.

Sanders (2005b) notes that not all sex workers experience the circumstances in which productive emotional labour may be possible. As McDowell (2009: 109) also observes: '....the maintenance of emotional distance, as well as the production of an adequate pretence, is not always easy to achieve'. Partly as a result of the illegal nature of many forms of sex work, she notes that sex workers may conceal their work from sexual partners, families and friends, which may increase the stresses associated with their work. The impact of stigma and secrecy on sex workers' levels of job satisfaction is a topic which will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven in this thesis.

### **3.3 *Discussion: applying diverse theories to the current research***

It is clear from the volume of literature exploring approaches to sex work and the sale of sexual services that the theoretical position which treats sex work as a unidirectional relationship of exploitation of women by men does not reflect the diversity within the commercial sex sector. Certain theories endeavour to fit sex work into narrow conceptions of patriarchy, rather than considering the circumstances under which theories of patriarchy or, more broadly, gender relations, might be applicable. In doing so, such approaches exclude the potential for a richer analysis of the organisation and processes involved in sex work.

If we are to proceed from the premise that sex work is a form of labour, this then raises certain questions. Where, for instance, would sex work fit within an occupational classification? It makes sense to compare sex work with other service sector occupations, because in essence a service is being provided, even if the service itself and some of the processes differ from those in other areas of work. As with any other occupation offering personal services, a number of elements appear to make up the work, including customer relations, emotional management, physical contact and the ability to draw boundaries when interacting with customers. The primary differentiating factor is the sale of sexual acts rather than, or in addition to, other services involving the body. The interactive nature of sex work also distinguishes it from most other forms of corporeal labour.

The arguments differentiating sex work from other forms of service encounter are sometimes premised on assumptions that a person's selfhood is inextricably bound up in their sexuality and sexual activity. Yet, as was observed in Chapter Two, there are problems with this argument. While workers may enact specific emotions to engender a pleasing customer experience, no plausible reason has been presented to suppose that this necessarily entails a surrender of personhood. It is conceivable that an individual can be involved in sexual acts without essentially involving their

private sexual or emotional self, in the same way that if someone sells their creative ability they are still able to draw boundaries between their working and private lives. From the growing amount of literature on the topic, and from themes which have emerged from the fieldwork for this research, it appears that many sex workers are as capable as workers in any other sector of drawing distinctions between what they do as part of their work and in their private, intimate relations. It is also relevant to note that this argument appears to have been used primarily about women who sell sex and there has not been an equivalent assumption about men who provide sexual services, either to other men or to women. Is this simply an omission, or have these arguments been premised on essentialist conceptions of femininity and masculinity? If a person's self is so ineluctably bound up in the performance of sex, how does this also relate to those who purchase sexual services?

A crucial factor that appears to distinguish sex work from other forms of work in Britain is its semi-criminal nature, placing conditions on how and where it can be performed without fear of harassment, which may also limit safety precautions that can be undertaken. This has been alluded to in the literature, but was explored further in the interviews for this study, in the context of recent legislative changes. For instance, does the semi-criminal nature of the work preclude a common set of expectations and standards for customer behaviour that might be seen in other industries? As with other precarious work settings, the work tends to be non-unionised and, as examples have shown, there are instances where, when individuals seek to improve their safety through working together, they make themselves vulnerable to criminalisation. This is pertinent to the relative degrees of control and agency experienced by sex workers in their work and it is arguable that changes to the law to recognise sex workers' rights might lead to somewhat different work experiences for many.

While there is a degree of essentialism in some of the suppositions behind theories such as human capital or rational choice theory, what is important to this research is that they introduce the concept of agency, which is a key issue to consider when exploring sex as work. For example, the extent to which sex

workers weigh up the options available to them and arrive at the decision to sell sex is a question that might be asked, although it is important to contextualise these decisions in a way that has not been attempted in rational choice theory. The findings are therefore set within the context of discourses of masculinity and femininity, as well as the social and economic contexts in which sex is sold. It might be argued, for example, that some sex workers are currently rewarded for the precariousness of their labour through the relatively high earnings it offers, which also sets sex work apart from most other service sector jobs. Notions of different forms of entrepreneurship are also pertinent to certain forms of sex work, particularly independent work, and these will be explored in later chapters, as will relative work autonomy.

Finally, further consideration needs to be given to the service being provided. If more than sex is being sold, as in the “girlfriend experience”, what *is* the service or product and are there elements that differentiate it from non-commercial intimate interactions? What are the conceptions of femininity and masculinity on offer and (how) do they differ from what is expected in non-commercial sexual relationships? Does the term “sex work” adequately convey the diversity of the work, or is there a need further to conceptualise different subdivisions of indoor sex work?

## **Chapter Four: Research methodology**

### **4.1 *Introduction***

In this chapter I explain in detail the study design and methods, the ethical and practical considerations relating to the study and profile of participants. These are set in the context of methodological and ethical issues relating to research with sex workers and marginalised participants more widely. I outline the rationale for drawing on grounded theory, which was the primary methodological approach informing this study, with a focus on gender and workplace diversity also incorporated. I also discuss the implications of using the Internet to recruit and communicate with participants. Many studies of sex work have been undertaken from a feminist perspective, although relatively few have so far related to adult indoor-based sex workers, whose experiences may differ from those of street-based workers. Research findings, particularly with a topic as controversial as sex work, may also relate to the ideological position of the researcher. It is therefore important to aim to be as transparent as possible about the researcher's theoretical stance when explicating the research methodology. As discussed in Chapter One, my approach is to view adult sex work as an occupation, while remaining open about the extent to which it may be regarded as comparable to other forms of work, particularly when considering the cultural and legal context surrounding sex work. Treating sex work as labour also allows for consideration of sex workers' access to labour rights and for comparisons to be made with the position of workers in the formal economy.

### **4.2 *Rationale***

There is a growing body of research with sex workers, although as Sanders et al. (2009) note, there have been relatively few studies relating to adult off-street sex workers. This may be related to the fact that street-based workers are seen to experience a greater range of social problems compared with their indoor-based counterparts (Jeal and Salisbury, 2007; Cusick et al., 2009) and



also because the public order concerns associated with more visible street-based sex work have frequently made it a focus for policy-makers and researchers (Pitcher et al., 2006). To date, the number of studies considering male sex work is relatively small and few studies compare the experiences of male and female sex workers (O'Neill, 2008). From the review of the literature in Chapters Two and Three, it is clear there are research gaps, particularly in relation to exploring the spectrum of indoor-based sex work. This study adds to the knowledge base through investigating the occupational characteristics of sex work in different indoor settings and comparing the labour processes and working conditions experienced by adult female and male and, to some extent, transgender sex workers, as well as considering these issues from the perspective of a small number of third parties. As I will outline below, I elected to undertake a qualitative study in order to explore these issues in depth and to draw out common experiences and diversity related to context.

### **4.3    *Research design***

The study drew on qualitative methods and could be described as incorporating elements of comparative design, as the aim was to contrast and compare the experiences of female, male and transgender sex workers and also conditions in different workplace settings. As Bryman (2008) notes, comparative research may be qualitative or quantitative. While one approach when undertaking a comparative study might be to draw on statistically significant numbers in each group, from previous research with sex workers, I was aware this would be problematic because of difficulties in gaining access to some groups of participants (Pitcher et al., 2008). There have been certain instances where quantitative studies have been undertaken: for example, Jenkins (2009) conducted an online survey of Internet-based escorts. This relied on participants' familiarity with and regular use of the Internet, whereas in the case of the current research study, the focus was on a cross-section of participants, some of whom did not have access to the Internet. There are also advantages to a primarily qualitative methodology in that, while it does not claim to be representative, it enables an in-depth exploration of issues,

processes and relationships (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). As a principal focus of the current research study was on exploring the experiences of individuals, a quantitative approach would not provide the insights into people's lives afforded by a qualitative method such as semi-structured interviewing. As such, it does not seek to lay claims to objective "truths", but rather, through the experience of participants, to elucidate the processes and structures that contribute to particular states of affairs. As Richardson (2002: 415) has noted, claims to authoritative knowledge are themselves debatable and denote unequal power relations: 'the claim to truth is also a claim to power'. Goffman (1974) has also argued that our interpretation of different situations or events depends on our framework of understanding. Researcher reflexivity is thus also a key consideration in qualitative research, as it enables the reader to contextualise the findings. While qualitative research does not strive for the generalisability claimed in much quantitative research, an approach such as grounded theory offers a systematic and focused method for collecting and analysing data to ensure that theoretical categories and concepts are based on the data, rather than imposing the researcher's own preconceptions or prior hypotheses (Charmaz, 2006). It is also pertinent to note that marginalised individuals may position themselves in relation to dominant representations or labels and although at times they may challenge their categorisation by others, they may also sometimes view themselves through the meanings others impose on them (Skeggs, 1997). In the case of sex workers, social stigma features significantly in their lives and while many constantly rebel against this, they may also at times internalise the negative connotations associated with their work. Thus it is important also to situate the analysis in the context of discourses which shape the lives of participants and the interview process was in part designed to elicit their views on these discourses.

My analytical approach was guided by the principles of grounded theory established by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and subsequently developed by Corbin and Strauss (2008), while also taking into account variations on the original grounded theory method and the reservations of some theorists about the perceived positivist elements of early grounded theory (see Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). As gender inequalities have been at the centre of debates

on the sex industry, the research methodology was also informed by feminist approaches to research practice, particularly feminist standpoint epistemology (Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1990; O'Neill, 2001). It has been argued that combining these methodological approaches enables an analytical focus on the experience of marginalised individuals and the way in which discourses maintain gender hierarchies (Plummer and Young, 2010). Charmaz (1990) also suggests that grounded theory as a method may be adapted for different disciplines or schools of thought. I consider the application of grounded theory principles further in section 4.6, which discusses the analytical processes throughout the research. In this section I focus on the way in which the research design integrated a focus on diversity within an overall grounded theory method, design of research instruments and methods of data collection.

#### **4.3.1 Exploring diversity in indoor sex work**

Research preceding the current study (Pitcher, 2010) demonstrates that the sex industry displays regional variation, not only in the size of the sex industry but in the composition and structure of local sex markets. Because of the extent of sex work in London and its ethnic diversity, certain research studies have focused on sex businesses in the capital, the majority concentrating on female sex workers (Mai, 2009). The limitations of drawing on the experience of sex workers in one major city alone, however, are that geographical variations are neglected. Furthermore, when studying sex work as an occupation, it is important to focus not only on female workers, even if they represent the majority of sex workers, but to consider also the experiences of male and transgender workers, in order to explore the extent to which gender may be implicated in power relationships and whether other factors influence working conditions within the industry. While not laying claims to representativeness, the current study therefore aimed to explore that diversity and this was integrated in the research design through the stages of data collection and analysis. It should be noted, however, that an aim to incorporate difference in certain aspects may of necessity within a comparatively small study lead to other factors being represented to a lesser extent. Given the geographically diverse nature of the sample, therefore, it

was not possible to explore issues such as the position of migrant workers to the same extent as had the study focused on a major city such as London. Moreover, it should be noted that as the research explicitly concentrated on adults who had entered sex work of their own volition, no conclusions can be drawn in relation to children selling sex or people who have been trafficked into the sex industry, as they were not included in the study.

The grounded theory method involves a process of constant comparative analysis, in which data collection, coding and analysis take place simultaneously, enabling concepts and categories to emerge from the data, which in turn inform subsequent data collection (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Where diversity is central to the research study, this also influences all stages of the research process, including data collection methods, sampling and the analytical process. My thesis was particularly concerned with degrees of difference according to gender and work setting, also exploring geographical diversity where possible. The aim of capturing comparative experiences according to both gender and work setting informed the sampling process. While a comparative focus to an extent dictates the sampling methods used, this is compatible with the grounded theory process of theoretical sampling. O'Neil Green et al. (2007) discuss the ways in which a diversity focus may be integrated within grounded theory research, through paying attention to the need to ensure representation from target groups during cumulative theoretical sampling. I discuss the stages of data collection, sampling and analysis separately in the following sections, with consideration given to the way in which comparative research methods were incorporated in each process.

The most suitable method of data collection was face-to-face interviewing, which allowed for exploration of similarities and differences between participants in diverse locations. Research questions, while sufficiently broad to encompass a range of experiences, also included a comparative element, with some questions asking participants to compare their experiences with those of workers of a different gender, or in different working circumstances within and outside the sex industry. Further details of the interview process

are described below. The incorporation of the comparative design in sampling and analysis is discussed in sections 4.4.2 and 4.6.2.

#### **4.3.2 Data collection method: interviews**

The primary method of data collection was through semi-structured interviews. It is sometimes suggested that the interview is an interaction between interviewer and interviewee and context-specific, so cannot be seen as representative of the social world. For example, Silverman (2006) suggests there are limitations to interview data, particularly because the interview is contrived and as a result may generate data based on the way in which individuals choose to represent their experiences. Nonetheless, as Miller and Glassner (2004) argue, information about social worlds may be achieved through in-depth interviewing. Jones (1985) comments that in-depth interviews can enable us to understand the way in which people construct their reality, which cannot be arrived at solely through methods such as observation or through imposing a rigid set of questions. This method enables participants to contribute their interpretations of the social world as it relates to them and the meanings they attach to their experiences, and thus they become “knowers” as well as “known”. As Miller and Glassner (2004) and others have noted, interviewees will tell us which of our questions are pertinent, or which make sense to them, and this is a central aspect of both a grounded theory and feminist standpoint approach. It is important also to recognise the position of researcher and interviewee and how this impacts on the process and way in which the participant responds:

The issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are – in their lives as well as the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one. The issue may be exacerbated, for example, when we study groups with whom we do not share membership. Particularly as a result of social distances, interviewees may not trust us, they may not respond to our questions, or they may purposely mislead us in their responses. Likewise, given a lack of membership in their primary

groups, we may not know enough about the phenomenon under study to ask the right questions. (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 127-128)

I selected semi-structured interviews as the primary method because it best matched the objectives of the study, giving sufficient flexibility and space for participants to reflect on issues of concern to them. Aldridge (2007) notes that a self-reflective and participant-focused research approach may of necessity involve a degree of flexibility in the methods used, in order to be responsive to the needs of participants and ensure that their perceptions and experiences are represented. At the same time having certain consistent questions enabled me to draw some cross-comparisons in the way different groups of sex workers presented their experiences of their working situation and conditions (see Bryman, 2008). This method was also pertinent across a range of settings, although the availability of participants in parlours was constrained by the fact that interviews were undertaken during working hours, as discussed further below. Undertaking interviews in parlours, however, also allowed for a limited amount of informal interaction with receptionists and different workers on the premises.

Although my aim was primarily to undertake face-to-face interviews, two individuals expressed a preference for email interviews, as this enabled them to answer questions in their own time. This is similar to the experiences of Bampton and Cowton (2002), who found that face-to-face or telephone interview methods were inconvenient for some participants. As Gibson (2010) notes, emailing a few questions at a time enables a more conversational style to develop. In order to adapt to this style of interviewing, I reformulated the topic guide into specific questions. With one participant, I was able to email initial questions and then explore certain issues further through supplementary questions and interchange. With the second email interview, however, it was clear the respondent had very limited time and preferred to have all the questions to reflect on at a convenient time, so with this interview I sent my complete list of questions rather than lose the opportunity for any data from this participant. As McCoyd and Schwaber Kerson (2006) comment, there are advantages and disadvantages to using email interviews compared with face-

to-face interviews. The advantages include being able to access marginalised populations who might not otherwise participate. They note, however, that face-to-face interviews can provide richer non-verbal data.

I aimed for flexibility in the design of research instruments, according to the principles of grounded theory. Nonetheless, constraints of ethics committee requirements meant that a semi-structured topic guide needed to be presented for approval, along with a participant information sheet and consent form. Within these parameters, however, it was acknowledged that because of the analytical approach, the topic guide, while indicative of the topics to be explored, might change as the research progressed. There were several iterations of the topic guide during the fieldwork as I identified additional areas for exploration, or certain topics which did not appear as relevant as others, during interactions with participants.

While the semi-structured interview schedule was designed to allow participants to raise issues of concern to them, certain questions were asked consistently throughout the research, for example, those relating to rates of pay and demographic information about participants. As a particular concern of the study was exploring diversity, questions were also designed to elicit participants' comparisons of their work situation with others of a different gender or working status, as well as asking them to compare their current work with previous working experiences in sectors outside the sex industry.

The initial interviews raised a number of issues I had not anticipated in the initial design of the topic guide, including different niche markets within independent sex work, the sensitivity of some issues, such as the legal status of self-employed work (for example, whether participants were registered as self-employed), or the ways in which to approach the subject of how sex work may impinge on personal relationships. While I had originally hoped to obtain estimates of weekly income, some participants were reluctant to provide such detail and it proved easier to gather data on hourly rates and approximate numbers of weekly appointments, although this could be quite variable.

The interview approach differed from many studies of sex work, because of its labour market perspective, which meant that similar questions were asked to those that might be covered within studies of other occupations. The broad topics for the sex worker interviews related to:

- individual personal background and work history and initial reasons for participating in the work;
- current work characteristics and organisation, including occupational health and safety, services, skills, marketing processes and sources of support;
- working relationships with third parties and clients and work-life balance;
- job satisfaction and aspirations;
- whether they viewed sex work as similar to or different from jobs outside the sex industry;
- how they saw their experience comparing with that of other sex workers, or workers in different settings; and
- views on the regulatory and legislative context.

Interviews with managers and receptionists followed similar themes, with additional questions asked about role-specific duties such as recruitment practices and support provided to sex workers. Full details of the interview topics and research instruments are given in Appendix B.

#### **4.3.3 Other data sources**

An additional method of exploration was analysing the websites of independent sex workers who used the Internet to market their services, using thematic analysis. Where participants also wrote a blog, with their permission I analysed the blog over a short period of time, using grounded theory methods to draw out the main themes, while also contrasting these with representations of sex work by those outside the industry, such as in policy formation or media reports. Some participants also sent further information by



email, either in response to supplementary questions from me after the initial face-to-face interviews, or because further thoughts had occurred to them subsequent to the interview. These were also incorporated in the analysis.

## **4.4 *Sampling and access***

### **4.4.1 Engaging sex workers: access issues**

In research with sex workers, as with other vulnerable groups, access can be problematic and trust may need to be built up over time (Shaver, 2005). The impact of stigma, the criminality of certain forms of sex work and mistrust of the motivations of researchers may all contribute to reluctance amongst sex workers to participate in research studies. Initial access to sex workers has therefore often tended to be through “gatekeepers”, such as support projects, although the researcher also needs to establish a relationship of trust with organisations and assure them that their relationships with service users will not be jeopardised through the researcher’s actions (Sanders, 2006b). While this approach may help researchers to gain access to service users in a relatively informal setting, relying on this method alone is unlikely to reflect the diversity of the sex industry, as it leads to a narrow sample of sex workers who are regular users of statutory or voluntary services (Pitcher et al., 2008; Cusick et al., 2009). Many indoor-based sex workers, particularly escorts, are unlikely to be in contact with sex work projects and/or the statutory services used by street-based workers, and fewer services are funded to provide support to male or transgender sex workers (Pitcher, 2006; 2010). It is thus important to consider alternative routes to identify and access sex workers, particularly when endeavouring to capture the diversity of indoor-based work.

With the increasing use of the Internet for networking and blogging by sex workers, as well as for marketing, this is becoming a significant methodological tool both for accessing potential participants and observing communication between sellers and buyers of sexual services (Sharp and Earle, 2003; Sanders, 2005c). It was thus an important source for accessing independent

and agency sex workers and for broadening access to male and transgender as well as female sex workers. Nonetheless, the wide range of online sources may also present problems for sampling.

#### **4.4.2 Sampling considerations**

Theoretical sampling or snowballing are common approaches for qualitative studies but as Howard (2002) notes, this can lead to inappropriate bias if the researcher does not know the field. There are various methodological problems with sampling participants in the sex industry: for example, reliance on gatekeepers to gain entry to premises is dependent on their contacts and may result in only more organised businesses being accessible (Sanders, 2006b). Although I had researched in this field for several years prior to undertaking the PhD, in order to ensure a broad sample I engaged participants through a number of different means, including initial convenience sampling via the UK Network of Sex Work Projects and sex worker contacts, who were also able to refer me to other potential participants. Information about my study was also disseminated by sex work project staff around the country working with female, male and transgender sex workers. In a climate where sex work is partially criminalised, sex workers are very cautious about disclosing their status and concerned about the way in which their data may be used. Trust is therefore difficult to establish and personal recommendation helped me through some of the initial hurdles.

In order to contact potential participants who did not use public or voluntary services, I also recruited via online sources, including a networking and advice website for escorts, and sites where sex workers advertised their services. Some websites were aimed primarily at female sex workers and the process of recruiting male sex workers took longer, with access being achieved through personal contacts and various websites where male escorts posted advertisements, in order to arrive at saturation with this group. While I had experienced little difficulty in recruiting female participants through one networking site, I found the response rate lower for escort advertising sites for

male sex workers. Because of the limited number of sites where transgender sex workers advertise, as well as the comparatively small numbers in sex work compared with their female and male counterparts, recruitment for this group was also more difficult. I also received enquiries from other sex workers where participants had told them of the study, posted details of the research on their website and/or blogged about the study and thus snowballing methods were an effective way of recruiting additional participants from a wider range of backgrounds. Participants often commented that they felt part of a 'hidden' group and frequently felt misrepresented and therefore wanted to put their stories, which they felt the research study would facilitate. This raises the issue of possible self-selection bias, wherein certain participants are more likely to be motivated to participate in a study, although this is more of an issue for consideration with social surveys, where representativeness would be sought. As Letherby (2003: 106) observes, this method 'has an influence on the data in that it affects what respondents say and how they say it'. Nonetheless, this approach generated diverse experiences and different recruitment methods were also used to broaden the range of participants.

Access to sex workers in brothels/parlours required approaches through gatekeepers, including not only sex work projects, but also securing the agreement of managers of establishments. Sanders (2006b) observes that managers may be concerned that the research might expose their identities or those of the sex workers in the parlour, or harm their business and thus considerable effort needs to be invested by the researcher to assure gatekeepers of the value of the research to them. There are also ethical considerations to take into account when interviewing in illegal environments, where criminal activities may be disclosed and establishments may be in danger of being raided by the police (Sanders, 2005a). My initial aim had been to recruit through a local NHS-based project, which had previously been discussed with project staff and approved by the relevant NHS Research Ethics Committee, but the project manager failed to process the required documentation, resulting in my being unable to use this route. This delayed fieldwork in parlours, but I was able instead to undertake this component of the research in two other cities. Initial introductions to seven establishments were

through staff in third sector projects. Once I had met the managers and receptionists and discussed my research with them, I was able to make appointments myself, although I was informed by the receptionist in one establishment that no-one there was interested in taking part. Obtaining initial agreement to undertake interviews on the premises is only one hurdle, therefore, and the sex workers or gatekeepers themselves may not always be convinced of the benefits of participation. Interviews were achieved with sex workers in three establishments and also with a small number of managers and receptionists, all former sex workers. I also recruited two parlour workers and one manager in other establishments through snowballing methods. While there was some geographical diversity amongst parlour workers, the demographic characteristics of participants reflected the composition of sex markets in the cities where fieldwork took place and thus the sample is not necessarily representative of sex worker populations in all areas in Britain. Because of the difficulties in accessing sex workers, however, few research studies in this field can lay claims to representativeness and, moreover, achievement of wider generalisability was not within the remit of this study.

As suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008), as part of a grounded theory approach I engaged in a process of theoretical sampling, that is, sampling informed by concepts emerging from the data, to explore how they might vary under different conditions, until reaching conceptual saturation. At the same time, there were practical considerations to take into account, particularly my aim to encompass different strata within indoor sex work, as well as capturing the experiences of male, female and transgender sex workers. Patton (2002) has described this form of sampling as maximum variation sampling, meaning that the researcher selects a wide range of cases in order to identify common patterns or divergences across variations. The time constraints of data collection also had some bearing on the practicability of achieving theoretical saturation across categories. Thus it might be more accurate to describe the process as purposeful sampling in order to recruit participants from each group, with a theoretical component to achieve saturation within emerging conceptual categories (see Hood, 2007 for a distinction between the two

terms). Further discussion of theoretical sampling and development of conceptual categories is given under 4.6.2 below.

#### **4.5 *Ethical considerations***

There are both practical and ethical concerns when undertaking research into the sex industry, including issues such as researcher safety, methodological considerations when researching a largely hidden population and potential limitations to informed consent (Shaver, 2005; Sanders, 2006b). Because the sex industry may be viewed as a problematic sector for academic inquiry, some ethics committees may express reservations about proposed research studies and this may pose an additional barrier to such research.

The research focus was on indoor-based adult sex workers, who, while they may be vulnerable to social stigma, tend not to experience the same social problems as street-based workers and are also more likely to be in stable forms of work (Jeal and Salisbury, 2007). My aim was to interview people who self-define as sex workers, rather than those who might have been forced into prostitution. Nonetheless, while the sale of sex in itself is not illegal, because of the partial criminalisation of some aspects of the sex industry, such as brothel management, I was aware that I might encounter participants who were vulnerable to the consequences of exposure through the research process because of the potential criminal justice implications of the work setting. Although indoor workers may not be classed as a vulnerable group *per se*, particularly in comparison with street-based workers, some individuals may also have experienced exploitation, violence or coercion at certain points in their working life.

The research study was approved by the University of Loughborough's Research Ethics Committee, after minor revisions to the participant information sheet and consent form. The processes were guided by the University's ethical principles and procedures and by confidentiality and informed consent protocols, based on those provided by the British Sociological Association

(BSA) and the Social Research Association (SRA). These included taking a participant-focused approach, considering the safety needs and interests of respondents and also where possible feeding back preliminary findings to participants in order to check validity.

#### **4.5.1 Informed consent**

Although individual participants may be protected by anonymity, it cannot be claimed for certain that any social research study will be devoid of possible risk to them. As part of the ethical protocol for the research and to minimise the potential for harm to participants, therefore, protocols for informed consent were drawn up. These included being explicit about the aims and processes of the research in advance of setting up interviews, ensuring that participation was voluntary and that participants were aware of their rights to withdraw from the research at any point and setting out the conditions for their participation, which included assurances regarding confidentiality of interview data. As part of the interview process, I also explained my background and reasons for undertaking the research as fully as possible.

Where contact was made online, participants were sent a participant information sheet and consent form to read and sign before taking part in the research. Within brothels, I made an initial visit to each premises to introduce myself and distribute the participant information sheet, before making further appointments to undertake interviews. I also explained the research again before the commencement of each interview, with participants being given the opportunity to ask questions.

#### **4.5.2 Confidentiality and anonymity**

In order to encourage further engagement from participants in the research process, I asked participants to choose the name they would like used in any quotes from their interviews. Where they did not express a preference, I confirmed the pseudonym with the participant. Different names were used

when quoting from individuals' blogs, to ensure these were not linked to interviews and to further preserve anonymity. I also asked all participants if they wished to see the transcript of their interview and sent this to everyone who requested it (six interviewees stated they did not wish to see this). The purpose of the member check was to ensure I had recorded certain information correctly, such as rates of pay, dates and other verifiable details, to try to correct any gaps and also to give participants the opportunity to request that I delete, further anonymise or refrain from quoting any parts of the discussion that they regarded as sensitive and which might identify them. To preserve confidentiality, transcripts emailed to participants were password-protected. Transcripts were anonymised to preserve identity, including not only participants' names, but also place names.

#### **4.5.3 Data storage**

Where permission was given, interviews were recorded and the recordings and transcripts stored on a password-protected computer, used only by the researcher. The recordings were encrypted and transcripts individually password-protected. Participants were asked prior to the interview whether they consented to the interview being recorded and were asked to sign a consent form indicating this.<sup>17</sup> In one instance the participant did not give consent to the interview being recorded and so field notes were taken for this interview, with the interviewee's agreement.

Transcripts of interviews in Word were imported into a password-protected NVivo 9 file for coding and analysis. Participants' contact details were stored in a separate password-protected file, with only the researcher having the key. Interview data will be kept for ten years, in accordance with Data Protection Act 1998 and Loughborough University guidelines.

---

<sup>17</sup> I gave participants the option of using their actual name or working name on the form, as some were reluctant to reveal their personal details.

#### **4.5.4 Researcher safety**

Researcher safety was a consideration and interviews were mainly undertaken in mutually agreed public or semi-public spaces, such as in quiet cafes, or on working premises within a managed environment such as parlours. As Letherby (2003) notes, the location of the interview can affect the degree of comfort and control experienced by participants and thus interviewees were encouraged to recommend spaces for interviews where they would feel comfortable. The original intention was to interview all participants in public spaces such as cafes, or collective working environments. While this was the case for the majority of interviews, a small number of participants expressed reservations about the sensitivity of the interview topics and the need to preserve privacy, particularly if they lived in a small town and did not feel able to find a public space that was sufficiently discreet. It became apparent I would only be able to obtain interviews with these participants through visiting them at their workplace/home. In these instances, I took care to engage in extensive email and telephone discussions with potential participants prior to arranging interviews and, as an additional precaution, where possible arranged to meet them in a public venue beforehand. I left details of all interview times and locations with a departmental representative and called or texted in at a pre-arranged time when each day's interviews were completed. I interviewed two pairs of individuals working collectively from their home and two other sex workers in their home/workplace, who had been introduced by personal contacts and with whom I had had prior face-to-face discussions.

#### **4.5.5 Research and the Internet**

The Internet offers a rich source of data for research on virtual communities. Websites and archives can enable researchers to study the way in which different 'social realities' are displayed (Markham, 2004). The Internet has been used to undertake ethnographic research in relation to sex work communities (Sanders, 2005c). Research using the Internet also brings significant ethical concerns and methodological challenges (Hine, 2005;



Ashford, 2009). For example, the issue of informed consent may not be straightforward and there are ethical implications of observing sites for research without the researcher disclosing their identity (Sanders, 2005c). Although online discussion groups may appear to be public, members may perceive their interaction to be private and can be surprised or angered by intruding researchers (Bryman, 2008).

The Association of Internet Researchers (Ess & AoIR, 2002) provide guidelines, which recommend starting with the ethical expectations of the website and seeking permission to quote any material, making clear how it will be used. Bryman (2008) suggests contacting members of public discussion lists in advance and asking for permission to observe. The researcher should also aim to minimise risk of harm to participants (Ess & AoIR, 2002). While I was not undertaking formal observation, as a result of recruiting through networking sites, some online interchange took place between participants and thus a consideration was to acknowledge these discussions and where necessary to respond to any issues raised about the research process.

#### **4.5.6 Other considerations**

It is important to be conscious of the respective positions of the researcher and researched and acknowledge power imbalances in these relationships, for example, when seeking informed consent and during the interview process. Factors to be taken into account included my own circumstances, age and class, in relation to those of interviewees, as well as my privileged position as researcher/analyst (see for example Bola, 1996; Maynard, 1998; Letherby, 2003). While the research study was driven by academic objectives and thus it was difficult to make it completely collaborative or participatory, it was still possible to aim for a degree of participation and interaction with participants that went beyond the interview stage itself and made the research more of a dynamic process. At different stages of the research, therefore, I encouraged participants to take an active interest in the research through maintaining

contact with them and providing feedback on emergent findings, as well as final outputs, as discussed below.

I followed BSA and SRA guidelines concerning the need to avoid unnecessary intrusion into the private and personal lives of participants, and being sensitive to the needs of participants during the interview process. Having interviewed sex workers in the past, I was aware that some people may reveal episodes in their life or work history that may be distressing to re-live and sometimes difficult for the researcher to hear. If interviewees bring up such episodes themselves, they may have actively chosen to do so during the interview, for example, to reflect on their feelings about these issues (Wengraf, 2010). In those circumstances the researcher has an ethical responsibility to enable difficult episodes to be talked about. I also identified agencies which might offer interviewees further professional support after the interview if they wished to pursue any issues of concern. In most cases this was not required, but during the course of the research two participants reported that they had experienced violent incidents: one in the context of her work and another in personal rather than working circumstances. One had already been referred to a supportive project by a colleague, but I was able to give the other participant the contact details of a project in her area.

Interview participants were each offered a £15 voucher to thank them for giving up their time. The issue of incentives is sometimes a contentious one, as it may be argued that some participants may feel under pressure to take part because of their financial needs. This is dependent on circumstances, however, and as Grant and Sugarman (2004) have suggested, the use of incentives becomes problematic only in situations such as those where the incentive is sufficiently large to overcome individual aversions to participation. In the current research study, many participants expressed a personal interest in the study topic and were keen to participate. The voucher offered was relatively small and, in two instances, participants declined to accept this.

## **4.6 Analysis**

### **4.6.1 Interview transcription**

I transcribed all the interviews myself, which, while time-consuming, can generate further ideas and concepts to pursue in the research. There are different ways of formatting transcriptions, according to the method of analysis used. It is often recommended that transcripts should adhere to what is said in the interview, word for word, and also how it is said, in order to avoid misinterpretation during the analysis (Bryman, 2008). Atkinson (1992) notes that transcription decisions run along a continuum, from denaturalised versions, where speech is standardised and all idiosyncratic elements of speech removed, to representations which retain all the features of natural speech. With the standardised version there is a risk the original speech will be misrepresented, although attempts to preserve the original speech, such as in conversation analysis and other ethnomethodological approaches, rely on specialised techniques which are also a matter of the transcriber's interpretation. Atkinson argues that it is impossible to arrive at a completely "unvarnished" representation of speech. A further issue is that, as Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005: 9) note, 'a transcriber hears the interview through his/her own cultural-linguistic filters'. Problems can arise with complete naturalism, where, for example, attempting to reproduce accents and regional or ethnic variations can reveal participants' identities. Prejudiced assumptions based on race and class can also be attached to analyses and interpretations. Thus, as Atkinson (1992) observes, the interpreter needs to be sensitive to his/her representations in order not to unnecessarily "other" certain participants, for example, through over-use of non-standard spellings. Taking these considerations into account, in my transcriptions I included indications of pauses and 'response/non-response tokens' such as 'mmm' or 'yeah' as well as non-verbal interjections such as 'erm', as these may sometimes have some bearing on participants' approach to certain questions or issues. While I used participants' own words, in view of the above considerations I did not attempt

to capture accents, as to do so would consist of my interpretation of an accent and might also be revealing of identity in some cases.

#### **4.6.2 Stages of analysis**

As Bryant and Charmaz (2007) note, there are different interpretations and modifications of grounded theory, with diverse opinions regarding what constitutes its essence. Nonetheless, an essential element is the development of theoretical concepts, which result from 'iterative processes of going back and forth between progressively more focused data and successively more abstract categorizations of them' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007: 25). I adhered to the basic principles of grounded theory, including commencing analysis in the early stages of data collection, with initial open coding and on-going development of categories and properties. With the interplay of data collection and analysis, including comparative analysis, I refined questions and revised the analytic scheme as the research progressed.

The advantage of using grounded theory principles when gathering interviewees' perceptions is that categories and subsequent theory emerge from the data, rather than being established prior to data collection, although it is also recognised that the researcher may start with a broad conceptualisation of the area of study. Having undertaken research into the sex industry for some ten years before commencing this thesis, I was aware my research was already informed by my previous experiences in the field. My primary research question also presupposed that sex work might be regarded as an occupation, with diversity in practices and styles of working that made it possible to make comparisons between sex work and mainstream occupations. Nonetheless, given the contested status of sex work in theory and policy, I aimed to be as open as possible to emerging concepts during the process of data collection and analysis. As part of a process of reflexivity I maintained a research diary to record not only analytical observations, but also my reflections on engagement with participants and other aspects of the research, to document my feelings and responses and be sensitive to potential

research bias. While some of these reflections are presented in section 4.7 below, as Finlay (2002) has observed, reflexivity is important only insofar as it contributes to the development of knowledge in the area of study and my reflections have thus been confined to observations on the research process as it relates to the findings and conclusions that may be drawn from the data.

#### 4.6.2.1 *Coding of data and development of coding tree*

The coding of interview data followed the two-stage approach described by Charmaz (2006), the first stage being an initial phase whereby defined segments of data (for example, line-by-line or incident-by-incident) are coded, staying as close as possible to the original language. By using *in vivo* codes which use participants' own terms, Charmaz argues that the researcher is preserving participants' meaning. These *in vivo* codes may be incorporated in their original form in the integrated analysis, which forms the second phase of coding, or the terms may be revised and refined as the analysis continues. Rather than coding commencing after data collection, Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose adoption of a constant comparative method, whereby coding and analysis take place simultaneously with data collection. This involves comparing incidents within each category and developing memos to record the researcher's thoughts on concepts emerging from the categories, or conflicts in the data. The researcher then starts to define the theory, which may involve focusing on the most relevant or interrelated categories, grouping them together under higher level concepts and exploring further instances of these categories, which is an example of the process of theoretical sampling discussed above. Theoretical sampling should commence after the first analytic session and continue throughout the research process, until the categories reach theoretical saturation, where no new aspects are being uncovered in data collection. The coded data and memos then contribute to theory-building. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that grounded theory principles may also be used not necessarily to arrive at a theory, but rather to obtain thick and rich description.

I used NVivo 9 for coding and analysis and followed the processes outlined above, including initial open coding using *in vivo* codes, although this was sometimes problematic where participants used different terms to apply to the same concept. I considered line-by-line coding to explore fine-grained themes, but in some instances this became meaningless without contextualising data and thus I coded as finely as possible while preserving the sense of what was said. Bazeley (2007: 69) advises that:

The goal is to capture the finer nuances of meaning that lie behind the text, coding enough in each instance to provide sufficient context, without clouding the integrity of the coded passage by inclusion of text with a different meaning.

I started asking questions of the data and comparing different accounts of similar actions and events during initial coding. Bazeley (2007) recommends beginning more focused coding and grouping of codes after the first few interviews and I commenced this after three interviews, as with more than 200 nodes free coding became impractical. Charmaz (2006: 57) suggests that focused coding 'means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data'. It may also result in going back to data coded earlier to explore and revise codes in the light of subsequent data. In order to organise my data more effectively, I constructed a coding "tree" from the open codes, to group together certain concepts under top-level nodes, which also facilitated comparative analysis (see Figure 4.1). Charmaz (2006) notes that this process of developing sub-categories and linking concepts is similar to the axial coding described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), although the latter may be seen as a more formal coding procedure. I coded certain segments of data under diverse categories where appropriate: for example, specific details of a relationship with a client could be coded under 'relationships', 'client expectations', 'agency', 'actions' and 'services'. I verified the emerging nodes and sub-categories with my supervisors. I also contributed anonymised data from my transcripts for use in a postgraduate training session on data analysis, which confirmed some of the emergent themes from my own analysis, particularly regarding agency and control, and

the way in which sex workers normalise sexual labour in relation to other forms of work.

**Figure 4.1 Top-level nodes and sub-categories in NVivo coding tree**

Top level nodes	Examples of themes in sub-nodes
Actions	Includes interaction with clients, networking and communication
Aspirations and future plans	Where participants see themselves in next few years
Attitudes	Includes views on advantages/disadvantages of sex work, job satisfaction and reasons for doing the work
Context	Includes economic/labour market, policy/legal and social contexts
Emotions	Emotions expressed by sex workers in relation to their work
Experiences	Experiences in working context. Includes early experiences in sex work
Issues	Conceptual nodes, including agency, gender dynamics, respect, value and stigma
People	Demographic information about clients and sex workers, and work/personal history of participants
Relationships	Includes relationships with clients, personal relationships and friendships in sex industry
Sex industry structures and services	Different markets, types of service, working structures and locations
Skills and qualities	Various skills/qualities involved in participants' work
Work organisation and processes	Includes business management, labour processes, marketing, health & safety and occupational hazards

While certain categories relating to the organisation of sex work, such as sex industry structures, services and modes of working, arose from the initial coding, there were also some interrelated theoretical categories, which Charmaz (2006) describes as ‘families’. These related to conceptual issues such as action, agency, gender relations and context, which were included under separate codes in the coding tree. I continued to develop the coding tree throughout the interviews and up to the final stages of writing, as certain concepts emerged or required revisiting when formulating each chapter.

#### *4.6.2.2 Comparative analysis*

I commenced comparative analysis of interviews within each specific code in the tree from the outset, although as the initial interviews were primarily with female independent sex workers, it was not possible to undertake gender comparisons until later in the analytical process. Certain independent participants had had prior experience working in managed settings, including for agencies and in parlours and thus I was able to start the comparative process in relation to workplace settings, with gender comparisons coming later in the fieldwork stages. When new concepts emerged from continuing interviews, these prompted the creation of new categories within the coding tree. Additionally, to ensure that these were considered across the dataset, I revisited earlier interviews to explore whether these issues had previously been touched upon in any way, through both text searches and re-reading of the interview data, which also enabled consideration of whether these issues were of relevance only to a sub-set of participants, or reflected broader concerns.

As coding progressed, I undertook cross-case analyses on specific factors within the coding tree, commencing with the most densely populated nodes (for example, types of interaction with clients, setting boundaries, types of service, views on occupational health and safety). As certain terms and concepts began to emerge from the data, I complemented this analysis with specific queries in NVivo to interrogate the data, for example, considering use of terms such as “contract”, “stigma” and “respect” across different settings



and according to gender of participants, to compare the meanings assigned to these terms and the context in which they were used. I captured the differences and similarities between participants across gender and occupational categories in tabular form, developing a classification table of demographic and work history characteristics; and also undertook fine-grained analysis of central concepts emerging from the data. Categories such as job satisfaction, for example, were further analysed according to the factors contributing to or detracting from job satisfaction overall, with comparisons then made according to gender and work setting. Their interconnectedness with other categories such as the legal context were also explored.

I kept an audit trail of changes to the coding tree in my research diary and also constructed memos, to capture my developing ideas as they emerged from the coding and analytical process, and to make links between categories. These led to some additional coding as well as consideration of further conceptual threads to pursue. For example, after the first few interviews, I started to discover emerging diversity between styles of working and approaches to the work amongst sub-categories of interviewees according to factors such as their work experience within and outside the sex industry and their aspirations, which enabled me to explore these issues further in the interviews and also informed future recruitment of participants. The theoretical coding also led me to pursue broader concepts in the fieldwork, such as the emotional impact of secrecy, isolation and the notion of value, as these emerged from the earlier interviews. The stages of coding thus informed my sampling of participants according not only to gaps in category of respondent (in relation to gender and work setting), but also in developing conceptual issues. Certain broad theoretical strands emerged from the data and were repeated throughout the interviews, regardless of the gender of participants or their working status. Three overarching themes arose in particular: those of human agency, stigma and respect, the latter relating not only the respect demanded of clients, but also that requested from the outside world, which often appears to view sex workers as degraded and deviant.

#### 4.6.2.3 *Analysis of internet data*

Because of the way in which independent sex workers' websites present marketing information, with certain recurrent themes throughout, such as services offered, rates and health and safety guidelines, it was more appropriate to use thematic analysis to explore the topics covered on these sites and the way in which they are presented. Where participants wrote online blogs, however, the text in these was more free-ranging and I used a grounded theory approach to coding and analysis of these to enable comparison across different forms of data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) give examples of how different sources of data, such as interviews, documents and observation, may be incorporated in a grounded theory method to triangulate different data on the same problem or issue and provide further context for interviews. Nonetheless, an ethnomethodological approach might provide different insights into the way in which sex workers present themselves online, in contrast to dominant discourses of sex work and this may be a consideration for further research.

With participants' permission and assurance that their online data would not be linked in to their interview data, which might have compromised confidentiality, I analysed individual websites and selected six blogs for more in-depth analysis. The blogs reflected a mix of styles and were written by male as well as female sex workers. This element of the research also allowed me to incorporate data written in participants' own styles.

### **4.7 *Reflections on the research process***

#### **4.7.1 Participant recruitment and involvement**

During the initial stages of study design, I consulted on the draft topic guide and methods with a small number of staff in sex work support projects and representatives of sex worker-led organisations. This led me to widen the scope of enquiry, not only in terms of geographical locations for the fieldwork, but also in the range of topics to be explored. Attending a bi-annual

postgraduate conference on sex work<sup>18</sup> with other academics in the same field, where I presented my research design and obtained feedback, also gave me further ideas on the interview topics, processes for recruiting participants, constraints of access and ethical considerations.

It is important to reflect on the role of the researcher in determining the nature of the sample of participants. Feminist theorists have argued that no research can be entirely objective and detached, as no-one can separate themselves from their values and opinions; and thus the researcher's choices of topic, method and population to be studied are influenced by his/her position in relation to wider theoretical stances (Letherby (2003). The sample of participants may also relate to the demographic characteristics of the researcher and his/her relationship to the topic studied. As a researcher approaching the study from a feminist standpoint, my aim was to ground the research and analysis in sex workers' experience and knowledge and to recognise their agency. Nonetheless, as a non-sex worker, I was also conscious I did not share participants' working experiences and that this might present a barrier to participation for some. It has been argued that much sociological and qualitative research, particularly in areas such as sex work, may be seen to "other" participants (Fine, 1998; Bernstein, 2007a). This may make some sex workers reluctant to participate in studies on their industry. In addition, factors such as the researcher's gender, age and ethnicity may influence both participation and the extent to which participants engage during the interview process. As an older researcher, it was possible that the disparity between my age and that of participants may have prohibited engagement in some instances, particularly when visiting parlours, as this may have been seen to intensify the power differential in addition to my status as academic researcher. Nonetheless, the age difference did not appear to be an inhibitory factor when participants discussed their working practices.

The methods selected had both strengths and weaknesses. In endeavouring to obtain broad geographical representation, particularly to capture the

---

<sup>18</sup> Held at University of Leeds, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

experiences of sex workers outside London, which has been the focus of many studies, the composition of the sample did not necessarily reflect the diversity encountered in the capital, particularly in relation to the proportion of migrant workers in the sex industry. In part, the ethnic composition of the sample reflects the geographical profile of the areas where fieldwork was undertaken, as discussed in section 4.8 below. It may also relate to the potential self-selection bias discussed earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that, while the sample of participants was diverse in terms of representation across different settings, gender and geographical location of participants, the broad reach of the study made the sample specific in other ways. This has implications for the conclusions which may be drawn in relation to certain variables, particularly comparisons according to ethnicity.

Because the sex industry in central London in particular is characterised by a significant proportion of migrant workers, a recent study of migrant workers in the sex industry by Mai (2009) focused primarily on this locality. While the current study captured the experiences of some migrant workers, it did not reflect the high proportion of migrant workers encountered in London. One city where interviews with parlour-based workers were undertaken had relatively low numbers of migrant workers in the local sex industry and the parlour which participated in the research employed no migrant workers. In the other city where fieldwork was undertaken in parlours, the proportions of migrant workers varied according to each establishment visited. Two migrant workers were present in one parlour visited and both were interviewed, along with two participants of UK origin, whereas in the other parlour, although some migrant workers were present, they declined to be interviewed. Some of the workers in this parlour spoke very little English and this was presented as the main reason for not wanting to participate, although given that we had only just been introduced and I had not had a chance to build up trust with them over time, this may also have contributed to their reluctance to take part, particularly because migrant workers may have additional concerns about their legal status in the UK. The research study by Mai (2009) employed a research team which included peer interviewers who were proficient in a range of languages and, while I would have been able to converse in French, I did not

have knowledge of any Eastern European languages. My original plan had been to interview parlour workers through an NHS-based project in my immediate locality, which would have facilitated regular visits to become familiar to workers in establishments and would also have benefited from the assistance of an interpreter, but as discussed earlier, this option did not materialise and I had to seek alternative venues. The budgetary and time constraints of the study also impacted upon the extent of fieldwork possible within managed establishments. It is possible that an ethnographic research approach might have generated a larger number of interviews with migrant workers in managed premises, which would have facilitated more extensive conclusions on the experience of migrant workers compared with those of UK origin. As discussed earlier, however, an interview-based approach was more appropriate for the aims of the study, in order to facilitate consideration of the occupational characteristics of sex work across a range of settings and geographical locations and to encompass the perspectives of workers of different genders. Furthermore, it is not possible within the parameters of a qualitative study of this size to incorporate a broad range of variables for cross-comparison. Nonetheless, the inclusion of some migrant workers in the sample, including some independent workers accessed through snowballing methods, enabled consideration in some instances of their relative experiences in the context of the literature on migrant workers in the sex industry such as studies by Agustín (2007) and Mai (2009).

Although the diverse recruitment methods employed were designed to attract participants from a broad range of indoor work settings, it should also be noted that recruitment of parlour workers primarily through gatekeepers meant that these establishments were limited to premises where project staff had established relationships with the managers and workers. These premises all operated according to principles of conduct encouraged by local projects, which included not employing underage workers, not allowing drug use on the premises and putting in place health and safety procedures. This may have influenced the age range and work experiences of the sample in this study, although many participants had previously worked in other settings, including managed establishments which appeared to be less stringent about their

recruitment policies. They were thus able to make comparisons with previous workplaces and to reflect on more exploitative practices they had encountered.

An issue which relates to use of the Internet for recruiting participants and also the fact that many escorts these days have their own online support, is that the interview process does not necessarily end with a single interview. There may be subsequent email discussions between the researcher and some participants which can sometimes supplement interview data for analysis, although participant consent is also required for use of further comments. The researcher may also find her/himself critiqued by participants in the online sex work community and my research was discussed in some participants' blogs and in online forums, for example, in terms of the theoretical approach to sex work as an occupation, reflection on shared issues emerging and encouragement to others to participate. This is a useful additional way of receiving feedback from participants on the interview topics and process. Where participants discuss their engagement with the research on the Internet, they are also divulging their participation and this may affect the extent of their anonymity, even where quotes are anonymised in research reports or publications.

As part of a participant-focused approach, I provided emergent findings to participants during the research process, in order to obtain their perceptions on the major themes arising from the research. This included sending them summaries of conference papers and publications based on early findings and engaging in further discussions with participants who expressed interest in hearing more about the findings. This enabled participants to see quotes I intended to use from their interviews within the context in which they were used, as a further step towards ensuring that my interpretation of the meaning of their words accorded with their own. This also corresponds with the concept of respondent validation (Bryman, 2008), which allows researchers to confirm congruence between their analysis and participants' understanding of the issues, or to challenge aspects of their interpretation. Eighteen participants provided their feedback on these summaries, confirming my provisional findings. After completion of the PhD, I will also produce a

separate short summary of findings for distribution to all participants and the full thesis will be available to participants if they wish to read it.

#### **4.7.2 Interview process**

Timing of interviews differed according to the working styles and forms of work of participants. Independent workers had more control generally over their working hours, with some tending to finish quite early in the evening. Some younger workers and also escorts working through agencies kept much later hours, however, and for these participants early morning appointments were not convenient. While some of the interviews in cafes were more protracted and relaxed, there were a few situations where participants had little time to spare and thus we met in a location most convenient for them to get to their next appointment or other job. This was not always the most quiet and relaxing of environments, and there were occasions where the interview had to be more focused to cover the most important issues within the time available. On two occasions participants brought a friend/partner with them because they were going on somewhere else together. While they seemed to have no reservations about speaking in front of others and appeared frank about their working lives and experiences, the context may have impeded the degree of candour possible to some extent. Two participants working together preferred to be interviewed jointly rather than individually.

The majority of interviews were undertaken during the day and, while the working times of some parlour-based participants extended to night-time hours, in the larger parlours which operated more than one shift it is possible that interviewing workers on the night-time shift may have generated different responses. Nonetheless, most participants had done both day and night-time work at some point in their working lives and were able to reflect on the differences between these.

Most face-to-face interviews and the two telephone interviews lasted from between 40 minutes to more than two hours, although some interviews

conducted in parlours tended to be shorter. The average (mean) time of all interviews was one hour.

#### **4.8 *About the participants***

Interviews were obtained between July 2011 and December 2012 with 36 current sex workers<sup>19</sup>, two receptionists and two managers in parlours. Further information about participants is shown in Tables 4.1 to 4.5 below. As Patton (2002) has noted, there is no optimum sample size in qualitative inquiry, as this depends on the nature and intention of the inquiry. While it is not appropriate to apply the statistical criteria of quantitative research methods to the sample, it is useful to note the varied characteristics of participants, reflecting diversity within the indoor sex industry in different settings. This accords with Patton's (2002) description of maximum variation sampling and enabled the generation of "deviant cases" described by Seale (2004), in order to deepen emergent theories. The findings discussed in subsequent chapters challenge those of certain other small-scale studies often relating to specific groups, particularly street-based workers, who are sometimes interpreted as reflecting the experiences of sex workers more widely. Indoor-based workers, as this study has confirmed, tend to display different characteristics from street-based workers, in terms of factors such as average age of entry and human capital. It is important to note that the number of transgender participants was relatively small and, while the interviews generated rich data, comparative analysis between this group and other groups in the sample was not always possible. While obtaining a racially diverse sample was not part of the research aims, it should also be noted that the size of the sample did not allow for detailed considerations of the ethnic dimensions of sex work.

The final sample of participants according to their work setting at the time of interview is shown in Table 4.1. All male and transgender participants were currently independent, whereas female participants were represented across

---

<sup>19</sup> This includes an interview with one male who was starting his independent part-time sex work business. As his business was still in development and he had not yet built up his client base, I have not incorporated the data from his interview in the comparative analyses of working practices and processes in subsequent chapters.



all settings. Most participants had worked in a range of settings during their time in the sex industry, as shown in Appendix A. Both managers and receptionists were former sex workers.

**Table 4.1: Participants' work setting by gender**

<b>Work setting:</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Transgender</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Independent lone worker</b>	12	9	1	<b>22</b>
<b>Agency</b>	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Independent collective</b>	2	0	2	<b>4</b>
<b>Brothel/ parlour</b>	9	0	0	<b>9</b>
<b>Manager/ receptionist</b>	4	0	0	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>40</b>

N=40

Sex workers in managed settings tended to be in the youngest age groups, with the oldest parlour worker being in her early 30s. The ages of independent and agency workers ranged from early 20s to over 40, with the largest group being in their 30s. Migrant workers were all aged in their 20s or 30s. One receptionist was in her 30s and the other receptionist and two managers were aged over 40. Table 4.2 shows participants by age and gender. Further details of age and work setting are found in Appendix A.

**Table 4.2: Total participants by gender and age**

<b>Age group:</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Transgender</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>18-19</b>	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
<b>20-29</b>	8	3	0	<b>11</b>
<b>30-39</b>	10	4	2	<b>16</b>
<b>40 and over</b>	8	2	1	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>40</b>

N=40

The majority of participants had entered sex work in their 20s (Table 4.3), which is consistent with the findings of other studies of indoor-based sex workers, such as that by Jeal and Salisbury (2007). In common with other

studies of indoor sex work, these statistics counter the claim made in some abolitionist narratives that the average age of entry into prostitution is as low as 14. As Comte (2013) has noted, these studies are often characterised by a misuse of statistics drawn from studies of specific and unrepresentative groups of those who sell sex, particularly young people. While some participants in the current study first engaged in selling sex while in their teens, the youngest age of entry was 16. Two female and three male participants started selling sex when they were aged under 18. The relationship of age to experiences in sex work is discussed further in Chapter Six.

**Table 4.3: Age of first entry into sex work by gender**

<b>Age group:</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Transgender</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>16-19</b>	6	3	0	<b>9</b>
<b>20-29</b>	16	4	2	<b>22</b>
<b>30-39</b>	3	1	0	<b>4</b>
<b>40 and over</b>	3	1	1	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>40</b>

N=40

Nearly all participants were white (two were of mixed race). Three male participants and two parlour workers were European migrants and two female escorts were migrants from outside Europe. The remainder were of UK origin (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4: Ethnicity/origin of participants**

<b>Ethnic group:</b>	<b>No.</b>
<b>White UK</b>	30
<b>White European</b>	6
<b>White Other</b>	2
<b>Multiple ethnic groups</b>	2

N=40

The ethnicity of participants partly reflects the locations in which the research took place. While London has a high proportion of migrant sex workers, particularly amongst indoor-based workers, the ethnic composition of the industry in geographical locations outside London varies, with some areas experiencing comparatively low percentages of migrant workers (TAMPEP, 2007; Pitcher, 2010). While mapping exercises undertaken in these studies

relied on the knowledge of local projects working with sex workers, it is important to note this geographical diversity, which was also reflected in the current study.

Participants had a range of qualifications. More than a quarter were educated to degree level or higher and a similar proportion educated to A-level or equivalent (Table 4.5). There was no clear distinction according to gender, although a slightly higher proportion of male participants were educated to degree level compared with their female counterparts.

**Table 4.5: Qualifications level by gender**

	Female	Male	Transgender	Total
<b>No qualifications</b>	2	1	0	<b>3</b>
<b>GCSE/NVQ2 or equivalent</b>	3	0	1	<b>4</b>
<b>A levels/NVQ3 or equivalent</b>	10	1	1	<b>12</b>
<b>Diploma/ HND or equivalent</b>	3	2	1	<b>6</b>
<b>Degree/ higher degree or equivalent</b>	8	5	0	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>38</b>

N=38 [2 not known]

Further statistical information about participants may be found in Appendix A.

## **Chapter Five: Work organisation and services in different indoor settings**

### **5.1 *Introduction and overview***

As the previous chapters have shown, the contemporary indoor sex industry has evolved in response to a range of factors, which have also influenced the nature of work in the wider economy, including the globalisation of markets, resultant flows of labour across boundaries and an increased emphasis on consumption and technological developments. In Chapter Three I suggested that sex work, while maintaining some characteristics which distinguish it from other forms of service work, nonetheless displays diversity in structures, processes and organisation of labour that make it comparable in many ways to other service industry occupations. Positioning sex work in a labour market context does not preclude consideration of the social inequalities relating to patterns of involvement in the sex industry, but rather locates analysis within a wider exploration of constraints and opportunities in post-industrial societies. It is also important to consider the way in which the socio-legal context influences and reinforces the organisation of work in the sex industry.

This chapter draws on the analysis of interview data to consider the organisation of indoor sex work, participants' perceptions of working conditions and presentation and management of services in different settings. There are substantial differences between independent self-employed sex workers and those in some form of employee-employer relationship, as O'Connell Davidson (1998) has commented, but there is also considerable variation within each of these settings, in terms of relative job satisfaction and work autonomy. This chapter also considers the interaction between structural constraints and individual agency in determining the scope of people's engagement with different forms of sex work and their working experiences.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, the notion of "sex work" incorporates a wide range of occupations, including those not traditionally defined as prostitution.

Some sex workers may work across more than one setting and may undertake both direct and indirect sex work, for example, combining escorting with webcam sex work. This chapter focuses specifically on direct forms of sex work in indoor settings, involving some form of corporeal interchange between sex workers and their clients. As I argue below, gendered practices permeate the sex industry, sometimes reflecting those in many other service sector occupations, but other factors also influence the organisation of labour in sex work.

## **5.2 *Sex work in context: working structures and practices***

Theorists such as Brewis and Linstead (2000a) and Brents and Hausbeck (2010) have shown how patterns of consumption, changing social relations and sexual norms, and an increase in interactive service work have all influenced markets in sex work, particularly in the off-street sex industry. As Cohen et al. (2013) have noted, various forms of embodied and intimate labour, including care provision and aesthetic body services, have become increasingly commodified and are considered accepted occupations. Zelizer (2005) has also argued that intimacy and commerce intersect in many different ways and that their interrelationship may be viewed in terms of a continuum. In this context, while direct sex work may involve the worker's body in a different way from a service such as therapeutic massage, for example, because of the reciprocal nature of bodily exchange in providing sexual services, it may also be considered within a spectrum which includes other forms of labour involving the co-presence of worker and client.

### **5.2.1 *Diverse settings and working arrangements***

While sex work operates within the informal economy, it also displays considerable structural diversity, from employed to independent forms of working. As Sanders (2005a: 13) notes: 'Despite the common and fundamental feature of exchanging sexual acts for money, the characteristics of markets vary in terms of organizational structure, working practices and

exposure to risk'. The range of working situations described by interview participants in the current study reflected the diverse settings for commercial sex outlined in Chapter Two. They included independent lone working, on outcalls to hotels or private homes and/or in-calls to the worker's own home, independent workers in collective arrangements in private or rented accommodation, and those in some form of employment relationship, including agency and brothel workers.<sup>20</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter, while female participants were drawn from both independent and managed settings, all male and transgender participants worked independently, although some also advertised via online escorting sites.

There are relatively few agencies for male or transgender sex workers and while male brothel work exists, it appears to be less prevalent than for female sex workers, with brothels for female sex workers being common across urban areas in the UK (Sanders, 2005a; Whowell and Gaffney, 2009). A study by Pitcher (2010), which explored the distribution of sex workers in the UK from the perspective of specialist projects, found that a greater proportion of female service users worked from brothels/parlours compared with independent work, whereas male and transgender service users were much more likely to be working independently than in other forms of work. Independent sex work tends to be viewed as affording greater autonomy and potentially higher income than managed work (O'Connell Davidson, 1998; Sanders, 2005b). Given the apparent gender distribution between different forms of work, there is thus some evidence of labour market segregation within the indoor sex industry. As will be discussed later, the way in which services are constructed also differs according to the setting. Nonetheless, as Brewis and Linstead (2000a) have noted, while male sex work is currently treated differently from female sex work in dominant discourses, female, male and transgender sex work may nonetheless be analysed concomitantly under the same categories when considering sex work in a labour market context. In the current and subsequent chapters, I consider the experiences of all gender groups under the main themes, highlighting significant differences as appropriate.

---

<sup>20</sup> The term 'brothels' here includes small working flats and larger saunas/massage parlours.

Drawing on the interviews, Table 5.1 shows the broad differences between working arrangements in the main settings. Within these settings, as I discuss later, there may also be substantial differences, for example, in prices, working hours, relationships with third parties and terms and conditions.

**Table 5.1: Work characteristics in indoor settings**

<b>Type of activity</b>	<b>Independent sex workers/ escorts</b>	<b>Escorts working through agency</b>	<b>Brothel workers (smaller flats, larger parlours/ saunas)</b>
<b><i>Management</i></b>	Manage own business; may delegate some aspects to third party	Third party manages aspects of business	Work in setting managed by third party/ies
<b><i>Marketing</i></b>	Own marketing and websites	Marketing usually done by third party	Marketing usually done by third party
<b><i>Other admin, e.g. bookings</i></b>	Manage own client bookings	Third party manages client bookings	Third party manages client bookings
<b><i>Setting terms and conditions</i></b>	Set own terms and conditions for client/ worker encounter	Worker usually stipulates terms of encounter	Third party sets initial terms and conditions; worker also sets terms of encounter
<b><i>Appointment lengths</i></b>	Appointments often longer (e.g. 1 hour or more)	Appointments often longer, as with independent workers	Appointments are shorter, e.g. start at 20 or 30 minutes, but also some longer bookings
<b><i>Rates</i></b>	Sets own hourly rates	Worker often sets rates, similar to those for independent escorts; percentage taken by agency	Rates set by third party, usually lower than those for escorts. Manager/ receptionist take percentage
<b><i>Working hours</i></b>	Set own working hours	Working hours agreed with agency, but minimum number of hours usually expected	Working hours set by third party: worker may negotiate hours/shifts, but usually minimum and sometimes maximum stipulated

## 5.2.2 Geographical distribution of sex work and occupational mobility

While sex is more commonly sold in towns and cities, commercial sex also takes place in more rural settings (Sanders et al., 2009). When considering online sources of data, such as AdultWork<sup>21</sup> and McCoy's Guide<sup>22</sup>, it is clear that, while the largest proportion of sex workers is based in Greater London, there are substantial numbers across all other UK regions (Pitcher, 2010). As Sanders (2005a) notes, the Internet has provided new ways for sex workers to make contact with clients and online advertising is increasing. This is borne out by statistics accessed on AdultWork: between July 2010 and July 2012, the number of escorts in Great Britain advertising on the site<sup>23</sup> had risen from 16,302 to 21,585: an increase of 32 per cent. Two-thirds of those advertising on the site were female. While this site is indicative of the expansion in female escorting, however, male sex workers providing services for men tend to advertise on separate specialist websites, as discussed later, and thus it is difficult to estimate the numbers of male-to-male sex workers, although, as Ashford (2008) has commented, this form of work is also increasing.

As noted in Chapter Four, participants had moved between different sectors during their time in the sex industry. For example, four female and two male independent workers had previously worked in brothels and many independent workers had also undertaken agency work. It appeared to be less usual to move from independent to brothel work, although three female brothel workers had previously escorted independently or through agencies. For two male participants, brothel work had featured in the early stages of their engagement with sex work before they moved into independent work. The two managers and two receptionists had all previously worked as brothel and/or independent sex workers. Moving from street to indoor forms of working is a less common

---

<sup>21</sup> A website where female and male sex workers advertise services for members of the opposite sex and/or couples, which also facilitates webcam work. AdultWork has a companion site, GaySwap, specifically for gay male and female sex workers and their clients.

<sup>22</sup> A guide to sex work establishments in Great Britain, including parlours, independent escorts and other services.

<sup>23</sup> With the search parameter being those who had logged in during the past two weeks. [Site accessed on 12/07/10 and 12/07/12]. Individual escorts are only allowed one profile on the site, attached to a verified email address, which should in theory minimise the use of aliases.



trajectory than moving between different forms of indoor work (Sanders et al., 2009), although two female and two male participants had sold sex on the street prior to moving into independent work. This mobility does not necessarily indicate a traditional upward career trajectory seen in some industries, but may reflect flexibility within the sex industry and the circumstances of individuals at any particular time, as well as individual preferences. For example, the three participants who had moved from escorting into brothel work found the fixed working days in this setting enabled them better to accommodate other commitments than the less structured arrangements of agency or independent escorting. Some participants had also moved from one city to another, or toured between cities, in order to generate further income through attracting a wider range of clients.

### **5.3 *The organisation of sex work: independent and “managed” work***

#### **5.3.1 Management arrangements and levels of autonomy**

There has been limited research on the management of sex work, in part because the management of brothels or establishments where sexual services are sold is illegal. A key distinction between independent work and that where a third party is involved is that independent escorts who are sole operators are working within the law, whereas, while it is not illegal to sell sex in a brothel<sup>24</sup>, the legal situation is more precarious for brothel workers if they are deemed to be in any way involved in management activities. As May et al. (2000) observe, the legal situation relating to escort agencies is less clear. If agencies do not play a part in private arrangements between escorts and clients, then their operation might be considered to be within the law.

As discussed in Chapter Three, one characteristic distinguishing sex work from mainstream service sector work and locating it within contingent or non-

---

<sup>24</sup> Crown Prosecution Service Prosecution Policy and Guidance: Prostitution and Exploitation of Prostitution. [www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p\\_to\\_r/prostitution\\_and\\_exploitation\\_of\\_prostitution/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/prostitution_and_exploitation_of_prostitution/). [Accessed 28/07/13]

standard working arrangements is the proliferation of self-employment across all settings. There are different modes of self-employment generally, however, with independent entrepreneurial self-employment seen as affording greater autonomy than “dependent” self-employment, where workers are in some form of disguised wage employment (Meager, 2007). “Dependent” self-employment may sometimes be used by companies as a strategy for more flexible working, which may put the worker in a precarious contractual situation vis-à-vis employment rights and labour protection (Böheim and Muehlberger, 2006). Agency sex workers and workers in parlours/saunas operate on a “self-employed” basis, although given the level of management in most instances, this status is questionable. This form of work, as Bruckert and Parent (2006) have observed, is typical in contexts where sex work is semi-criminalised, where individual workers in managed establishments are both self-employed and “disguised” employees. A recent legal ruling in relation to self-employed lap-dancers, where a judge granted a lap-dancer the right to take a case against Stringfellows, a London nightclub, to an appeal tribunal, to determine whether they were in an employment relationship with their dancers<sup>25</sup>, may have implications for other establishments run along similar lines. Nonetheless, erotic dance venues in the UK are subject to different regulatory frameworks from brothels (Cruz, 2013). Because managed premises where direct sexual services are sold are located in the informal and illegal economy, workers in these settings are currently unlikely to benefit from such rulings. This brings into question the role played by broader institutional and social structures in determining working relationships and degrees of individual agency in sex work. While independent self-employment may be a preferred working arrangement for some, for example, the fact that it is the only current option which is clearly legitimate means that sex workers’ choices are limited.

It can be seen from Table 5.1 above that different settings provide varying levels of control over work processes and diverse levels of workplace autonomy, which I take here to refer to the extent to which individuals are self-governed and the relative discretion they are able to exercise in structuring

---

<sup>25</sup> [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/nov/18/stringfellows-lap-dancer-wins-appeal](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/nov/18/stringfellows-lap-dancer-wins-appeal). [Accessed 18/07/13]

and carrying out their work.<sup>26</sup> As such, higher levels of autonomy are often associated positively with job satisfaction (Hodson, 1991; Grandey, Fisk and Steiner, 2005). As Castells (2005: 10) has noted, the ability to work autonomously, or ‘self-programmable labor’, is also an emerging feature of the network economy. The self-programmable worker might have greater bargaining power than the dependent self-employed worker, but may be in a less secure position than employees in the primary workforce. There may thus be a trade-off between autonomy and comparative economic security.

Independent sex work is sometimes viewed as the apex of the sex work profession, because of the relative freedom and ability to set terms and conditions afforded by this form of work, as well as the potential financial security and its legal position (O’Connell Davidson, 1998). Nonetheless, managing a successful enterprise is not always a feasible option, not only because of the additional responsibilities involved, but also because of individuals’ personal and economic circumstances. Jenkins (2009) points to factors such as domestic circumstances, or lack of local knowledge for overseas students or migrant workers, which may prohibit establishing a sole self-employed venture. It is important, therefore, to consider the structural constraints surrounding involvement in different forms of sex work, as well as individual preferences and aspirations. For example, working in a brothel may be seen by some as a viable short-term option for instrumental purposes, as I discuss below, whereas for others there may be limited alternative opportunities available and thus this may become a longer-term career, sometimes with a transition from selling sex into a managerial or administrative role. As discussed in Chapter Three, because this is a common trajectory, the managed sector tends to be feminised at all occupational levels. In part, as Bruckert and Law (2013) note, this may relate to the fact that some sex workers perform overlapping roles as third parties, such as undertaking receptionist duties, which was also reflected in the current study.

---

<sup>26</sup> In this definition I differentiate the concept of “autonomy” from that of “agency”, although the two are often interlinked. Herr (2010) argues that the close association between the two is predicated on liberal conceptions of agency, which are also culturally specific. I take “agency” to refer to the capacity of individuals to act in and engage with the world, which is related to intention as well as structural constraints.

Nonetheless, there are also male managers in some brothels, although interviews with participants in the current study suggested that there may be some geographical or sub-sectoral variations.

For certain participants, constraints such as the need to balance work and domestic commitments, which sometimes made it difficult for women in particular to take on the responsibilities of running their own business, led them to work in more structured settings. The long and irregular hours involved in being a self-employed sole operator and the antisocial working times often required in agency escorting sometimes made these less viable options for women with young children. It is perhaps notable that four participants in parlours had young children and both managers interviewed had also had young children when they started working in brothels. Alexa, a manager at point of interview, had a child when she was fifteen and entered brothel work 'to try and, you know, get a little bit of a better life for the kids'. Only three female escorts had young children and restricted themselves to outcalls. They had found ways of accommodating the two aspects of their lives, through working patterns and sometimes help from friends or family, but for others this was not possible, particularly if they kept their work secret from others. Louise, for example, felt she had to move from escorting to parlour work when she had her first child, even though she much preferred the former setting to the latter. To some extent, therefore, the managed sector in the off-street sex industry reflects mainstream feminised occupations, where flexible working strategies suit the interests of managers but are also convenient for women with domestic responsibilities.

There were additional reasons influencing participants' preference for the managed sector. People wishing to have set times of working in order to fit in other commitments such as study, for example, sometimes preferred to be in a job where a third party such as an agent or manager took on administrative tasks. Two participants who had previously worked as escorts stated that they preferred the more structured environment of a brothel, not only because of the lesser time-commitment compared with independent work, but also because this enabled clearer demarcation

between work and private life. Sasha opted to work in a managed flat because: 'I don't want all of those claims on my time, having to keep up with the chat boards on Punternet and all this stuff. I want to go to work, work, finish, come home'. Rebecca also commented on how working in a parlour suited her:

It takes up less time, because independent work, you constantly have to be online really. You need to reply to emails, sort out things, and, erm, nine out of ten fall through because they're guys that want to...chat to you and stuff.....[I] hate travelling round as well, because that takes up loads of time. You can be travelling for up to an hour and do your half hour and you're off.

Even participants who would not wish to be managed by a third party found the additional administration and marketing tasks required to maintain an independent business onerous at times. For example, Leon noted that:

...the worst part of the job is actually being on the Internet all the time... you have to... talk to people, and like explain what you're doing. So actually I probably spend like 30 hours a week just online, maybe do like 4 or 5 clients. So... all the work you have to do if you're self-employed, if you don't work with an agency, which for guys doesn't really exist...yeah, it's lots of work.

Although independent work may thus afford greater freedom in some ways, it can also be constraining in terms of the time investment necessary to sustain the business. While structural factors may sometimes restrict people's choices and limit the potential for autonomy, others may weigh up the different options available to them and actively choose working conditions with lower levels of autonomy for reasons of expediency. The different contexts bring certain benefits or disadvantages, therefore, depending on factors such as the perspective of the individual worker, as well as the organisational setting. There are differences within each form of work, for example, with regard to the extent to which independent workers develop business strategies, or levels of

management and “good practice” within managed settings. In the following sections I elaborate separately on management tasks and practices within each form of work.

### **5.3.2 Work organisation and conditions in managed settings**

Within agencies and brothels, the manager and, where applicable, the maid/receptionist take on administrative tasks such as putting in place safety precautions, screening clients, organising advertising, negotiating prices with clients and sometimes matching clients and workers according to preferences. Brothels also provide spaces for workers to eat and wash. Some premises have strict rules in relation to sexual health, safety and services (May et al., 2000; Sanders, 2005a). Sanders (2007b; 2009) comments that many establishments adhere to informal codes of conduct which have been developed within localities. Some brothels advertise protocols on their website and may promote schemes for anonymous reporting of coercive practices or crimes against sex workers.<sup>27</sup> Certain websites, such as that established by the Sex Workers Outreach Project, a sex workers’ collective in the USA, also provide guidance on “how to spot bad management”<sup>28</sup>, based on sex workers’ own experiences. There are also other local bodies influencing employment practices and work organisation in indoor establishments, including police, local authorities, health agencies and services tailored to sex workers (West and Austrin, 2005; Sanders et al., 2009).

Based on the interview data from sex workers, parlour managers and receptionists in the current study, the practices of managed premises where participants worked at the time of interview were informed by the implicit principles of good practice noted above. For example, Susanna, a receptionist, commented of the premises where she was based: ‘here it’s

---

<sup>27</sup> For example, one site linked to Redline UK, where escorts, parlours and clients can make anonymous reports on human trafficking for forwarding to the appropriate enforcement agency. Sites may link to the UK National Ugly Mugs scheme, which allows for reports of violent crimes against sex workers to be shared anonymously with the police.

<sup>28</sup> SWOP-USA, ‘How to spot bad management’: <http://redlightchicago.wordpress.com/2012/07/31/avoiding-bad-management-across-the-adult-entertainment-industry/>. [Downloaded 01/8/12].

really good, well-run, the girls're looked after...they don't 'ave to do anything they don't want to, they don't 'ave to see anybody they don't want to'. Carol, who had begun her sex work career in brothels and, at the point of interview, managed a small establishment working with one or two other women, stressed that 'I would never force a girl to do anythin' I wouldn't've done'. She had firm rules regarding use of drugs or drink on the premises, allowed some flexibility in working times, welcomed visits from the local sex work project and encouraged workers to go to the sexual health clinic for regular check-ups. She had also been a member of a local forum of parlour managers, which met with police and sex work project staff to discuss principles of good practice in brothel management. This reflects the inconsistencies in the application of the laws in the UK, whereby in some areas police forces have tolerated brothels where there is no evidence of coercion or underage workers and in some cases have encouraged good working practices, as noted by Sanders (2009). All participants currently working in parlours commented that their workplace had rules about occupational health and safety, with condom use for penetrative sex being a requirement in these establishments and an emphasis placed on the physical safety of workers. Workers were able to exercise discretion regarding which services they would offer beyond the standard "full service"<sup>29</sup>, with "extras" such as kissing or oral sex without a condom being negotiable. While some participants were prepared to offer certain extras, others were more restrictive about the services they would provide, depending on their attitudes to risk as well as personal preferences. For example, Delia commented that 'I don't do extras. Just normal, basic service. Safe. Safe and healthy'. Nonetheless, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, individual risk also relates to relative circumstances, such as financial need, as well as management practices.

While all study participants in managed settings were currently working within supportive environments, as evidence from the current and previous studies has shown, there is considerable variation between establishments. For example, Louisa, an independent worker, commented that in the past some

---

<sup>29</sup> The "full service" is penetrative (vaginal) sex in female parlours.

parlour managers had told her she needed to find somewhere else to work when she wanted to limit the services she provided. Eva noted that she had encountered some escort agencies which had tried to stipulate the services individual workers would offer, which she found unacceptable since 'you're basically self-employed'.

Although brothel work is less prevalent for male than for female sex workers in the UK, from the small number of examples in the current study it appears that there is a similar spectrum of practice within male brothels. In some instances poor management may be associated with lack of training or professional development. For example, Cleo, an independent worker at the time of interview, observed that while she had not encountered 'abusive' practices when she had worked in brothels, there was nonetheless a lack of professionalism in management practices in many settings. Examples included having no-one on the premises to supervise the establishment, leaving sex workers to manage reception and negotiate prices with clients, as well as providing sexual services. This might be to the benefit of some workers, but it depended very much on their ability to negotiate and thus some workers might be disadvantaged. As Cleo remarked:

...in a way that can work quite well for people, but it can also work quite badly for people, because it depends on how well you negotiate that setting, and all sorts of other things. So there's a couple of people working [in one parlour], who hardly spoke any English. I was like god knows how they, erm, negotiate.

As Cleo noted, in many instances managers had 'not necessarily had much experience in other areas of work. So they kind of make it up as they go along'. This was borne out by other participants such as Simona, who had worked in the same building as a small parlour and observed that the workers were often left on their own at night and seemed to have no awareness of safety precautions. Demetrio had worked in brothels both in the UK and Europe and had also found varying levels of professionalism according to the establishment. There were similar disparities noted between agencies.



Although agency workers were self-employed and could to an extent set their own working hours, not all agencies respected their boundaries.

While inadequate management practices may sometimes be associated with lack of relevant knowledge and experience, however, in certain instances participants reflected on more coercive practices in brothels and agencies. Seven participants (six female and one male) identified situations where they had either had personal experience of, or had observed, exploitative or controlling behaviour by managers. Alexa, a former brothel worker and currently a manager, commented: 'I know there's a lot of bad people out there, and some girls are pressurised into working [i.e. sex work]'. Three female participants had encountered settings where the male manager had tried to have unprotected sex with the workers. Carol noted that one of the women who had opted to work with her had previously worked in a parlour where workers were 'pushed' into giving sexual services they did not want to offer or seeing clients with whom they did not want to work. As Mai (2009) comments, migrant workers may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation in some circumstances, because of additional factors such as lack of English language skills, as also noted by Cleo earlier, as well as their immigration legal status. Because under current British legislation brothel management is illegal and sex work is not considered a form of labour, as Sanders (2009) has noted, there are no formal national mechanisms for establishing good practice or regulating establishments, which allows for exploitative practices to go unchallenged. No distinction is made in law or policy between different types of practice, except in the case of examples such as the forum discussed above, where informal local guidelines may be developed.

Participants in the current study working in brothels also had views on what constituted good working conditions and made decisions about the establishments in which they would or would not work. Nearly all had changed their place of work on more than one occasion in order to seek a more favourable working environment. Recruitment to establishments was usually by word-of-mouth, with sex workers passing on information to one another about better or more supportive management practices. This confirms findings

by Sanders (2009) that sex workers themselves are a source of evidence on good and poor practice; and also that, similar to workers in other sectors, they are often able to make informed decisions about where they will work. These choices are constrained by circumstances such as the need to earn money quickly and the alternatives available to individuals, but these are factors which also affect workers in other sectors, particularly in relation to precarious work, where the interplay between agency and structural constraints may be observed. Individuals who are financially disadvantaged and/or have limited human capital may have restricted working options, resulting in entry to precarious jobs with little employment security, which can exacerbate their vulnerability (McKay et al., 2012; Burgess, Connell and Winterton, 2013).

Participants who had worked in different managed settings observed that, while exploitative management practices were sometimes a feature in these settings, vulnerability to exploitation also relates to individual circumstances. The worker's age may be a relevant factor, as more experienced workers may be more assertive and able to resist demands to offer services they do not want to perform. For example, Rebecca had worked in a parlour previously, where the manager encouraged workers to take drugs and to perform certain sexual acts: 'He tried to push you to do like anal, stuff like that. But [that] just doesn't work with me, 'cause I'm not an eighteen year-old. Whereas it worked with the other girls'. Others such as Tania noted that financial desperation also impinges on workers' susceptibility to exploitation. Martin, an independent sex worker, commented that when he worked in a brothel at the age of 24, he was financially exploited, with the brothel manager taking nearly 80 per cent of his earnings, and he 'did S&M, which I didn't want to do, but I was, you know, desperate and lost'. He related this to his general low self-esteem at the time. He left the brothel of his own accord, after working there for six months. He compared the effects of the exploitative management practices in the brothel with his experiences in other service sector jobs such as care work, where he had also encountered exploitation and bullying by some managers. From his experience, the effects of workplace bullying in different contexts were 'no different really'. As he commented, he had encountered no managerial or legal support when he was bullied in a previous

health sector workplace: ‘the law wasn’t really on my side to protect me from that’, and thus there are limitations more generally to the degree of protection offered to workers. Studies of bullying in other sectors, such as within restaurants (Mathisen, Einarsen and Mykletun, 2008), or health care (Lewis, 2006), show that workplace harassment is endemic in these sectors, despite codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures being in place, and that aggression and bullying of workers are normalised into workplace cultures, making it difficult for individual workers to challenge these norms. Sexual harassment and violence are also prevalent in many workplaces, but especially so in certain occupations with a strong masculine culture, such as the armed forces (Sadler et al., 2000). Racial as well as sexual harassment may also proliferate in organisations such as the fire service (Archer, 1999). Nonetheless, while some workplaces in the sex industry may display similar normalisation of coercive practices, the illegality of brothel management may act as a further disincentive to reporting of exploitation, because a likely consequence would be that the workplace would be closed and workers would lose their income. Reports about raids and closure of brothels in England and Scotland due to suspected control of sex workers indicate that the workers themselves have not been treated sensitively or their rights respected, but they have instead been faced with public exposure as well as loss of their jobs.<sup>30</sup> While workers in the broader economy may also face considerable barriers to reporting of bullying and harassment, therefore, sex workers in brothels are further disenfranchised through law enforcement practices in some parts of the UK. In situations where sex work is recognised as a legitimate occupation, however, workers’ rights may be protected in the same way as in other sectors. In New Zealand, for example, where sex work has been decriminalised since 2003, a sex worker recently won a sexual harassment case against a brothel owner.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter Three, legislation is not sufficient alone to address gender divisions and workplace

---

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.scot-pep.org.uk/news/i-felt-so-bad-so-violated>;  
<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/23/soho-brothel-sex-worker-raids-priest>;  
 [Accessed 24/02/14]

<sup>31</sup> See <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/sex-worker-wins-harassment-case-5854800>. [Accessed 12/03/14]

inequalities and implementation of such provisions depends also on organisational practices.

Workplaces in the current study also tended to have policies regarding harassment or abusive behaviour from clients. The managers and receptionists interviewed discussed their role in addressing problematic situations with clients. Carol commented that if groups of men turned up, she would not open the door to them unless she knew them, nor would she admit someone who was visibly drunk. In situations where clients presented any problems both she and Alexa stated that they would intervene and try to calm the situation down, ensuring that the client left as quickly as possible. While the precarious legal status of brothels may present barriers to involving the police in the event of more serious incidents, there are mechanisms for reporting abuse and harassment as well as more violent crimes to intermediaries such as sex work projects, who will pass this information to the police without disclosing the identity of the individuals reporting.<sup>32</sup> Alexa noted that she had used this reporting system for the one abusive customer encountered at the premises she managed. Sex workers interviewed also felt that in their current premises they could rely on their managers if any problems arose. Delia commented that if she had any problems with a client: 'I'd just come downstairs...and just say, you know, I don't want to stay with him in the room... Nobody force you to do...nothing'. Sasha stated that if she did not like the way she was treated by a client and rejected his demands, her managers would support her:

If I don't like the way somebody's speaking to me, or whatever, then I tell them, it's not like they've paid and they can do whatever they like ... the bosses will always back me up on that.

There are thus examples of good practice in some brothels that might be used as a basis for more general codes of conduct across the managed sector, with lessons from these premises potentially being applicable more widely. As participants such as Rebecca noted, abuse from customers is often a feature

---

<sup>32</sup> One such scheme is the National Ugly Mugs scheme, discussed earlier in this chapter.

in other service sector occupations. In mainstream settings involving customer service work, for example, workers may sometimes be expected to accept irate or abusive customer behaviour without answering back (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Korczynski, 2003). The notion of customer sovereignty is also central to some management strategies and embedded within many service sector workplace cultures, which normalise levels of customer aggression (Korczynski and Ott, 2004; Yagil, 2008). Workers are expected to manage interactions with customers in order to sustain this “myth” in the interests of the company, through drawing on emotional labour to influence customer behaviour while ensuring that the customer feels in control. A measure of successful customer service work, therefore, is the ability of the worker to deflect anger and abuse, with the onus often being on individual workers to transform a confrontational situation into a more sociable interaction. Sex workers’ use of emotional labour and other strategies to manage interactions will be discussed further in Chapters Six and Seven.

It can be seen from the examples given by some participants in this study that certain instances of poor or exploitative management practices may be viewed as comparable to those in other industries, including the use of dependent self-employment as part of a flexible working strategy, a general lack of professionalism and support for workers, financial exploitation and workplace bullying. While these are not necessarily gender-specific, there are also gendered practices of abuse, reflected in broader workplace cultures, which may be exacerbated in sex work due to societal perceptions of female sex workers and the stigma attached to their status, as well as the lack of recourse to any professional or legal body or regulatory framework. Sanders (2007c) argues that lack of regulation and formal standards for indoor establishments opens the way for exploitative practices. Brents, Jackson and Hausbeck (2010) studied the legalised brothels of Nevada, undertaking more than ten years of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with local regulators and analysis of historical and contemporary documents. They concluded that the state’s legal model has enabled structures to be put in place that have reduced the violence and severe exploitation typically deemed to be associated with illegal prostitution. Nonetheless, in line with

other mainstream businesses, legal brothels are subject to social and cultural norms, and thus gendered and heteronormative discourses are also reproduced in these settings: 'Brothels may be a sign of liberalized sexual norms, but they do not challenge inequalities' (Brents et al., 2010: 229). Mossman (2010: 137) comments in relation to the decriminalisation of sex work in New Zealand that the 'effectiveness of any legislation depends not only on its provisions, but also on the regulatory body responsible for implementation'. This is not unique to sex work establishments, however, but is an issue that affects workplaces more widely. Abbott et al. (2005) point to research which demonstrates that, despite legislative changes, sexual harassment and sexual power relations continue to permeate wider organisational cultures. Dickens (2012) suggests that part of the problem with continuing inequalities in the workplace is that little attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which statutory rights may be realised. As with other sectors, therefore, if there are no systematic processes for monitoring compliance with employment legislation, or addressing practices which have been normalised into workplace cultures, certain unfair treatment may persist. Thus it might be considered unreasonable to expect that changing the law to regulate sex work in the same way as mainstream businesses will be sufficient alone to address broader cultural and sexual norms which are also reflected in the organisation of the sex industry.

### **5.3.3 Independent self-employed sex work**

Although sex work involves greater intimacy than many other occupations, there are also many ways in which the position of independent sex workers can be compared with that of self-employed lone contractors more generally. Independent workers take on all management tasks themselves, or sometimes delegate certain aspects such as web design or accounting to a third party, which may be claimed as a legitimate expense if they are registered as self-employed. Participants in the study working independently saw themselves as having greater control over their working conditions than those in an employment relationship, despite the additional

work required to maintain and possibly develop their business. This reflects findings by O'Connell Davidson (1998) and Brewis and Linstead (2000a), who note the autonomy afforded by the self-employed status of independent sex workers, compared with workers in other settings.

For Louisa, who had worked for agencies, in parlours and later as an independent worker, the benefits of having certain responsibilities administered by a third party did not compensate for the reduced control over her work: 'if you're working for someone else, they organise what you're doing. But it's worth [being independent] not to have the hassle of 'you've got to do this, you've got to see him, you've got to do these hours' '. Carla commented on the difference between agency work and independent escorting, in terms of the relative freedom attached to the latter. For her, making the transition from agency to independent work was:

...quite a relief, because you're in control of things suddenly. You don't have to get your face on at 9 o'clock in the evening and wait for the phone to ring because you might be out in twenty minutes, you know. It just gave me so much more control over my life and I was studying as well, so I could do it in between my studies....rather than be absolutely so tired that you're waiting up at night and the phone rings at 3 o'clock in the morning.

The higher degree of autonomy compared with working for a third party was cited by self-employed participants as a major factor contributing to their job satisfaction. When discussing this, participants frequently resisted dominant discourses viewing prostitution as exploitation by third parties, which they felt denied them any sense of agency, whereas their experience of independent sex work did not correspond with the messages perpetuated by these discourses. For Ruby, who also ran her own business in another sector, self-management was a crucial feature of her work:

...the word independent is quite important to me... I have nothing but sympathy for anyone who is coerced or in some way forced to do sex work, but I am completely happy with my choice. It's a career choice, it's a

business choice. I don't do anything I don't want to do. I set my hours, I set my limits, I set my prices. The independence is vital to me...and I couldn't do it if I felt in any way controlled by anybody else...running your own business makes you kind of unable to work for other people anyway.

Independent self-employed work was seen by participants to offer greater flexibility than employed options, not only because of the relative amount of free time compared with full-time jobs with fixed hours, but also because workers could organise their own schedule in order to take time off when it was convenient for them. Twenty-two independent participants compared their sex work business favourably with previous employment, particularly low-skilled service sector jobs, but also public or voluntary sector work in some instances. In addition to the comparative autonomy, which was a key factor in independent sex work, a further benefit was the potentially higher earnings, which allowed them more free time than lower-paid full-time work. Nonetheless, while independent workers were able to exercise some control over when they worked, there was a considerable amount of administration involved in managing a small business. For example, Jessica commented that, although the appointments with clients might be time-limited, there was a significant amount of additional responsibility associated with running an independent business, so that she sometimes found herself working longer hours than when she was employed. She compared this with the position of self-employed entrepreneurs more generally, but also commented that she enjoyed these aspects of the work:

I do have an accountant... but I do all my own... sort of admin, I keep my own records, I do...the website, and me blog, and answer all the emails and the phone. I take my own photos.... And I spend an inordinate amount of time... sorting out train tickets and scouting hotels and things like that...I probably work more hours a week than...well, than I've ever done doing anything really, but I mean if you're self-employed that's what you're signing up for really, you know, if you've got housekeeping and things.....people don't think of the amount of showers and things we have to have and the amount of laundry we 'ave to put through, and towels and



linen and throws and.....packs of condoms and shower gel and God knows what.... I think that's why some people choose to work for agencies instead, when they first get started, just because it does take....some of the onus off them to do all the security checks and, you know, the advertising and stuff....I quite enjoy doing the website and the blog and the photos and writing all the things, but if you aren't naturally inclined that way, I mean it would be really hard work.

For some independent workers, however, there was greater financial insecurity than with employed work, either in the sex industry or in other sectors. Tania compared the uncertainties associated with independent escorting with the work of other self-employed workers such as taxi drivers, with similar seasonal peaks and troughs in demand. Rachel reflected on how the advantages of flexibility would sometimes be offset by uncertain income:

Sex work is essentially like running your own business. So it's entirely flexible....you can drop in and out of it whenever you want. If you're not feeling like you wanna work, you don't have to.... it's a difficult one, because like being self-employed, if you don't do the work you can't have the cash. And it's also... stressful in a different way, like [when she was employed] I knew every month I would struggle to make ends meet and I knew every month I would go over my overdraft limit, in the last week, by maybe two hundred pounds. But I always knew that I had x amount of money going in on that day.

Nonetheless, this was seen to be a problem relating to self-employed work more generally, rather than sex work in particular. Participants who had been working independently for some time noted that in order to do this successfully a range of skills was required to sustain the business, and not everyone was suited to self-management. As Chris, a male escort observed: 'If you're independent, then obviously you have to be much more business-savvy'. Jodie, an independent transgender escort, outlined the broad range of skills she saw as required to manage a successful business:

...you need to... have the awareness of what you're doing for physical safety, health safety-wise, and....you need to have the skills to run a small business, you need to look at the services you're offering, where you're advertising, where you're marketing, your income, expenditure, your advertising expenditure, forward planning, market competitors, measures of what you're doing, where you can expand, whether you should look at geographical changes, look to change the types of services you're offering. So there's a wide range of things you would ideally want as a skill set.

In order to maintain and possibly expand their business, independent workers thus needed to be adept at business planning and strategic development. Some participants had drawn up a business plan: for example, Ruby had put in place a five-year plan, which incorporated assessing the costs and benefits of particular strategies, a risk assessment and setting weekly and monthly targets.

There are many comparisons, therefore, to be drawn between independent sex work and other occupations which attract sole self-employed operators. A significant difference, however, relates to the legal constraints on business development within sex work. A preferred mode of working for some sex workers, for example, is working with others for companionship and support (Cruz, 2013). In the current study, two female participants worked independently as sole operators, but shared working premises with other independent sex workers; two transgender sex workers lived together and sometimes worked in partnership; and two female participants were working in a co-operative enterprise where administrative tasks and screening of clients was shared. In some instances, workers rented out a room in their home to another worker, for safety and to share costs. While all these collective arrangements enabled participants to retain their independence, participants were aware that they might be deemed to be running a brothel under the current laws and thus were concerned about the potential implications if their working arrangements were discovered. In some ways, therefore, independent sex workers might be said to fit the model of the self-actualising

entrepreneur valorised in neo-liberal discourses, yet when their aspirations to self-development are set in the context of sex work policies in the UK, contradictions arise between the ideal of the self-managed worker and strategies of state control. Phoenix and Oerton (2005) have pointed to the inconsistency between liberal discourses of freedom of choice and the increased state regulation of illicit or “dangerous” sex. As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Eight, the way in which sex work is regulated in the UK impinges significantly on sex workers’ agency if they wish to maintain legitimacy.

## **5.4 *Services in independent and managed settings***

While a feature of direct sexual services is physical contact, authors such as Lever and Dolnick (2000) and Bernstein (2007a) have observed that the services offered in indoor markets, particularly in escorting, may also incorporate a much broader intimate exchange, including social interaction and companionship more traditionally expected in private intimate relationships. Nonetheless, services vary not only according to the setting but also to individual client requirements.

### **5.4.1 Types of services and appointment lengths in different settings**

Brothels offer a range of sexual services, often have a “menu” of specific acts and prices, but may also provide more extensive engagements which include social interaction as well as sexual intimacy. The duration of appointments and types of services may be agreed initially with the receptionist, although in some establishments the client can negotiate a longer appointment or additional services during the booking. The type of service is partly determined by the appointment length, which in establishments in the current study started at 20 or 30 minutes. Services for shorter appointments tended to be more prescriptive, for instance, linked to the number of times the client was permitted to reach sexual climax, whereas there was greater flexibility in longer appointments. In one London flat, for example, the list of services

included the options of “basic service, come once”, or “oral without [a condom]” for a 30-minute appointment; for an appointment of an hour or longer, however, there was no restriction on the number of times the client could climax. In another small parlour, all appointment lengths were 30 minutes, but prices varied according to the service, with additional “extras” on top of the basic full service, such as oral sex or kissing at the worker’s discretion, incurring further costs. Services over a longer appointment might involve more social interaction and possibly some gentle massage. As Delia noted: ‘It’s just time, some customers just want to spend time with you. Without doing nothing, just to have a conversation, and relax. They like to be pampered’.

In independent and agency escorting the minimum appointments were often one hour or sometimes longer. The services offered by individual escorts were usually listed on their websites. The range of escort services included discrete sexual acts, similar to those offered in brothel menus, along with additional services such as massage, “tie and tease”<sup>33</sup> or dinner dates. Castle and Lee (2008: 116) in their analysis of 76 escorts’ websites, describe some of the services offered on these sites, which included:

...specific services such as ‘GFE’ (girlfriend experience), ‘BDSM’ (Bondage/Sadomasochism), ‘fetish fulfillment’, ‘FK’ (French kissing), ‘OWO’ (oral without condom), ‘mild dominance to severe nipple torture’ and ‘cross-dressing’. In addition, services may include bachelor parties, baths/showers, corporate events, striptease, fire and ice, bisexual doubles, couples booking, food play, body sauces, oral services, role-playing and massages.

While there were some similarities between the specific sexual services advertised by independent or agency escorts and those in brothels, however, within escorting the sexual acts often tended to be packaged in a more holistic intimate engagement, rather than the “Taylorised” version often found in

---

<sup>33</sup> Which is seen as a milder version of domination, involving loosely tying up a client and controlling when they are allowed to orgasm.

brothels. Female and transgender escorts often advertised a “girlfriend experience” (GFE) on their websites, as discussed in Chapter Three, involving conversation and intimacy and mirroring elements of non-commercial partnership relations. Some male participants also offered a similar service: for example, Demetrio provided a “Boyfriend Experience”. As part of this service, some escorts offered overnight stays, or sometimes trips away with a client. A “mini” GFE was also offered within brothels, although within the usual time constraints in managed establishments this was of necessity less extensive. An independent female participant outlined on her website what was involved in the GFE:

I specialise in the perfect Girlfriend Experience (GFE) as I love kissing, preferably deep, long lasting French kissing that takes your breath away, and adore cuddling and being touched all over. I love dirty talk and finding out what makes you tick! Passionate and fiery romps are just as hot as slow, sensual love making. I also offer an excellent massage which can be sensual and sexy, or more deep and therapeutic.

The “Girlfriend Experience” was seen as a form of shorthand for a more emotionally intimate interaction. Jodie spoke with some cynicism about the notion of the GFE. In her view, it was something expected by clients and a label used by some people to describe a service involving sex, but also other forms of personal interaction. As she saw it, however, it was a simulation of an intimate relationship without any of the usual demands accompanying most personal relationships:

I love the girlfriend experience! ‘Where were you last night? Didn’t get in till 12 o’clock. The grass needs cutting. And I don’t care, Sunday we’re going to see my mother. And, we’re going to get the weekly shop on a Saturday. No. Do football another day.....ohhh, a different sort of girlfriend experience. Okaay’....I don’t really necessarily like the girlfriend experience, because I give a professional interactional experience...We’re trying to give it, er, a veneer of intimacy er....that it isn’t. It’s basically

money for sex. And that's what you're trying to dress up with the girlfriend experience....It's er....something I do but that's very much acting.

Undoubtedly, from participants' descriptions, a degree of acting was often required in providing this service. The GFE/BFE was viewed by some participants as a means of attracting regular customers who are looking for a degree of companionship and affection as well as sexual services. Thus it was in part viewed as a marketing tactic, to give clients the 'pampering' they appear to expect. For example, Kylie, a parlour worker, commented that the girlfriend experience 'makes them come back'. Bernstein (2007a: 7) has commented on the changing nature of sexual relations in contemporary consumer society, with "recreational" sex becoming a feature in some contexts. She points to the way in which some 'overworked' professionals seek emotional authenticity through commercial sexual transactions. While time pressures which impinge on some people's ability to form relationships outside work might be seen as one reason for paying for sexual services, O'Connell Davidson (1998) has also questioned the motivation to purchase intimacy outside the responsibilities and mutuality of a conventional non-commercial relationship. As Pettinger (2011: 236) also notes, the GFE serves to 'make the customer feel special' while at the same time being seen as providing more exciting sex than a girlfriend would offer, an observation echoed by Rebecca in the current study who commented that along with the affection that forms a part of the GFE, 'you do all the things a girlfriend wouldn't do'. In one sense, therefore, referring back to the discussion on queer theory in Chapter Two, the GFE may be seen as subverting normative heterosexual partnership relations through parodying sexual norms in a commercial setting. At the same time, both the GFE and BFE might also be seen as reinforcing an idealised version of partnership relations, where clients are able to enjoy the benefits of an emotionally intimate and sexually satisfying relationship without the intrusion of the tensions and obligations accompanying many relationships.

Not all participants saw their role as purely one of performance, and some viewed the interaction as a more mutual exchange despite its being framed

within a commercial setting, which may be closer to the “bounded authenticity” mooted by Bernstein (2007a) discussed in Chapter Three. For Demetrio, most clients were ‘looking for giving, you know, not only receiving but also giving. And so that’s this...affectionate relationship’. Walby (2012) has argued that male-for-male Internet escorts may experience a more reciprocal encounter than that suggested in research relating to female sex workers. Nonetheless, Jenkins (2009) found minimal differences according to gender amongst participants in her study; and a degree of reciprocation and emotional intimacy in commercial interactions was found amongst some female as well as male participants in the current study, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In addition to more generic sexual services, some participants also offered specialist services, based on specific physical attributes, skills or focus of provision. For example, four female participants advertised themselves as BBW (i.e. big beautiful woman).<sup>34</sup> Participants referred to a market for mature sex workers, primarily in independent work but also in some specialist brothels. Six participants advertised BDSM services. Some escorts (female, male and transgender) offered services to disabled clients and advertised on a specialist website for disabled clients, the TLC Trust<sup>35</sup>, which provides advice and support to disabled men and women and aims to connect them to ‘responsible sex workers, therapists and teachers’. Certain participants, such as Kieran, Jemma and Martin, had invested in further education or training while undertaking independent sex work and were using the skills developed to extend their sex work services, which including drawing on professional massage and holistic therapy.

While some participants were specific about the gender of clients (for example, some women only offered services to male clients; some male sex workers only offered services to men), thirteen participants offered services to either male or female clients, many also working with male-female couples.

---

<sup>34</sup> There is also an equivalent for men: big beautiful man (BBM).

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.tlc-trust.org.uk>.

### 5.4.2 Prices and working hours

Working hours and prices varied according to the setting. Independent escorts tended to have greater flexibility over their availability, whereas escorts working through agencies had to be available at certain times, in order to ensure that they were retained in employment. Parlours and flats usually had a set working day and some offered shifts, so workers could opt to work at specific times. For example, Michelle, a receptionist in a parlour which had two daily twelve-hour shifts with up to six sex workers per shift, worked from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.: 'when the new shift starts the receptionist starts with the girls as well'. The London brothel where Demetrio had worked when he first came to London also operated two shifts per day. The small parlour where Susie worked with one other sex worker had regular daily hours from 11.00 a.m. till 7.30 p.m. Workers in flats and parlours tended to work a set number of days, typically two or three days per week. The number of clients per day varied from three/four in one small parlour employing two workers, to 20/50 in a larger city parlour with four workers per shift; and the number of clients also varied depending on the location, opening hours and appointment lengths. Alexa commented that in some London walk-ups, where she had worked 15-hour shifts when she was younger, and which offered shorter appointments, her clients could number up to 30 in one day.

The working days and hours of independent participants varied considerably according not only to their personal circumstances and preferences but also to fluctuating demand. For example, Jemma worked six days a week, but generally never saw more than one or two clients per day in order to accommodate other commitments. Karen undertook sex work part-time alongside another service sector job. Chris tended to see an average of ten clients per week. For Jodie: 'In terms of how many people I see, that massively, massively varies. I have in the past seen six people in one day. And I've also had periods where I haven't seen one person for a three or four week period'. Jessica only worked three to four days a week when at home, and took one to two bookings per day. As she commented, the choices she was able to exercise over her working hours related partly to her personal



requirements and longer-term aspirations, but also to the fact that she had built up an established business which met her current financial needs:

I would hate to be in a situation where I was having to just take bookings off everybody and anybody who phoned up and I know enough people that have. But...I'm in it for the long haul, other people just want to come to England or do whatever....or while they're studying they just want to work for a couple of years, earn as much money as they possibly can, get themselves out of whatever debt they're in, do whatever they want and then just pack it in...you know and that's it, so if there's an end in sight...I mean if I was working like that I would be packing in like ten a day if I could.

Prices were generally lower in flats and parlours than for escorting, although participants in these settings felt they were able to earn more than in other service sector jobs and could take home a reasonable wage while working fewer days per week. Prices in brothels outside London tended to range from £35-45 for half hour appointments and £50-80 for hour-long appointments. In London the prices were higher, with two establishments (one male and one female) charging clients £60 for half an hour. Within brothels, managers either took a percentage of the sex workers' earnings (a typical amount might be 40-50 per cent for the manager and 10 per cent for the maid/receptionist), charged a fixed amount of £20-30 "on the book"<sup>36</sup> per appointment, or the manager sometimes charged the sex worker a flat rate for use of the premises. While there were often set fees for specific services in brothels, sometimes the sex worker was able to negotiate extras during the transaction, which would increase her earnings, although as Rebecca noted in the flat where she was based, it was expected after the transaction that the receptionist would manage allocation of the payment:

...the receptionist goes in....they either know what the rates are, or she goes and tells them. I think she has a board, like a menu. They can change their minds during the booking for longer, or for another, more

---

<sup>36</sup> These charges also paid for the receptionist if there was one on the premises.

expensive service, they can't downgrade it, but if they do that you have to take the money then and give it to the receptionist.

Pricing structures in independent or agency escorting differed from those in brothels. Escorts tended to charge according to the transaction time rather than specific services which, as Jodie commented, can differentiate it from some occupations: 'I figure it's a transaction for time rather than services. So that actually makes it a bit different from most...industries'. There are comparable professions where the cost is according to transaction time rather than the precise products offered, however, including complementary therapies, where different interventions may be undertaken according to client needs (Ernst, 2000), or domiciliary care work structured around the time available per client (Wibberley, 2013).

Escorting charges for outcalls tended to be higher than for in-calls because of the time and cost of travel. There was some difference between rates within each geographical area, depending on the type of services. For female escorts in London, rates for the first hour charged by participants ranged from £90-300 for in-calls, and £100-300+ for outcalls, depending on the zone in which they worked and the services they offered. Outside London, the hourly rates for in-calls tended to start at £120-140, with outcalls slightly more. Generally the hourly rate reduced after the first hour.

While agency escorts tended to charge similar rates to their independent counterparts, the agency took a percentage of the escort's earnings, which according to participants varied from 25-40 per cent<sup>37</sup>. Thus, although agencies took over administrative tasks such as advertising or arranging bookings, the escort also tended to take home less than independent escorts. Sasha commented that because of the more regular custom in the flats in which she worked, although the rates there were lower, she could earn as much as she had through agency escorting over a shorter time, because of the relative uncertainty of the number of customers through agencies:

---

<sup>37</sup> This appears to be standard in most countries, according to SWOP-USA (op cit).

...brothels, erm, I'd say that what I earn now probably over a year averages out at about the same as I did escorting, but I'm working for two or three days a week, in flats, rather than being signed on for five or six as an escort.

Transgender participants in the study earned slightly more than their female counterparts. This might be attributed to the fact that, as Kat commented, pre-operative transsexuals, were: 'Slightly more expensive because, erm, we're a bit more exotic'. Once they had 'transitioned', however, she noted that they would be in the same market as escorts who had been female from birth (cisgender). Male escorts tended to earn less than female escorts, which reflects the findings from other studies noted in Chapter Three. Male participants who commented on this attributed the discrepancy to various factors, including demand (although one participant felt that demand for male-male escorts had increased, while prices had not risen as a result), the fact that the rate was set at this level in the early days of price-setting and this has continued, and normative assumptions about male and female sexuality, where it is expected that men will earn less because of the enjoyment they gain from the sexual exchange. For example, Chris observed:

I think men presume that other men selling sex are like them. And that they're wanting sex for the sake of having sex. Whereas I think that they realise that [if] a woman is offering sex, it's much more of a commercial ...interaction.

Nonetheless, while some studies such as that by Weinberg et al. (1999) found that male and female participants attached different meanings to the sale of sex, the current study encountered a mix of male, female and transgender participants who enjoyed sex with clients (nine women, five men and one transgender sex worker) as well as those who undertook the work primarily for commercial reasons. The findings in the current study thus concur with those in the study by Jenkins (2009), which found that, while male respondents were more likely to report sexual enjoyment as a positive feature of their work, half of female respondents also stated that sexual pleasure was an important

aspect of sex work. As Jenkins notes, her participants were drawn from escort work, whereas previous studies such as that by Weinberg et al. (1999) related to street workers and thus this may explain the difference in findings.

Independent escorts often researched their pricing strategies, for example, through exploring the rates offered by others in their geographical area or according to the types of service offered. Carla decided to increase her rates when she moved from agency work to independent escorting and found that this resulted in longer appointments, which she preferred:

...all my independent ones would spend....at least two hours, I think when I put my rates up. You know, three hours, four hours, go out for dinner, go to a nice hotel, spend the night and things. So it was much more about....getting a girlfriend for the night than, erm, you know, an hour or so of fun.

Demetrio raised his prices after reassessing his potential market as a result of attending a workshop on business strategies for sex workers. He found as a consequence that he could reduce the number of clients he saw each week, which gave him more time to pursue postgraduate study. He also observed that he had far fewer 'timewasters' after changing his rates. Jemma felt that initially she had priced her rates too low, and was increasing them at the same time as she hired a professional to develop her website. She did some research into the rates charged by escorts offering a similar service and adjusted her rates accordingly:

And then I've looked at what girls, erm.... I know there are groups of guys that frequent certain types that like very, erm, independent, slightly older women, the more intelligent, sort of creative kind, and.... the girls that they like, and the circle of us that they see, and all of my peers in that circle are [x amount]. And I'm [y amount]. So I'm way under-priced in my market.

As the discussion above demonstrates, individual agency and job satisfaction relate not only to the work setting, but to individual circumstances, personal

goals, economic necessity and levels of demand. There was a general feeling that the recession had impacted on demand and prices. For example, some independent participants outside London had started to offer shorter appointment times, such as 30 or 45 minutes, since the start of the recession, as clients had been finding it more difficult to afford longer appointments, or they had not been getting many new clients. Others were considering reviewing their prices, although this might cause future problems, as Angel observed: 'if you drop your prices you'll never put them back up again, when things get better. People won't accept it'. Thus it was important not only to be realistic about what clients could afford to pay during particular times of hardship, but also to weigh this against the income required and longer-term strategies. Again, this relates to the relative agency of individuals and their financial need, but also to the confidence of individuals in the value or distinctiveness of the services they are offering.

Some participants viewed the Internet as playing a part in increasing competition and lowering prices, particularly because it made independent sex work seem more accessible. For example, Rachel commented on price-setting, and how she had heard:

....people saying 'well obviously people are tightening their belts' and stuff. But as well it is probably so many new girls. If you look. And they're doing so many dangerous things, as well. They'll look at AdultWork and go '£140 an hour? I can do that for....80's a fair price. I could do that for 80. And I'll get all of their business'. Yeah, you will. But what you don't realise, because you have no idea, is that you're going to get the proper scumbags as well. Erm, because they've seen that low price and go: 'Desperate. Vulnerable. Weak'. And I've read men talk about this [on networking sites].

Tania also commented on how people were entering escorting as a result of the Internet without necessarily having the requisite expertise or attitude to personal safety to protect themselves. This also led to them taking greater risks, which she was not prepared to do:

....Suddenly every girl's an escort. In their home. So they're offering £50 services, and bareback, and things like this. We could never...when we were at that higher end of escorting, we could never compete with that for guys, they'd be like... 'Why pay you for [sex]...when I can go and see Sarah down the road who does it without a condom'. You know. And I'm not willing to put myself at risk for that.

Thus the ease of Internet advertising may lead to reduced prices, but this may also be at the expense of safety and the sexual health precautions taken by more experienced escorts. Nonetheless this element of competition appeared not to have affected participants in niche markets, or those with established businesses and regular customers. Participants noted that the skills and attitude of individual sex workers and their ability to engage in emotional as well as sexual services was as important to some clients as their hourly rates.

## **5.5 *Marketing strategies and self-presentation***

An essential element of business management is marketing, not only of the services offered but also of the individual(s) providing the services. In this way, sex work may be seen to be both similar to and different from other forms of service work, in that the individual worker is as much a focus of the marketing strategy as the services provided. While in other sectors the skills and qualifications of workers may be emphasised, as in other touch-centred work such as massage (see for example Purcell, 2013), in sex work the body is implicated not only in the work but also in its presentation. This is not unique to sex work, as certain other forms of work such as modelling also centre on the physical appearance of the worker and, as discussed in Chapter Three, there is an increasing emphasis in service work on aesthetic labour. Nonetheless, there are few occupations where the bodily attributes of the individual worker are a focal point of marketing in the same way.

In the current study there were differences between managed and independent settings in terms of marketing strategies and the relative autonomy afforded to workers. The establishment determined the services to

be offered and the way in which they and the workers were presented. Agency escorts or brothel workers thus had less control than independent workers over the way in which they were described and their services marketed, although in some establishments they were able to choose or produce their own photographs and have an input into textual descriptions of themselves. Because of the illegality associated with brothel management, services were often presented obliquely, for example, in terms such as “full body massage”. While most of the seven parlours or saunas visited initially only gave out a telephone number and location, one also had its own website, which included photographs of the regular workers, with faces obscured to protect identity, and availability of individual workers on each day. While many escort agencies now advertise online, the Internet did not appear to have made a significant difference to the way in which parlours and saunas advertised and, as Alexa and Carol commented, many still rely on more traditional methods such as local newspapers and word of mouth.

As Ray (2007) and others have noted, the Internet has had a substantial impact on the way in which independent sex workers advertise their services. Some participants advertised via sites such as Punternet, or more usually AdultWork, as it was relatively inexpensive to put a profile on these sites. There were also various Internet listing sites for escorts, which tended to cost less than advertising in the printed media. On these specialist sites it was possible to put more information referring explicitly to sexual services, whereas there were constraints on the language that could be used in newspaper advertisements, or on more general websites for services or dating. Sites used by gay male participants also included gay networking or dating websites such as Gaydar, as well as sites specifically for male escorts. There were also certain specialist sites used by transgender escorts, such as Birch Place.

An important element of marketing for sex workers in all settings was feedback from customers although, as with opinion sites for customer reviews of other services, sex workers did not have control over what was said about them or their services. There are also private areas on some sites where sex workers can exchange information about clients and warn others about timewasters

and, as Soothill and Sanders (2005) have observed, these websites also give opportunities for sex workers and clients to communicate and debate issues relating to commercial sex. Sites such as AdultWork and Punternet have ratings systems or contain customer reviews, both of escorts and parlour workers (Sharp and Earle, 2003; Castle and Lee, 2008). Pettinger (2011) notes that reviews on sites such as Punternet, usually by male heterosexual customers, are set within norms of what it is to be a “good” woman as well as a “good” worker or provider. These include that the woman is committed to and “genuinely” enjoys her work, is aesthetically pleasing, which may conform to normative standards of femininity or relate to customers’ personal preferences for particular bodily attributes, and is skilled not only at erotic but also emotional labour. A “good” worker is therefore someone who makes the client feel valued, which goes back to the notion of the sovereign consumer discussed earlier.

Nearly all independent participants had their own website, which enabled them to give more extensive information about themselves and their services. Jessica found that using the Internet gave her access to a much wider geographical range of potential clients than previous advertising methods. She was able to change not only her client profile, but also develop her marketing strategy and network with other escorts, so it ‘sort of snowballed’ from there. She commented on how in her previous low-skilled service sector work, she had rarely come into contact with the Internet or seen it as a vehicle through which to advertise services:

I didn’t even realise we could have Internet. I certainly didn’t realise we could ‘ave websites. I thought it was like....having an advert on TV having a website, I thought it must cost thousands... You know, I just didn’t realise...I mean like I said, we were all cleaners, we worked on the market, we worked in pubs and shops and things.

With the ability to set up their own sites, independent sex workers were able to exercise greater control over the way in which they presented themselves and the services they offered. Simona, who only advertised via her own website,



stressed the importance of being able to target a particular type of client through her marketing approach:

I just look at it as running a business, and the product I'm selling is my body. You know, and, erm, for the sort of customers that I want, I think you have to, you know, you tailor your advertising in a particular way.

The websites of independent participants usually had a brief profile of the worker and set out services, terms and rates. Some websites also had a page of FAQs to guide clients through the booking process and a calendar indicating availability might be included. Similar to other online businesses, some also had a section for customer reviews. The profile section gave an opportunity for the worker to describe her/himself in ways which also indicated the type of client or behaviour they expected. For example, some sites emphasised the need for punctuality and stipulated that the worker expected to be treated with respect. Some workers highlighted particular aspects of their personality or background and described their preferred type of encounter, which might include conversation and dinner. Sally, for instance, presented herself on her website as 'more than just a pair of breasts' and stressed her intelligence, her knowledge of literature and understanding of a number of different languages.

A photograph or set of photographs of the worker tended to be standard on their Internet profiles and these were often prominently displayed on the home page. Castle and Lee (2008) note that many of the photographs on agency websites omit the faces of escorts in order to conceal their identity; and female independent sex workers often tended to blur their facial image in the photographs they used for advertising. This was primarily because of the need for secrecy, because of the stigmatised nature of female sex work and implications of discovery. Certain female participants such as Anna, who were open about their occupation, did not conceal their online identity, but this tended not to be the norm. While some male participants also excluded their faces, Leon commented that in his view preservation of anonymity may not always be as imperative for male sex workers:

I think in some way for guys it's less stigmatised....most of my male friends who do sex work, they put their pictures on their profile. And most of my...all my female friends...they hide their face.

Nonetheless, as Walby (2012) has commented, male sex workers may also encounter certain forms of stigma, which will be discussed in Chapter Eight. While concealment of the face is for pragmatic reasons, however, this may depersonalise the sex worker, resulting in a tension between her/his wish to be seen not just as a body and a visual emphasis on bodily attributes in advertising material. As theorists such as Gill (2007) have observed, the effect of presenting the body in such a way, which is also common in much mainstream advertising, is to deny women's (and men's) humanity by presenting only selected body parts and not the whole person. Nonetheless, while this might be read by some as perpetuating objectification of the body, the images might be construed differently according to the personal standpoint of the viewer, as well as the social context and the way in which sexual relations are viewed (Morgan, 1993; Power, 2009). Attwood (2013: 205) also points to the way in which sexualisation in popular culture does not necessarily denote passivity, but 'has fused notions of a strong confident self with body display, self-pleasure and erotic gazing'. Direct sexual labour is by definition embodied and therefore it would normally be expected that the individual's body would feature in sex workers' advertising material. Independent sex workers are also in control of their marketing materials and from some perspectives may be seen as exercising power in determining the way in which they are represented. While it may be argued that they are exercising agency in taking charge of their marketing, however, sex workers' decisions about how they present themselves also need to be understood in the context of societal and cultural norms of sexuality and gender. As commentators such as Ray (2007) and McNair (2009) have observed, there are inherent tensions in the expression of female sexuality online, both in the commercial and non-commercial worlds. While there has been less discussion of the way in which male bodies are sexualised, as Lee-Gonyea, Castle and Gonyea (2009) have commented, male escorts advertising on the Internet also provide semi-nude or naked photographs of themselves and often explicit descriptions of their

bodily attributes. Any discussion of sexuality, commodification and power in relation to sex workers' online self-representations, therefore, needs to incorporate considerations of the way in which masculine as well as feminine norms are depicted in this context. It is also important not to focus extensively on sex workers' visual images online, as their websites contain far more information about the individual worker and this is just one component of their self-presentation. There was the occasional exception to these visual representations in the current study: for example, Selena made a point of not putting a photograph on her AdultWork profile, so that potential clients were first steered to the textual description:

...if you want to go into my private pictures you can pay a pound to see them. That keeps casual callers away. So I don't get chosen on my looks, but people will generally decide to see me and then they will pay a pound to see my private pictures, just to make sure I don't look horrendous. But some of them have seen me [i.e. made an appointment] without even seeing the pictures. So I get chosen on personality.

The lack of readily-accessible photographs on a profile was rare, however, and participants were more likely to accompany the visual image with additional textual information to attract clients whom they hoped would explore further than the initial page on their site. Some sites produced by independent workers also had a blog attached to the site, which enabled them to present aspects of their personality and go beyond the visual representations. Anna noted that 'It's part of marketing in the sense that I think it helps give readers an extended idea of what I am like as a person and therefore whether they might want to meet me'. In her view, this was a successful strategy: 'I would say it gets me if not more actual bookings, then certainly nicer clients - the ones who read it tend to be, anyway'. Thus, while some clients might be more interested in the bodily attributes of the sex worker, others were also attracted by personal qualities, reflecting the diversity found in studies of clients such as that by Sanders (2008b).

As Chris commented, sex workers are also increasingly using social media to communicate, such as Facebook, Linked In and Twitter. Both blogs and discussions via social media can help to increase a sex worker's profile and may be seen as part of their wider business strategy. Independent participants emphasised the way in which they viewed themselves as managing a business, where they were the focal point, which involved marketing themselves accordingly. Chris commented that his marketing strategy involved re-evaluating his services periodically:

...if you want to stay in this long term, you have to really treat yourself like a business... like running a coffee shop, like running any business, you have to market yourself, you have to....you know, look for new clients all the time, you have to build a regular clientele base but you've also got to try and appeal to new people all the time. And....you've got to be aware of what's happening in the industry.

In some instances, sex workers who manage their own business may hire a professional company to develop their website. Carla commented that there is a need to exercise caution with third parties, as some people may try to take sexual advantage of their relationship with the sex worker for whom they are providing a service. She viewed this with indignation, as she saw herself as hiring a professional for a particular product, in the same way that any other self-employed contractor commissions someone to assist them with their business. Relationships with some third parties indicate a further way in which the stigma associated with sex work may elicit contradictions between the sex worker's view of her/himself as a professional and perceptions of individuals in external but associated businesses. These themes will be taken up in Chapter Eight, when considering forms of resistance and how sex workers present themselves in their own words.

## **5.6 Conclusions**

It is evident from the findings in this study that the structures and processes in indoor sex work are varied and complex. This builds on earlier studies but

adds new dimensions, not only by comparing the experiences of male and female sex workers and where possible considering transgender workers, but by exploring the comparative working practices and conditions within managed and independent settings, as well as comparisons participants made between sex work and occupations in other sectors. Structures and processes of indoor work are gendered to some extent and there are divisions in terms of comparative workplace autonomy and control, with managed settings tending to be oriented primarily towards female workers and male clients. Structural constraints impinge on relative agency and the ability of sex workers to organise their business to suit their own needs; and individual expertise may also determine the forms of work which are most feasible for some people.

There is a clear distinction between independent and managed forms of work, not only in terms of the way in which the work is organised, but also the services offered, rates of pay and approaches to the work. There are also some differences within as well as between sub-sectors and there were mixed experiences of working conditions in managed settings. There is some evidence of gendered exploitation and abuse, with certain male managers attempting to take sexual advantage of female workers in some instances. While informal codes of practice govern working relationships in some establishments, the lack of regulation of managed premises allows for more coercive practices to go unchecked. Nonetheless, mainstream businesses also encounter lax regulation and therefore legal changes are not sufficient alone to address entrenched workplace cultures.

Independent escorts generally experience a higher degree of autonomy than those in managed work and many appear to enjoy their work, with no evident pattern along gendered lines in this respect. For some people, it provides an escape from other low-paid work and enables them to develop business skills and independence to which they would not otherwise have access.

Nonetheless, self-employment also comes with uncertainties and occasional problems, which may be exacerbated by the legal framework surrounding sex work. For those who enjoy the organisational aspects and are astute business planners, however, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

The Internet has in principle enabled sex workers to take greater control of self-presentation and to set out the terms of the behaviour they expect from clients, as well as facilitating dialogue and establishing screening processes to verify details of prospective clients. While they may experience greater autonomy over their marketing, however, the ease with which an online profile may be established has also led to variable degrees of professionalism and sex workers who advertise online may exhibit different degrees of agency. Although some sex workers may take a cautious and planned approach to managing their business, as discussed earlier, others may be less attuned to the risks posed by Internet use. Cunningham and Kendall (2011) have observed that the proliferation of online sex work has not always led to increased safety. Attitudes to risk and the way in which this is managed will be explored in Chapter Seven. Sex workers' digital self-representations, alongside online expressions of sexual identity in the non-commercial world, are also situated within the context of social structures and normative discourses. The tensions between discourses of objectification and sexual freedom have re-emerged with the proliferation of opportunities for self-display via online social networking and individual websites, raising new challenges for conceptualisations of agency and, specifically, sexual agency.

It can be seen that potentially greater autonomy over working conditions does not always result in higher levels of security, as external factors may impinge on the degree of agency experienced by sex workers under some conditions. Similarly, some people may forego increased autonomy in sex work in order to realise longer-term ambitions. In some circumstances, sex workers may take an instrumental approach to their work, whereas for others their involvement in the work may be a more unplanned response to their financial or personal situation. Chapter Six will explore the aspirations and trajectories of sex workers in different settings in the context of social structures of constraint.

## **Chapter Six: Work trajectories, attitudes to sex work and aspirations**

### **6.1. *Introduction***

As discussed in Chapter Five, the indoor sex industry is highly diverse, both in the range of settings and the demographic profiles of those working in different settings. While there is evidence of gendered patterns of work organisation, with managed establishments having a predominantly female workforce, whereas there is a broader gender mix in independent work, there is also variation amongst both male and female sex workers in relation to their approaches to their work, pathways into the sex industry and working history. There is considerable fluidity within the industry, with many workers moving across settings, as well as making transitions in and out of sex work, according to circumstances and opportunity (Brewis and Linstead, 2000a; Sanders et al., 2009). While there has been discussion about the ways in which women in particular make transitions out of the sex industry, there is less consideration of how sex workers build careers within the industry and little research comparing the experiences of male, female and transgender sex workers (Weitzer, 2005a). This chapter moves beyond the simple dichotomy of choice versus exploitation, to consider the degrees of agency experienced by women and men, as well as transgender workers in the sex industry, according to their circumstances. It explores pathways into sex work, factors contributing to job satisfaction and individual trajectories according to circumstances. It also contextualises discussions on sex work through considering broader labour market trajectories, opportunities and experiences.

The research evidence confirms the findings of some other studies showing diverse modes of entry, patterns of re-entry and mobility between sub-sectors. For some, sex work is a positive decision, for others it presents a pragmatic solution to individual circumstances at a particular time, whereas in certain instances sex work may represent the least worst among limited options, or a means of survival. Nonetheless, many individuals build short-term or longer-

term careers in the sex industry and take a professional approach to their work. As was seen in Chapter Five, there are distinctions between workplace settings, with independent work often seen as offering greater autonomy over working conditions and being more of a career option than managed work in the sex industry. Even in settings where workers are managed by a third party, however, there may be opportunities for them to exercise a degree of control over transactions, which under some circumstances may afford greater autonomy than more highly regulated work in mainstream sectors. Expanding on previous studies, the current research considers varying degrees of agency and job satisfaction, depending on individual circumstances, preferences and work settings, as well as the age and experience of workers.

The findings in this chapter show that, while some workers take an instrumental approach to their involvement in sex work and see themselves as remaining in the business only until they have met their objectives, others may have less clearly-defined goals and sometimes remain for longer. For some, independent sex work is viewed as a longer-term career, particularly in circumstances where alternative options are seen as less favourable, for example, in relation to the financial gains and benefits of flexibility. Authors such as Day (2007) and Scambler (2007) have noted the effects on female sex workers of “whore stigma”, which imposes structural constraints on their working lives, is often resisted strongly, but also may influence the way in which they view their work and themselves as individuals. As the current study indicates, such externally-imposed stigma has an impact on male and transgender as well as female sex workers and some may internalise this negativity over time. Stigma can be both a motivation for leaving the sex industry and also sometimes a trapping factor, depending on individual circumstances. Certain other factors can be either supportive or binding, according to the context. This chapter extends on earlier studies to develop typologies of transitions into the sex industry, styles of working and patterns of departure. Many of the trajectories discussed here contrast with narratives of coercion and demonstrate the diversity in sex work and the ways in which sex workers interact with their work at different stages in their lives.



## **6.2. *Modes of entry and reasons for working in the sex industry***

The interface between structure and agency is often evident when considering transitions into sex work in the context of labour market opportunities and relative disadvantage. As Sanders et al. (2009) observe, people have varied reasons for engaging in the sex industry and there are often interlocking factors shaping their involvement. Those who enter commercial sex as adults may sometimes have different experiences from young people and different reasons for undertaking the work, although, as Phoenix (1999) notes, there is an enduring association between women's participation in sex work and the feminisation of poverty. Similarly, Whowell and Gaffney (2009) identified a range of economic and social factors influencing men's involvement in different sectors in the sex industry. Comparisons between adult male and female sex workers are rare, although Jenkins (2009), in a survey of male, female and transgender escorts, investigated motivations for entering sex work. While economic motivation was a significant feature, Jenkins notes that this also explains most people's reasons for entering work of any form, and was not the sole rationale for working in the sex industry. A small minority (less than 5 per cent) of her participants reported having a problematic family background, having been coerced by a third party into sex work, or drug or alcohol dependency. This confirms earlier studies (e.g. Jeal and Salisbury, 2007) which have found that indoor-based workers are less likely to experience the range of vulnerability factors encountered among street-based sex workers.

Although the current study is of adults engaging in commercial sex, some participants became involved when they were comparatively young. Studies of young people who sell sex have identified certain mutually reinforcing "trapping" factors which draw them into and sustain their participation in sex work, such as a background in care, running away from home or problematic drug use (Pearce et al., 2002; Cusick, Martin and May, 2003; Drinkwater and Greenwood, 2004). While the very fact of their age makes young people vulnerable in comparison with many adults, however, theorists such as Davies and Feldman (1997) and O'Connell Davidson (2005) have argued that the

social construction of commercial sexual exploitation of children does not always reflect young people's diverse involvement in selling sex. Moreover, the greater emotional value society attaches to sexual exploitation compared with other forms of exploitation and abuse prohibits a more considered exploration of the broader structural and socio-economic contexts framing the involvement of young people in selling sex and their transition into adulthood. As Melrose (2010: 17) argues, the categorisation of women and young people as "victims" forecloses the conceptual space for considering their capacity to exercise agency and to make their own decisions, 'albeit decisions taken within a severely constrained set of socio-economic circumstances'.

### **6.2.1 Reasons for participating in sex work**

Although studies of sex workers sometimes focus on the "push" factors leading to their involvement in sex work, such as economic necessity and limited labour market options, participants in the current study also discussed various "pull" factors such as financial independence and flexibility. The factors shaping individuals' engagement with sex work have bearing on the degree of agency they are able to exercise, as do broader external influences such as the criminal justice context and local policing practices, the impact of stigma and consequent need for some sex workers to conceal their working identity from others. As other studies have identified, the potential economic gains from sex work are a significant motivating factor and, in the current study, all but two participants specifically referred to the financial benefits as being a primary incentive. Nonetheless, the interview data show that participants' decisions were also based on other factors and their reasons for engaging in sex work were complex.

As previous chapters have indicated, it is important to situate analysis of pathways into sex work in the context of broader labour market trajectories. Bruckert and Parent (2006) have argued that the constraints influencing some people's trajectories into sex work need to be set in the context of available options, some of which may be exploitative in different ways. Dwindling

opportunities for young adults in contemporary labour markets and the increase in precarious work, both of which have a bearing on their transitions into work, have been noted in relation to broader labour markets (Bradley and Devadason, 2008; MacDonald, 2009). As discussed in Chapter Three, specifically gendered constraints, such as labour market divisions and the balance of responsibilities in the domestic sphere are also a consideration relating to some women's entry into a feminised occupation such as sex work. The lack of other feasible pathways was a central consideration for five participants in the current study, who described their initial decision to work in the sex industry as a pragmatic one, because it was seen as preferable to low-paid service sector alternatives. For example, Aisha, who was in her late teens, had a criminal record unrelated to prostitution and saw herself as having limited options as a result:

I can't get...no proper good job. Like lookin' after people or anything. Just customer service or McDonald or something. Chip shop or something...  
So I'd rather be in here than do that.

The potentially higher earnings, which resulted in needing to work fewer days to earn an income, were reasons given for preferring to work in the parlour where she was based. Alexa, who was in her forties at the time of interview and had worked in the sex industry since her early twenties, observed that:

...if you haven't got any qualifications, which I haven't, then you are in retail, shops, which pay a minimum wage. So that's what I'd be working for, a minimum wage. If I wasn't doing this.

For some people with a limited range of options, therefore, sex work may be seen as the best of possible occupational choices at a particular time. Nonetheless, comparative agency also needs to be viewed in the context not only of structural constraints, but opportunities at different life stages. As discussed in Chapter Five and later in this chapter, some participants who identified limited choices at the time of entry as a reason for participating in sex work had found they experienced greater job satisfaction through this work

than in their previous jobs and therefore, at the time of interview, did not express a wish to move into any other sector. Others used the earnings and free time from sex work to broaden their options, for example, through study. Sasha reflected that she might not have taken up sex work had her circumstances been different, but at the same time had found personal benefits from the work:

I feel fine about the job, I don't feel fine about the sort of lack of opportunities that have meant that it's been my best option. Erm, but that's a whole heap of other stories. Erm, it's given me the freedom to do what I want, which means mostly my education and therapy and looking after myself, you know, mentally and emotionally.

While constricted labour market options are one explanation for involvement in the sex industry, however, the data from this study suggest that limiting analyses of transitions into sex work to a single explanatory model prohibits consideration of the varied motivations for engaging with this work. For many participants, the reasons for considering sex work as a viable occupational choice were instrumental and related to their aspirations, rather than being viewed solely as reactive to circumstances. For example, being able not only to fund studies or an internship, but to fit sex work around these was a reason mentioned by eight female and five male participants. Delia and Yulia, the two migrants to the UK working in parlours, were both funding their education in their home country through sex work, working in the parlour for short lengths of time and periodically returning home. This pattern is similar to that of female migrant sex workers in the study by Scambler (2007), who tended to engage in sex work on a short-term opportunistic basis. Angel and Kat, who were saving for gender reassignment surgery, had experienced prejudice in other occupations, which they felt reduced their options. For them, independent sex work offered not only greater income to meet their financial commitments, but also 'a way of working which accommodates our transition'. Many participants only needed to work part-time in sex work to generate sufficient income for themselves and, where relevant, their families, and being able to provide for their children was mentioned as a key consideration by six female participants.

For example, Louise commented that, compared with previous jobs 'I get a month's worth of wages in a week...I've got more time for my daughter and I'm less ratty. It pays my student fees'. For some participants, therefore, sex work offered a lifestyle which accommodated their current needs and increased their ability to pursue financial and social goals, as well as personal development. Moreover, as the following analysis will demonstrate, transitions are not always divided along strictly gendered lines, which tests the discourses of exploitation and female vulnerability discussed in earlier chapters.

### **6.2.2 Pathways in to sex work: planned and unplanned transitions**

As Bradley and Devadason (2008) have noted, the transitions of young adults in contemporary labour markets may often involve movement between different jobs in the formal and informal economies, and in this sense the trajectories of those engaging in sex work are not dissimilar. While six participants in the current study started their working life selling sex, the majority had prior labour market experience and displayed multiple work pathways and shifts in status. A substantial proportion of participants (22) had started sex working in their twenties, which corresponds with other studies which have found that the average age of entry for indoor-based sex workers tends to be higher than that for their street-based counterparts (Sanders, 2005a; Jeal and Salisbury, 2007). Nearly a quarter of participants had entered sex work before the age of twenty and some had become sex workers later in their lives (see Table 4.3 in Chapter Four for further details). While for some people their involvement was relatively unplanned or casual, as the interviews demonstrate, others took a more planned or instrumental approach to their initial engagement or subsequent trajectory.

Participants taking an instrumental approach had often been proactive in exploring potential working opportunities. For example, six female participants had searched for work through newspapers or online and contacted different agencies or establishments. Some spent time reflecting on various options before they took the decision to enter sex work. Seven participants aged in

their late twenties and above mentioned undertaking some preliminary research into sex work, including having discussions with others working in the business, before taking the decision to engage in commercial sex. For example, Cleo had been working in the voluntary sector for a number of years and felt 'really burnt out, and I was also really poor, all of my work had been unpaid or low-waged'. She had already considered sex work as an option and spent time in discussions with a couple working in the industry and reflecting on the potential advantages and disadvantages, before trying her first appointment and deciding to continue working with them on a co-operative basis. Ruby had her own business in another sector, but the recession was affecting it detrimentally. In order to bring in further funding to sustain her primary business:

I cast my net wide and looked not just at sex work but across the board at what I've got skills at doing....erm, just looked at all of my skill sets and what offered the biggest financial reward. And sex work is, I think.....maybe professional women's tennis, modelling and sex work are the only areas where women outperform men in terms of salary.

Although they were both in their teens when they started escorting, Tulisa and Jake had considered potential labour market routes before deciding to engage in paid sex. Tulisa, a young single parent, found the earnings from her waitressing job were not sufficient to fund her college course, so she explored additional work options via the Internet. Jake commented that he had done some initial research before deciding that sex work, and specifically escorting, would suit his personal as well as financial needs:

...there was guys askin' like on gay websites... if I would do stuff for money. And I didn't do none of that, but then... I thought about it more. And then I met up with an escort who wanted to hook up for fun. And then I asked him loads about, you know, the whole industry and everything, and then I set up professionally.

Some participants made a gradual transition into sex work. For example, one transgender and four female participants already enjoyed non-monogamous or recreational sex in a non-commercial context, including through involvement in swinging or BDSM clubs, online dating or cybersex, and for them moving into commercial sex enabled them to be paid for their leisure interests. Two male participants had gradually moved into commercial sex after engaging in transactional sex when in their teens. For example, Leon had exchanged sex for drinks in bars when he was 17, before he became a sex worker. While transactional sex may not necessarily lead to sex work, he viewed this as a natural transition for him:

...I would go to bars, and I'd get like free drinks, and like end up with someone who'd be paying for drinks....but at the time I wouldn't see it as sex work, and now people like consider well it was like exchanging sex, sexual services...but like it wasn't pay at that time. And, erm, so.....I guess it start[ed] from there because it's kind of like getting the idea well I can actually exchange sexual services for something. So at the time I wouldn't ask for money, but sometimes people would give me money. But it wasn't like asking for money, it was just like happening in some way.

For some participants their involvement in sex work arose through a combination of circumstances, including immediate financial need or because of constricted available choices at the time. Although these participants, who were all relatively young at the time, did not necessarily map out their pathway in advance, however, their trajectories did not necessarily reflect the disempowerment presented in traditional explanatory models of young people's entry into selling sex. The degree of agency they exercised in these contexts related not only to their individual situation but also their life experiences and awareness of other possible options.

In three instances, other family members or close friends were already working in the sex industry and this represented a familiar pathway. Scambler (2007: 1080) has described this mode of entry as 'destined', although this categorisation implies a level of pre-determination which was not necessarily

experienced by participants in the current study and 'socially acquainted' may be a more apt description. Susie's mother and aunt already worked in parlours and, when she 'got into the wrong crowd' at the age of 16, sex work seemed an obvious trajectory, as she had no qualifications. This was the only form of work she had known and she had continued working in parlours for 14 years, latterly in a small flat with other family members and friends. She was content with her current situation and was not considering other options at the time: 'I quite like my job here'. While Louisa shared a similar initial acquaintance with sex work, however, her longer-term work trajectory could be considered more instrumental and linked not only to her personal situation at the time of entry, but also her aspirations. Louisa had initially worked as a receptionist at weekends in a parlour managed by her friend's mother. When she finished a college course, she reflected on whether to move into selling sex, to earn additional income and thought 'd'you know what, why not?'. She progressed from parlour work into agency escorting, and subsequently independent sex work, which gave her sufficient income and free time to undertake a degree course and professional training. She was currently working for a voluntary sector project as well as continuing one day per week with escorting and sometimes domination services or professional massage, for which she had trained. She had thus not only moved from managed to independent sex work, but also diversified into specialised services, as well as having an alternative career alongside her sex industry work.

Sometimes a chance encounter may prompt a decision to move into selling sex, although there may be varying individual reasons and circumstances influencing this direction. While both Kieran and Jemma were in their late teens when they first became involved in sex work, they already had some labour market experience and saw commercial sex as a viable form of work. Kieran was offered money for sex through a gay dating site, while he was working as a fundraiser for charity, which paid less and he found 'monotonous'. When he realised after his first encounter how easy it was to create an online profile, he decided to set himself up as an independent sex worker. Jemma, an escort originally from South Africa, described herself as a 'very feisty waitress' at the age of 18, who had 'stormed' out of her job after a



disagreement with the manager. She was propositioned by a man when she was walking home:

This guy drove past and he went 'how much love?'... And I came up with a price, and he went 'excellent', and I was very promiscuous anyway, and he was quite good-looking. So he came up to my flat, and I was 'oh, I've found a new job!

Jemma continued selling sex for two years in her home country, then undertook further studies and managed a business in another sector before returning to escorting some years later when she moved to the UK. While Jemma and Kieran were both relatively young when they entered sex work, they nonetheless described themselves as having made a pragmatic decision to change their circumstances. Their initial engagement with sex work could be described as fortuitous and opportunistic.

For three participants, however, their financially vulnerable status might be seen as a determining factor in their initial engagement with sex work. For example, Aisha, who was aged 16 when she first became involved in sex work, found herself with very limited employment options because of her criminal record. She had little money and was initially paid for sex by a taxi driver, who also informed her about work opportunities in parlours. After this occasion, she 'started to look in the paper' for parlour jobs. Selena was doing her 'A' levels when:

....my parents threw me out of home... the church who ran the school thought that social services should take care of it, social services thought the church should take care of it, and I'm wandering round with my toothbrush in my school uniform, wondering where I'm going to sleep and what I'm going to eat. Erm, I had a bit of money, so I got a bedsit in ... happened to be the red light district of town, and when I found out how much the gentlemen who kept pestering me in the street were actually offering, I thought 'yeah, I'll have some of that'.

During interview Selena said that she saw her decision to enter sex work as a short-term solution to an immediate problem, which was financing herself while she completed her exams. She commented: 'I wasn't particularly traumatised, everything was fine and everybody was a perfect gentleman'. She saw two clients until her benefit money came through and then stopped selling sex until after she moved to London, returning several years later to independent sex work after undertaking various other jobs. Martin, who had just left home in his early twenties and 'couldn't afford to live well', recounted his reaction to his first encounter with selling sex through an escort agency, which contrasted with Selena's experience:

And it really was your typical, kind of clichéd first prostitution situation, really, in that I didn't want to be doing it, I was desperate for the money, and I felt so dirty after he'd gone that I literally got in the shower and scrubbed myself with, erm, Jif and a scourer.

Nonetheless, while Martin found his early experience of selling sex through third parties distasteful, he set this in context by relating it to his low self-esteem at the time. He returned to independent sex work some years later, when he felt more comfortable with his circumstances and able to be more selective about his client base and commented that: '...the difference now, is that I really enjoy it'. Although it is important to document the range of transitions into sex work reported by participants, it should also be noted that there was no one typical trajectory and that early experiences were not necessarily reflected in participants' subsequent engagement in sex work, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The diverse transitions emerging from the interview data enable development of a typology of initial entry into sex work, shown in Table 6.1 below. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive: for example, a gradual pattern of entry may also be reactive or opportunistic.

**Table 6.1: Patterns of entry into sex work**

Type of entry	Examples
Reactive	Response to straitened circumstances
Gradual	Starting off through occasional sexual exchanges not necessarily involving payment, gradually moving into selling sex
Socially acquainted	Family or friends working in the sector, hence familiarity with this as an option
Opportunistic	Response to immediate opportunities, or for instrumental reasons
Planned career	Planning longer-term involvement

Certain of these routes of entry, particularly those of Aisha, Selena and Martin, who were reacting to financial desperation and also Susie, although her circumstances of entry were different because of her family connections, relate both to economic push factors and also to some of the vulnerability factors identified in the studies of young people discussed earlier. Nonetheless, it may be argued that there are qualitative differences between some of these examples. For Aisha, her criminal record precluded certain labour market directions which she might have chosen in other circumstances and she felt restricted to a small number of pathways, with sex work being seen as preferable to other unskilled but less lucrative jobs available to her. Her career options were severely constrained as a result of her early engagement with the criminal justice system. Although Martin saw himself as equally financially desperate when he first entered sex work, further opportunities became available and he was able also to work in health and social care occupations as well as gaining qualifications. For Selena, sex work was viewed as a practical solution to address her immediate financial needs, after which she continued along her intended career path. The circumstances influencing all these trajectories were associated with external constraints and vulnerability factors, but the degrees of agency exercised also related to individual ambitions and personal resilience. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to note that Selena and Martin were both successful independent workers in their forties at time of interview, whereas Aisha was still relatively young and therefore it is not possible to compare onward trajectories.

Even where participants had taken a more considered approach to engagement in sex work, this did not mean the process of becoming a sex worker was entirely unproblematic. Similar to sex workers in Petro's (2010) study, participants in the current study were conscious of the stigma attached to sex work and the potential impact, not only on how they were able to undertake their work, but also the extent to which they felt able to be open about their working status. Some also had their own early preconceptions about sex work, based often on the way in which it was portrayed in the media as degrading and exploitative. Thus, in entering sex work, there may be additional factors to consider which would not necessarily be an issue for other occupations. Nonetheless, for the eight participants who referred to these initial reservations, the benefits of sex work outweighed the disadvantages.

### **6.2.3 Individual agency and transitions into sex work**

The examples above confirm the diverse trajectories into sex work encountered in earlier studies. They challenge the discourse of exploitation as an essentially gendered phenomenon discussed in earlier chapters, as the interview data did not indicate significant gender differences with regards to specific transitions or motivations for participating in sex work. Although the number of migrant workers in the sample was relatively small, their diverse experiences also reflect the findings of other studies (e.g. Agustín, 2007; Mai, 2009) which show that migrants into the UK sex industry have a variety of reasons for undertaking the work. The current research shows that individual agency is related to a number of different factors, including age and experience, personal preference and aspirations but also to broader structural inequalities which may limit individual actions. In some instances, unplanned entry may be a matter of responding to an immediate opportunity, as with Jemma and Kieran. In others, vulnerability factors are an important influence, as in the examples of Aisha, Martin and Selena and agency under these circumstances is more constricted. Nonetheless, while limited options and structural constraints may compromise people's agency, it is important to acknowledge their capacity for action and rational decision-making even within

the context of reduced opportunities. Scambler (2007: 1083) notes that, while agency may be structured, 'it is not structurally determined'. Dodsworth (2013) has argued that it is important to move away from binaries between agency and choice, or "victimhood" and agency and to situate young people's experiences in the context not only of structural constraints but also psychosocial factors such as their coping strategies, relationships with others and the meanings they attribute to these factors. Individual agency and resilience also vary at different times and people react in different ways to situations. Although some people who turn to selling sex or other jobs in the informal economy may have few options they can realistically pursue at the time of entry, their pathways may change according to other factors in their lives and how they adapt to their circumstances.

In considering sex work as an occupation, it may also be pertinent to distinguish between those who sell sex out of financial desperation, or because of limited options, from those who view sex work as a viable occupational pathway. As O'Connell Davidson (2006b: 9) argues, 'many of those who turn to prostitution because they are dislocated, propertyless, and rightless do not approach prostitution as an occupation or a job as such, but merely as a strategy to get by'. While the polarity between "prostitution as exploitation" and "sex as work" discussed in Chapter Two is not helpful for understanding the complex circumstances in which people engage in commercial sex, therefore, there may be a need to separate "sex work" as an occupational choice from "selling sex" as a reaction to circumstances. Nonetheless, similar distinctions might be made regarding trajectories into informal and formal labour markets more generally, and the ways in which these are influenced by structural inequalities. Glucksmann (2005) points to a need to reconceptualise work according to its socio-economic context and relations between different modes of work and non-work activities. In developing an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of sex work as labour, therefore, it is important to accommodate analysis of the different circumstances under which people undertake the work and the meanings they attach to it at different points in time.

Moving away from binaries it is more constructive to consider a continuum of agency within sex work as well as other occupations. Degrees of agency may be restricted when related to circumstances such as immediate financial need or other intrinsic or extrinsic factors constraining people's range of possible actions, as well as levels of awareness of the potential implications of their actions. Towards one end of the continuum, beyond the extreme of coerced entry, which was not encountered in this study, may be those who are not comfortable with sex work, but nonetheless put aside their reluctance in order to sustain themselves or escape from a situation they find more repugnant. Slightly further along the continuum are those who may experience similar financial pressures, but who also find sex work more acceptable than other available options. They may also develop and assert an identity while in sex work, comparable to some participants working in informal sector jobs as outlined in Snyder's (2004) study, which was discussed in Chapter Three. At the opposite end of the spectrum would be those who see sex work as part of their lifestyle. Ranging along the continuum between the two extreme points would be the majority, who see sex work as a means to an end but also gain a degree of job satisfaction from their work, depending on the conditions.

### **6.3 *Approaches to the work and job satisfaction***

Similar to workers in many other occupations, participants' reasons for undertaking sex work, their aspirations and perceptions of future opportunities affected their sense of job satisfaction and engagement with their work. Relatively few studies have considered factors relating to job satisfaction in sex work (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). A study on the wellbeing of female sex workers in diverse settings in the Netherlands (Vanwesenbeeck, 1994, discussed in Koken, 2010), found that higher levels of wellbeing were associated with issues such as levels of control over their work and social support from others. As Brents and Hausbeck (2010) also note, relative autonomy and control over working conditions are linked to job satisfaction in the sex industry. These findings correspond with evidence from research on self-employment generally, which has found that self-employed people tend to

have higher levels of job satisfaction than employees (Blanchflower, 2000; OECD, 2000). Job satisfaction arising from self-employment has been linked to the ability to exercise greater control over work-life balance, as well as relative independence and autonomy (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). Hughes (2003) also observes that those who are “pushed” into running their own business are less likely to enjoy their work than those who are “pulled”, indicating an association between work choices and job satisfaction.

The current study asked participants to identify factors contributing to their job satisfaction and the elements of the work they enjoyed most. Independent participants were more likely than those in managed settings to describe a broader range of factors relating to their job satisfaction. Not unexpectedly, a common feature for most participants was the economic benefit (cited by 38 participants), which gave them more time to pursue other interests or fulfil responsibilities. Other principal contributory factors were social interaction (34 participants) and managing the encounter with clients to create a mutually enjoyable experience (23 participants). Fifteen participants mentioned enjoying the sexual “chemistry” with some clients, as discussed in Chapter Five, and 11 noted the intellectual or emotional stimulation they gained from some encounters. In all of these categories of job satisfaction there was a mix of male and female participants, which raises questions regarding the gendered distinctions discussed in previous chapters. There were times when the very factors which contributed to participants’ enjoyment of the work could also detract from it: for example, while the social engagement with clients was frequently noted as a source of job satisfaction, there were also instances when it could become tiring or stressful. While I do not wish to argue that sex work is exactly the same as other jobs, there are common features shared by workers across sectors, including the tensions between personal fulfilment from the challenges of the work and the strains of maintaining a consistent work persona. For example, Gill (2009a), turning her gaze on contemporary academia, highlights similar paradoxes inherent in academic life.

### 6.3.1 Job satisfaction and autonomy

The relative autonomy afforded by self-employment, compared with being in an employee-employer relationship, featured significantly in independent workers' accounts of job satisfaction. Twenty cited the management of their own business and development of associated skills as being an aspect they particularly enjoyed. Although independent workers were most likely to feel they exercised control over their working conditions, some workers in managed settings also commented positively on the relative autonomy they experienced in certain elements of their work. As Bruckert and Parent (2006) have observed, sex workers in commercial premises are sometimes in a position to negotiate aspects of the interaction with clients, which involves judgement and skills and can be more emotionally challenging than more highly structured service sector occupations. Four participants who had experience of working in parlours noted that the one-to-one nature of the encounter with clients in this setting enabled a more personal social interaction, which compared favourably with previous, more highly supervised jobs outside the sex industry. For example, Rebecca contrasted her work in a small managed flat with her former service sector roles, observing that she saw her current working situation as involving co-dependency, even with a third party in a management capacity: '...they bring people in, and I bring people in, so everyone's...got a good relationship, we need each other'. She experienced greater autonomy than in previous jobs with greater managerial control, where 'someone's telling you what to do and barking at you'. Sasha spoke of how she felt able to explore her creativity in the interaction with the client, which made the work more interesting for her. Cleo compared her work in parlours with employment relationships in other sectors:

...in a way you have your control, because when you're in the room with a client, you're in charge, you're the person there who's the professional. So even if you're in a situation where you're working set hours, at set costs, you've got a lot more say in a way about your job...than in the kinds of work I was previously used to.



In this way, Cleo may be seen as being in a similar position to professionals in comparable occupations involving one-to-one relationships, such as counselling. While self-employed sex workers in managed premises may not have the same labour rights as employees, therefore, the looser management arrangements in some brothels may work in their favour in other ways, such as in terms of comparative autonomy over their relationships with clients. The nominal self-employment status of sex workers in brothels can thus benefit workers as well as employers; and for this reason many may not want a more formalised employer-employee contract because it is seen as restricting the freedoms they currently experience (Cruz, 2013; Pitcher and Wijers, 2014). As was discussed in Chapter Five, however, not all sex workers wish for greater autonomy over their work organisation and processes and some may prefer a more structured managed environment for the reasons noted earlier.

Independent sex work can sometimes offer opportunities to people with few qualifications to move from low-skilled and poorly remunerated jobs with little responsibility into a position where they manage their own business. While this may not always be the only self-employed option available to them, they are exploiting an immediate asset, their erotic capital, which is also more likely to draw in instant income than certain other self-employed types of work, which may require a higher amount of financial capital to become established. As participants such as Karen and Jemma noted, all that was required to start their business was a small amount of funds for an advertisement or setting up a website and clients would start to contact them. Jessica commented on how she moved into sex work from 'everything you would expect a woman with no qualifications to have done. I've, y'know, shop assistant, cleaner, barmaid, erm...I was a crab dresser on the fish market...'. In comparison now, as a self-employed escort, Jessica ran her own business and saw herself as having developed a range of skills associated with her work, including information technology, financial management and organisational skills and 'I love every minute of it most of the time'. For Jessica, therefore, the increased human capital as well as the autonomy associated with independent sex work contributed to her job satisfaction. Her quality of life had also improved, not

only due to the financial benefits but also the free time afforded by self-managed work:

I can eat good fresh food every day and get as much sleep and rest as I need. I mean I used to get four hours sleep a night and live on crap, because I worked three jobs and by the time I'd paid all me bills and me mortgage and stuff I'd 'ave about fifteen quid a week left.

### **6.3.2 Social interaction and client relations**

The social interaction offered by sex work was referred to as a primary source of job satisfaction by both UK-born and migrant participants of all genders, across different settings. For Jake, job satisfaction resulted from 'a respectful, friendly time. That's what I like and that's what most of my clients like'. Delia, a parlour worker, preferred her regular customers, as she felt more relaxed with them, especially if they booked for a longer appointment which involved friendly interaction: 'it's nice to be nice'. One of the factors contributing to Jessica's job satisfaction was being able to meet and converse with a range of clients from different socio-economic groups and diverse occupations: 'people I wouldn't stand a chance of meeting if I was still like stuck in a grotty nightclub pouring drinks'. Others such as Carla and Jake also commented on their ability to extend their social networks through sex work. Several participants mentioned that an additional benefit of the interaction with clients was the emotional intimacy developed with some people. Some sex workers may thus develop a deeper relationship with certain regular customers which may challenge professional boundaries, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Participants stressed that an enjoyable social interaction was based on a premise of mutual respect. Nonetheless, some described incidents where clients were seen to be disrespectful, which could undermine participants' agency and control. Honneth (1995) notes that disrespect is associated with denial of recognition, which may damage individuals' self-perception and challenge their sense of identity. He identifies different forms of disrespect, including social denigration or humiliation, practical and physical maltreatment.

Disrespect may also include structural exclusion from certain rights in society, to which I will return in Chapter Eight. For participants in the current study, disrespectful conduct could relate to the language used in initial enquiries, non-observance of the contract when it was set out by the worker on their website or during preliminary discussions, trying to haggle over prices or failure to acknowledge the worker as an individual. This conduct was seen as unacceptable by participants in all settings. For example, Angel noted that she and her partner 'won't tolerate rudeness' and referred to the 'set of rules' they outlined, which clients were expected to understand and respect. Elena discussed how she set out her expectations of behaviour on her website:

I've put this on my profile, don't like being called 'hon', don't like being called 'babe', you know, I want a message that is polite and respectful, and you telling me a bit about you. I don't want, you know, 'I've got the cash can we meet at 2 o'clock' or whatever, that's just not going to do it. You have to make an effort.

Independent participants commented that in situations where clients showed disrespect, they would either be turned away or would not be given a repeat appointment. Jessica sent away one client who turned up after drinking heavily, because she viewed this as discourteous. Jake also outlined his interpretation of disrespectful behaviour from clients:

I think if someone's arrogant and they're rude and they're like 'I want you to do this sexual thing right now, and get on the bed' or, you know, that kind of stuff, if someone is too aggressive or that, I don't like that...some of them are like that, but I won't usually see them again.

Both female and male participants referred to instances where client attitudes or behaviour detracted from their enjoyment of the job. Rachel described situations when she felt treated 'like a piece of meat', mainly from people making initial enquiries: 'not established people, but just idiots that call up'. Kieran, who found the social aspect of the job the most important element, commented that on occasions when a client just wanted sex, it 'makes me feel

a bit objectified'. Some participants working in parlours observed a difference between daytime and night-time customers, with the latter more likely to be drunk and difficult to please. For this reason, these participants preferred daytime work, even though there were likely to be fewer customers. This again raises the issue of needing to balance job satisfaction against financial necessity, which is a choice also faced by workers in the wider labour market, as touched on in Chapter Five. Participants frequently normalised sex work as labour in their discussions. For example, Jem felt there was little difference between sex work and other occupations in terms of customer relations:

Working in the adult industry has all the same trappings as any job, repetitive, boring. Only the subject matter changes. I got as much abuse working for a bank or a mobile phone company as I do working in the adult industry, just as I get nice customers.

Nonetheless, other participants compared sex work favourably with previous service sector jobs. For instance, Rebecca commented on the distinction between many customers in the flat where she worked and those she had encountered in service sector jobs, where she was comparatively anonymous and in a demonstrably subservient role:

... here I see the nice side of businessmen. At [the supermarket] you see the evil side of them! Shouting at you on the check-out, you're not quick enough, you can't put alcohol through because you're not old enough...you just see angry people, disrespectful people...a lot of the time you didn't feel respected in jobs and this one I feel more respected.

This example relates partly to the intimacy of the sex work encounter compared with most service sector jobs, but also the more prolonged one-to-one interaction in some sex work settings, which enables sex workers to use social skills and emotional labour to develop a more personal interchange. Eva observed that she felt more appreciated working in escorting than in her previous service work, which she associated in part with the autonomy she experienced:

Erm, what else do I like [about sex work]? I like that it's, you know, working in sales you realise there's a big difference between how people treat you when you're standing behind a counter and how people treat you when you're escorting. I mean they do, they make such a big fuss about escorts and you know how degrading it is and stuff, but you know, you try being a waitress or work behind a counter and see how people treat you, they treat you like shit, they talk to you like shit.

Nonetheless, participants in both independent and managed settings described situations where they had to use negotiation and social interaction skills to retain control of the encounter with clients and on occasion deal with potentially difficult situations, where customers were rude or demanding. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, these incidents were seen by participants to be comparatively rare. While management of the encounter is a necessary element of independent sex work, the degree of autonomy often given to workers in parlours places the onus on them to steer interactions and this may benefit some workers more than others, depending on their skills and experience. Job satisfaction is also a personal issue, and what some workers valued most was less interesting to others. For instance Michelle, a receptionist in a parlour, commented that resolving disputes between sex workers and clients if the client was 'not happy' with the service was the element of her job she enjoyed least. Two participants were less keen on the conversational side of the work. Aisha liked her clients 'nice and quick' and not wanting much conversation. Pascal's preference was also 'when it's really about sex and not having to...talk too much'. As with any job involving close interpersonal contact, there were times when the interaction with clients could become onerous, particularly if the worker was tired, or if they found the customer uninteresting or too emotionally demanding. Independent self-employed sex workers were more likely than parlour workers to be in a position to turn down or cancel bookings if they did not feel up to working on particular days. In part, this related to professional pride, such as wishing to provide a good customer experience. As Rachel commented, the extent to which this is possible also relates to workers' financial circumstances, as

sometimes the income foregone will present too much of a loss and in these situations the worker might have to force him- or herself to carry on working. Yet this is not dissimilar from workers' position in other sectors, although Martin observed that in the intimate setting of the sex work encounter, it is 'more difficult to fake it', whereas 'you can fake a smile, if you're working in a coffee shop'. The intensity of the one-to-one encounter in sex work, particularly in escorting or independent work may be more emotionally challenging than some other jobs involving customer relations. This also relates to emotional labour, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

### **6.3.3 Well-being and self-respect**

Certain studies, particularly of young people and/or street-based sex workers, have linked involvement in selling sex to low levels of self-esteem (e.g. Hester and Westmarland, 2004; Coy, 2009). These studies have tended to draw on sex workers with a background of problematic relations, including childhood abuse, drug dependency or time in local authority care, and therefore a range of overlapping factors may contribute to their low self-regard and vulnerability (Pearce et al., 2003). Nonetheless, other studies comparing different groups of sex workers have found that, while street-based workers are less likely to regard their work positively, relatively high proportions of escorts or call-girls have reported increased self-esteem after commencing sex work (Weitzer, 2005a). In the current study, it appears that levels of self-esteem also related to participants' age, as well as individual circumstances and the work setting. Participants who had been working in the industry for some time, such as Martin and Eva, commented that their levels of confidence had increased as they got older.

The longer-term impact of stigma attached to working in the sex industry may negatively affect self-esteem, however, and may be a reason for deciding to leave (Petro, 2010; Comte, 2013). Vanwesenbeeck (2005) found that burnout amongst sex workers was associated primarily with factors such as social stigma or lack of a supportive working structure. In the current study,

participants also frequently commented on the effects of stigma, which could influence the length of time they remained in the industry. Cleo felt that this was the most problematic aspect of sex work: 'It's about social attitudes, it's about socially enforced isolation'. Susanna spoke of being 'constantly on edge' because she kept her working status both as a receptionist in a parlour, and previously when she was an escort, secret from her family and friends. Elena also commented that she felt 'proud' of her sex work and it upset her that the outside world might view it differently: 'it's the perception that's the problem, of what it is'. Nonetheless, despite the negative effects of stigma, ten independent participants and one parlour worker in the current study commented that they found sex work contributed to their self-respect and compared it favourably with many other jobs they had undertaken. Comparing sex work in a managed flat with previous office jobs, Sasha observed:

It's much more skilled, it's much more challenging, it's much more interesting. Erm, and I'd say that...even aside from sort of social stigma, that I have more self-respect related to this job than to other jobs which I've done, where I was very unhappy, very bored.

A contributory factor with respect to job satisfaction for many workers was also the validation they received from clients and, as participants such as Angel and Verity commented, it was important to receive verification of providing a good service. Customers may give feedback on websites, as discussed in Chapter Five, and female and male participants also mentioned the personal appreciation they received from some clients. Elena compared the praise she received in her escorting work with that in her concurrent professional healthcare occupation:

I get exactly the same type of praise off both, you get thank-you cards, I've had thank-you cards off both, erm, and they just make you feel really good about yourself, you feel like you've really made a difference in someone's life and that's the key thing.

One difference between brothel work and independent work described by participants was the benefit of others' company and support from other workers, which participants working in managed or collective settings tended to cite as a contributory factor to their enjoyment of the job. Younger workers also commented on the value of receiving advice and support from older workers, some of whom, as Tulusa noted, 'act like your mother'. Various authors have identified workplace social relations and social support as contributors to job satisfaction, particularly in terms of coping mechanisms for dealing with work-related stress (e.g. Hurlbert, 1991; Fogarty et al., 1999). As some independent participants commented, the isolation of sex work, particularly where sex workers kept their working status secret from the wider world, could at times decrease job satisfaction and sometimes became an impetus for moving on, or taking time out. Leon spoke of the isolation he sometimes experienced when escorting from home and how he felt he received social recognition in another job he undertook for a while, working as a chef in a small collective, where it was 'kind of like a normal workplace relationship'. More recently, he had used the free time afforded by sex work to become involved in other activities, such as sex worker activism, which provided a balance between lone working and collective projects.

For three participants in managed settings, job satisfaction was limited and the job was seen as purely functional. Louise, a parlour worker, stated that 'I wouldn't be doing it if I could do something else'. For her, the reason for staying was the money and the time it gave her. It was simply a means to an end: 'If I hated it I wouldn't do it, but I can't wait to finish it at the same time'. Nonetheless, she commented that she had 'loved' escorting, which she had to give up when she had a child because of the unsocial hours, so her lack of enjoyment appeared to relate to the particular setting. While there were elements of job satisfaction for others, there were also times when sex work was tedious, similar to many jobs. Participants' views on their capacity to leave sex work could also influence their enjoyment or frustration with the job. The impact of limited longer-term prospects or progression routes on job satisfaction has been noted in relation to sectors such as hospitality or retail (Brown and McIntosh, 2003; Lindsay, 2005). Similarly, perceptions of their



labour market potential may affect the way in which sex workers view their work. As Kylie commented, she had qualifications and training in other areas: 'I would never find it hard to get a job. So I know if I'm getting bored I'll just go and get a normal job. So that's like a lot of pressure off me'. In situations where participants did not particularly enjoy, or became bored with their work, the company and support of other workers were often noted as mitigating factors. The role of workplace communities and "communities of coping" was discussed in Chapter Five. This community effect was described by Martin, referring to when he was younger and worked in a brothel. Although much of the time he did not enjoy his work there, he also commented that he felt included and part of a family: '...at the same time I felt like I belonged there. Because I hadn't had any proper family you see'. Thus for Martin, the community in which he worked also acted as a binding factor to a situation that he might otherwise have left sooner. Under such circumstances, the development of an apparently supportive network might be seen as enabling management to retain workers despite exploitative working conditions.

There are thus many aspects contributing to job satisfaction in sex work, which reflect those in the broader labour market and relate to degrees of agency, control and job autonomy. There are tangible differences, particularly between independent and managed work, and some participants perceived there to be a hierarchy within, as well as between different settings. For example, Karen contrasted her own situation with other escorts whom she felt could 'pick and choose' and have more control over their working conditions. Some escorts felt there was a qualitative difference between independent and brothel work, not only in relation to comparative autonomy, but also in terms of the type of clients who used the services, although this sentiment was not echoed by all participants who had worked across both settings. Some workers may also experience burnout after a time working in the industry and this inevitably impinges on their job enjoyment. For some, the features they had once enjoyed, such as the emotional or sexual intensity of the work, could become wearing. For example, Carla wished to develop her own business outside the sex industry, partly drawing on the skills she had acquired during independent sex work. She had also become jaded with her current work, which acted as

an additional stimulus for leaving. She compared this with previous jobs outside the sex industry where she had become bored: 'I think in six months I'll look back on it more fondly. Like with everything. But at the moment....you might have caught me at a bad time. I'm just so bloody sick of it!'.

#### **6.4 *Aspirations and barriers to achievement***

While patterns of leaving sex work and sometimes mobility between sectors in the sex industry have been considered, few studies explore the aspirations and career trajectories of sex workers who wish to remain within the industry. One exception is the study by Brewis and Linstead (2000a), who discuss the way in which, while some entrants to sex work view their jobs as the best amongst a (limited) field of potential options or an economic necessity, others see it as an advantageous career move, with some workers diversifying into specialist areas of work or developing their own business. Nonetheless, they also comment that some people may have difficulties coming to terms with being a sex worker, which also reflects the deliberations of some participants in the current study, as discussed earlier. These factors influence how sex workers view their future direction, as well as their current work situation:

Nonetheless, how the worker views their occupation in this regard—as a career, as a stop-gap, as a means of developing self, as the only choice in particular socio-economic circumstances, as a feminist protest, as a flexible and well-remunerated alternative to the 9 to 5 etc.—makes a significant difference to their self-construction and to the degree of self-reflexivity they demonstrate in their everyday activities. (Brewis and Linstead, 2000a: 240)

Sanders (2007a) identifies various processes which influence when and how sex workers make transitions out of the sex industry. She arrives at four main types of trajectory (Sanders, 2007a: 81). A 'reactionary' departure relates to a response to change in circumstances, such as relationship formation, a violent incident, or disclosure of working status; 'gradual planning' is a timed transition, accompanied by financial planning and external career

development; 'natural career progression' might relate to ageing or reaching a natural end to career; and 'yo-yoing' describes patterns of leaving and re-entry.

The following sections consider the varied aspirations of participants and factors influencing their decisions to remain within the sex industry or move into other sectors. They build on Sanders' typology of exiting strategies, but focus more on reasons for remaining in sex work and diverse trajectories within the sex industry. Relative job satisfaction can be a motivation for remaining in the work or for moving on, if circumstances or individual requirements change, but there is a range of other factors which may affect people's transitions. I distinguish between short-term careers and longer-term options, but also consider the pathways of those who engage with the sex industry periodically or move between sectors.

#### **6.4.1 Interim or short-term careers**

A distinction may be made between those taking a planned approach to their involvement in sex work and those with less clearly-defined outcomes. Some sex workers view their work as a means to a specific end, with aims such as funding education or training, building up savings for specific projects, or paying off debt, and may consider it a temporary option. As discussed earlier in relation to routes into sex work, this group might be described as "instrumentalists". Amongst the participants in the current study, they included six parlour workers, both migrant and indigenous to the UK, who funded their studies through sex work and set themselves a specific amount of time to achieve their goals; and nine independent workers who were also funding academic or professional courses. It also included independent workers such as Angel and Kat, who were using the earnings from sex work to fund their gender transitioning. While Ruby, an independent escort, enjoyed her work, she also entered it primarily as a means of financing her other business and had set herself a time-limited plan.

While many participants with an instrumental approach had a clear vision of the time they intended to spend in sex work, others with less specific goals viewed it as an interim option while they considered potential future pathways. This category might be described as “occupants”, used here to denote a temporary residence, a status which may change over time. Sometimes categories may be overlapping: for example, Jemma, an independent escort, commented that while sex work was instrumental in terms of funding and giving her time to pursue her studies, she also enjoyed the work for its own sake and was reflecting on her future pathways. For her, sex work:

...gave me the opportunity of financial freedom, time freedom, doing something that I’m good at, that I enjoy doing, and erm, it gives me much more job satisfaction and it gave me the freedom to be able to study, focus on my studies, focus on other things....this is at the point when I start thinking about what I’m going to be doing, with what I’m doing now, which is a stepping stone for me, to get me capital, and time and brain space to think about other things.

Certain trajectories out of the sex industry may be seen as reactive to circumstances, as discussed by Sanders (2007a). While Rachel had found sex work ‘a massively positive experience’, she was finding it increasingly stressful to keep her work secret from her family and friends and was reviewing her future options. Factors such as a new relationship may sometimes influence sex workers’ attitudes to their work, as Eva and Leon found at times in their lives, with partners who were not comfortable with their involvement in sex work. As discussed in Chapter Five, family formation may also be a stimulus for moving out of independent work or escorting.

#### **6.4.2 Mobility and multiple transitions**

Apart from four exceptions, participants had also worked in different settings outside the sex industry. It is not uncommon for individuals to leave sex work and return at a later stage, or move between different sub-sectors of the industry (Brewis and Linstead, 2000c; Sanders, 2007a). This is similar to the

pattern of “yo-yo” transitions identified in the wider labour market literature (see Bradley and Devadason, 2008). More than a quarter of participants (nine women and two men) had left sex work for a period of time, for reasons which included taking up alternative jobs, forming a new relationship and, for female participants such as Carol, childrearing. Sometimes participants moved back and forth between sex work and other occupations, or worked intermittently in the sex industry for short periods of time. For instance, Delia worked in a British parlour for a few months at a time, but frequently returned to her home country and worked in jobs outside the sex industry. Verity had been a freelance decorator prior to becoming an escort and sometimes moved between this work and sex work, for example, at times when bookings were slow in one business. Nine participants undertook sex work alongside employed or self-employed work in another field, either viewing this as a short-term or longer-term pathway, depending on factors such as their aspirations and job satisfaction.

Some participants had struggled with the stigma attached to sex work, which could be a motivation for leaving the work, although for some this was on a temporary basis. Jemma and Demetrio, for example, spoke of how social stigma impacted on their enjoyment of sex work, causing them to take time out to pursue other trajectories, including studying and working in mainstream occupations. Both had taken a considered approach to returning to sex work, exploring different options and weighing up the advantages, such as independence, job satisfaction and financial benefits, against the potential social disapproval.

While the description of “yo-yoing” might fit some participants in the current study, including those who had taken time out for reasons such as becoming temporarily bored with the work, bringing up children, or forming a new relationship, the concept of “yo-yoing” implies a relatively unplanned or directionless process, whereas participants such as Jemma, Martin and Demetrio had given the issues some consideration before returning to sex work under their own terms, which was a different experience from when they were younger and less self-aware. Thus “planned return” might be more

appropriate in these instances. This also moves away from a focus solely on transitions out of sex work, to consider the way in which people may develop careers in the sex industry.

### **6.4.3 Longer term participation**

Less attention has been given in the literature to people who remain in sex work over a longer period, either by choice or as a result of circumstances. Longer-term participation may sometimes be linked to lack of available opportunities elsewhere; some may initially view sex work as a short-term option, but may continue because other opportunities do not arise, or because they become settled in the work; the financial gains from sex work can sometimes make it difficult to make a transition to lower-paid occupations in the mainstream labour market. People remaining for these reasons are similar to temporary occupants, except that they continue in sex work for a more protracted time-period. For Susie, who had left school with no qualifications and had worked in brothels since she was a teenager, sex work represented the best of a limited range of options and had been her main form of work for more than ten years.

In certain circumstances, remaining in sex work may be as a response to external factors and may also be considered reactive. Sometimes the fear of exposure can limit alternative options, and while stigma can be an impetus for leaving the sex industry, it may also present a barrier to moving on. As Tania observed:

I think...my past will catch up with me. I'm scared of that, scared of going and getting a job and them finding out what I do or have done, and firing me. That's my worst fear, I'd rather, you know, not try, because the thought of being judged, you know, when I give up, if ever [they] mention it, it's a scary thing that people will always...your past will always haunt you. So it affects your whole life I think, definitely.

For others with limited formal labour market options because of factors such as lack of qualifications, as discussed earlier, independent sex work may represent a positive as well as pragmatic direction, because of the relative freedom, autonomy and job satisfaction it offers compared with other managed work. As Jessica commented: 'I've got no chance of getting another job I like as much as this where I've got as much control over it and that pays as well as it does'. Other independent workers wished to develop their business, either individually or co-operatively with others, including diversifying into new spheres or niche markets within or linked to the sex industry. For example, Kieran had developed new skills and redesigned his business to offer a more holistic sexual healing service. Jake was building associated businesses such as online agencies and other websites. Angel and Kat were considering developing a photographic business, drawing on their previous skills, which they commented would offer a more supportive service with less 'sleazy innuendo' than escorts often experienced. Some women who had worked in brothels, such as Alexa and Carol, had gone on to run their own small business. This group might be described as "entrepreneurs", although there may be some differentiation between those who diversify into business management because of limited alternative options and those who develop their enterprise for aspirational reasons, as discussed in Chapter Five.

For some participants, diversification offered an opportunity to remain within the sex industry while no longer selling sex, or possibly only retaining a few regular customers. Gradually moving into a new area of work might be seen not only as an entrepreneurial venture, but also compares with Sanders' (2007a) category of "natural progression" discussed earlier. Examples include three participants in their late forties/early fifties, who were starting to plan for retirement and reducing their clientele. Two participants had moved from direct sex work into reception work in parlours. Leon and Alex both considered moving into an area of work offering support to sex workers, such as sexual health education. In some instances progression into other areas might be considered comparable to the "portfolio" work becoming a feature of contemporary labour markets (Kalleberg, 2000). While portfolio work tends to be associated with career advancement, the holding of diverse jobs can also

relate to the precarious “poor work” undertaken by those with limited opportunities (MacDonald, 2009). To encompass the diverse trajectories in sex work and other sectors, a categorisation of “multiple” transitions might be more appropriate.

A final category of longer-term occupants is those who undertake the work primarily because they enjoy it. For instance, Elena commented: ‘I can’t see why I would stop. Because...what’s not to like?’. Verity wished to continue as long as she was able, because she enjoyed the sex and other aspects of her job. This, smaller group, might be considered “enthusiasts”, although the financial benefits may also be a primary consideration.

#### **6.4.4 Developing a typology of transitions**

The discussion above indicates that there is a wide variety of trajectories within and from sex work. Table 6.2 below outlines a typology of destinations, which may be seen as complementary to the categories of exiting developed by Sanders (2007a), but which also distinguishes between short-term and longer-term careers and considers patterns of remaining within as well as leaving the sex industry. Within broad categories related to the time spent in sex work are sub-categories linked to aspirations and reasons for undertaking the work. Some sub-categories may overlap: as with other jobs, people may change their attitude to their work during their lifetime and may sometimes leave sooner than anticipated; enthusiasts may engage in the sex industry part-time while also working in others sectors; self-employed “settlers” may become entrepreneurs. External factors such as punitive law enforcement policies may also impinge on sex workers’ ability to determine future directions and thus their capacity to exercise agency in career planning may sometimes be compromised. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.



**Table 6.2: Transitions within and from sex work**

<b>Career pattern</b>	<b>Related to aspirations/ opportunities</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Interim pathways	Instrumentalist/ planned transition	Specific projects e.g. funding study, paying off debt, childrearing
	Occupants	Sex work as pragmatic option while considering further options, reacting to circumstances
Multiple transitions	Shifting careers	Moving between different sectors or status, reactive or undecided
	Planned return	Considered return, often linked to progression to more autonomous working style
	Parallel pathways	Sex work alongside work in other sectors
Longer-term careers	Settlers	Lack of preferable alternatives, content with status, responding to external constraints
	Entrepreneurs	Developing business within direct sex work and/or peripheral ventures
	Enthusiasts	Enjoyment of the work

## 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter confirms the diverse motivations for entry into and attitudes towards sex work, with a combination of push and pull factors often being presented as reasons for involvement. While this is a study of adults in sex work, some female and male participants became involved while young and their comparative vulnerability was evident at times. Different attitudes to sex work also reflect initial reasons for engaging, changes in individual circumstances over time and the extent to which workers develop skills that may take them in different directions. Comparative agency depends not only on structural constraints or opportunities, but also individual transitions, aspirations, age, experience, resilience and coping strategies. People's life options and attitudes to sex work may change over time. The diversity in approaches to the job may be seen as comparable to workers in other sectors, although there remain some key differences between sex work and other occupations, particularly the social stigma and secrecy associated with sex work. External constraints, therefore, impinge on individuals' agency at all stages, influencing their transitions into and out of sex work, their working

experience and relative job satisfaction. These were particularly evident in relation to initial involvement in sex work and the diminishing labour market options available to young people and adults, most notably those with low levels of skills/qualifications or fractured educational trajectories. The gendering of broader labour market options, the unequal balance of domestic labour and the greater availability of brothel work for women can all be seen to contribute to gendered pathways into the sex industry. There are also internal factors within the industry which impact upon the relative agency experienced by sex workers in different settings, as outlined in Chapter Five and developed in this chapter. Nonetheless if, as Giddens (1987) argues, a measure of human agency is that the individual could have acted otherwise, albeit in the face of limited opportunities, then this was reflected in the stories of participants in this study. Even when faced with few options, they weighed these up and concluded that sex work, while not necessarily being an ideal choice, was nonetheless preferable to the alternatives available to them.

As with many occupations with a customer interface, enjoyment of the job depends on the balance of pleasant to unpleasant customers and when the latter exceeds the former, then job satisfaction is likely to be diminished. There may be degrees of difference in job enjoyment according to the type of setting, location and times of day, but there is also an extent to which sex workers can exercise control and use their skills to change a situation, and their ability to draw on these qualities also relates to their comparative job satisfaction. The factors contributing to job satisfaction did not appear to be divided along gendered lines, with social interaction being a key feature for most participants and factors such as sexual enjoyment also being mentioned by both male and female participants. The expectation of respect was also central for the majority of participants. As with employment more broadly, job satisfaction is not always consistent and the features contributing to a positive experience at times can also detract from enjoyment of the job at others, depending on how the worker is feeling at the time. The interviews with participants confirmed findings from other studies that a key distinction related to job satisfaction in sex work compared with mainstream sectors is the impact of social stigma. This will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter Seven: Labour processes and skills in sex work**

### **7.1 *Introduction***

There has been relatively little research into the skills sex workers draw upon for components of their work in different settings and the qualities required to undertake their work effectively. While some studies have compared labour processes and skills requirements within street-based and indoor-based settings (e.g. Lever and Dolnick, 2000; Bernstein, 2007a), few consider distinctions between different forms of indoor labour and this was an important focus of the current study. Male sex workers have tended to be excluded from analyses of labour, with a few exceptions such as Walby's (2012) study and to date there have been no studies comparing the sexual labour of female and male sex workers.

Brewis and Linstead (2000c) have observed that the job of the sex worker involves a range of skills comparable to those in many other industries, such as social and customer service skills, with business-related skills also important for those who make a professional career in sex work. Sometimes skills are drawn from prior experience in other occupations and they are also obtained through learning on the job. Sanders (2005a) discusses "skills talk" employed by sex workers relating to their knowledge of the industry and safety mechanisms undertaken, which they pass on to others. Brents et al. (2010) note that brothel workers perform aesthetic labour and use bodily, caring and emotional skills, as well as time management, in their work. As outlined in Chapter Five in the current study, the entrepreneurial aspect of independent sex work can involve a wider range of skills than managed work, with business management and organisation forming part of the role. Some services incorporate a therapeutic or holistic element, depending on the sex worker's expertise and training (Brents and Jackson, 2013).

While a central component of much sex work is embodied labour, authors such as Lever and Dolnick (2000) have drawn on the theories of Hochschild

(1983) to identify the emotional labour involved and some (e.g. Sanders, 2005b) have compared aspects of sex work with the emotion management required in mainstream service sector occupations such as health and social care or hospitality work. Nonetheless, there are certain factors which currently differentiate sex work from other occupations, including the legal, policy and cultural context and the social stigma attached to the work (O'Neill, 2001; Satz, 2006). The interactive nature of direct sex work also distinguishes it from many other occupations involving bodily labour (Korczynski, 2013). As Hardy (2013) argues, however, while the intercorporeality in direct sex work essentially implicates the worker's body and person, this does not preclude consideration of sex work as a form of labour.

This chapter considers the types of labour and skills in different categories of indoor sex work and makes comparisons with other forms of work, particularly in the service sector. It discusses the way sex workers manage different identities, set out the contract and negotiate the risks associated with their work. Participants in the current study clearly saw what they did as paid work, sometimes normalising it through making comparisons with other occupations, particularly in terms of the working conditions and variety of skills involved. This applied not only to those in independent or agency sex work, but also workers in brothels. Where participants felt that sex work differed from other jobs was in relation to the legal barriers and social stigma they encountered, which also sometimes challenged their perception that what they were doing was "real" work. The physical and emotional intimacy involved in sex work also required intense boundary-setting, without the professional support provided in many other occupations involving close bodily or one-to-one contact. Nonetheless, despite certain distinguishing factors, sex work can have similar diversity, in terms of the balance of labour, levels of responsibility and degrees of skill, to work in other service sector occupations.

The current study reveals distinctions between types of labour and degrees of intimacy in different indoor settings, with more protracted encounters in independent or agency sex work/escorting often involving a greater degree of emotional labour, particularly the "deep" acting discussed in Chapter Three.

There are also degrees of emotional labour within each setting relating to the approach and circumstances of individual workers, as well as clients' expectations. This diversity points to a continuum of intimate relations, which may not necessarily be demarcated according to gender. Workers' ability to control their labour, as well as managing risk and the contract with clients, also relates to their relative agency in their personal and working lives.

## **7.2 *Intimate labour: embodied and emotional labour***

Cultural, socio-economic and demographic changes in Western societies have led to a growth in demand for personal and care services, with increasing commodification of intimate labour which was once provided on an unwaged basis in the home (McDowell, 2009). Despite the proliferation of service sector work focusing on the human body, there has been relatively little theoretical attention given to the processes involved in body work (Cohen et al., 2013). The labour market in body work displays a degree of segregation according to factors such as class and gender, which may be seen as similar to occupational segregation in the wider service economy (Wolkowitz, 2002). In this respect, although sex work differs from most other intimate service interactions because the sex worker's body is as much a focus of the exchange as that of the client, comparisons may nonetheless be drawn between the wider service industry and sex work, where the balance of bodily and emotional labour and the skills involved in the work vary according to the setting. The current research adds to previous studies through demonstrating diversity in labour requirements within indoor sectors, according not only to the type of setting, but also the client base and personal circumstances of sex workers. Participants in brothels and independent/agency settings offered a range of services, from specific sexual acts to more intimate exchanges, but participants also attached different meanings to their work, depending on their age and individual situation as well as the work setting. These factors are also relevant when considering the role of agency in the labour process.

Brents and Jackson (2013) argue that sexual labour in indoor sex work involves not only body work but also interpreting clients' emotional cues in order to manage transactions. Sexual labour thus incorporates different processes, including emotional labour as well as physical/bodily interactions. They note that sex workers, as with others involved in "dirty" or stigmatised body work, may resist negative constructions of bodily labour and emphasise the other skills involved in providing a service. While embodied sexual labour involving mutual touch was clearly a central part of most transactions in the current study, participants tended to accentuate the emotional aspect of their work when discussing labour processes. Nonetheless, 18 participants in different settings also referred to the sexual skills required in their work, which they tended to see as part of a "package" of erotic skills, which included verbal as well as bodily communication. For example, Kieran described the need to listen not only 'with your ears, but listen with your body as well to what that person is requiring sexually'. Kylie commented that in parlour work you needed 'good social skills' as well as being good at sex. As Ruby observed, there was also a psychological aspect to the job, which might sometimes involve dealing with problems such as premature ejaculation, while still making sure that clients experienced 'a good time'.

Nearly all participants preferred an encounter which combined social interaction and emotional labour with sexual relations, although the balance between these varied according to the sector. In addition to sexual skills, certain qualities were seen by participants as essential across settings, particularly what might be described broadly as "social skills", including conversation and social interaction with customers, identified by 34 participants. These were closely followed by customer awareness and customer service skills (noted by 29 participants), which included being able to put customers at ease and meet their requirements, without necessarily compromising the worker's rules or principles. Participants compared this with the skills required in customer service or retail occupations. As Eva commented, 'I guess it's like... you've just got to be pleasant all the time, without being a pushover. So in that way it's a bit like being in sales'.

### 7.2.1 Degrees of intimate labour in different settings

The interviews demonstrated diversity amongst managed premises, with “walk-ups” being seen as more demanding in terms of physical effort and bodily labour. While no participants worked in walk-ups at the time of interview, three had worked in them for a short time when they were younger. As Alexa noted of her early days in walk-ups in London, appointment lengths started at 10 minutes: ‘So it was quick, it was in out, in out, in out. Like a cattle market really’. As she also observed, many clients would be drunk, which could lead to arguments. Tania, now an independent escort, also described similar experiences in some managed flats where she had worked when younger, where clients ‘come to get their money’s worth. They come in there, they’ve paid their entrance... they’ve saved up, and they’re gonna shag you from the minute they walk in until the minute they leave’. In these settings, the potential for more creative physical or emotional labour and job satisfaction appeared to be limited, although sex workers might be required to exercise a degree of emotional control in order to calm potentially confrontational situations with clients, which could be demanding and sometimes stressful.

These experiences were not widely reflected amongst participants based in managed settings, however, and more than half commented that the social interaction with clients formed an enjoyable element of their work. This also related to their work setting at the time of interview and, as discussed in earlier chapters, participants had sometimes changed establishments or times of working in order to secure more favourable conditions. Although the physical labour in managed settings might be intensive because of the generally shorter appointment lengths and higher numbers of clients, there were also variations amongst workplaces. For example, Sasha commented that what she described as a more ‘gladiatorial’ style of working in managed flats allowed her to be creative with the physical aspects of the encounter, including trying out new sexual techniques, which contributed to her job satisfaction. Participants such as Rebecca, who worked in a small managed flat, and Tania, who had previously worked in similar settings, also noted the opportunity for more extended encounters which required greater emotional

intimacy. Sasha observed that clients might have different needs at different times: 'there are times in people's lives where they need... intimacy, and sometimes they just need sex'.

Experiences varied not only according to the type of setting, but also by geographical location. While Tania's experience of flats in locations near to London was more negative, Rebecca found that clients in the London City flat where she worked generally treated her with respect. Alexa also compared her current working flat in a small Midlands city, where she felt the clients were much friendlier and 'more laid back', with the walk-ups and larger saunas/parlours in London and other large cities where she had worked previously, where the environment was more stressful.

Although there was some diversity within as well as between sub-sectors of the indoor sex industry, the interview data showed that more protracted intimate encounters were possible in escorting and independent sex work, because workers were able to determine the length of appointments and generally opted for longer transactions. In the encounter provided by independent sex workers or escorts, interactive sexual labour tended to be included within a more extended and more emotionally intimate interaction, whereas in managed settings specific acts were generally more demarcated, particularly according to price and appointment time. Although some parlours or working flats offered a "mini" girlfriend experience as part of their services, because of the generally fixed time limits this tended to be more delineated than in escorting/independent sex work. Sasha, who had opted to move from escorting to managed work, compared the two settings, observing that the comparatively limited nature of the encounter within managed flats gave her greater ability to manage its direction, compared with the less structured environment of escorting. While there was also emotional labour involved in some managed settings, she described the transaction as more 'formulaic' than the relatively fluid encounter in escorting:

...escorting it's a minimum of an hour, erm, for most agencies, minimum two hours for some...and in flats it's half an hour, or it's 20 minute quickies



or whatever.....and so I think in that short space you can control the situation a lot more easily as well, you can kind of create an experience that has a beginning, a middle and an end....The hour [in escorting] is a lot more sort of free-fall...you get a lot more personally involved.

Nonetheless, within managed as well as independent settings, participants retained some regular clients, with whom they sometimes developed more affectionate relationships. As the interview data demonstrated, there were also varied degrees of intimacy in agency escorting or independent sex work. Within these settings, encounters might encompass those which focused primarily on sexual activities, social engagements which also included dinner and conversation and intense one-to-one interactions involving a more reciprocal intimate exchange. As observed in Chapter Five, an encounter which included emotional as well as sexual intimacy encouraged clients to return to the same worker, so the use of emotional labour could also be seen as part of a marketing strategy. While the social interaction contributed to job satisfaction for many participants, therefore, there was also on occasion an element of what Goffman (1959) has termed “cynical” performance.

The role of the escort or independent sex worker differed not only according to context and clients’ expectations, but also the type of service provided. Brents and Jackson (2013) have argued that the services offered by sex workers vary according to the way in which they conceptualise their role, with holistic workers tending to view their work as involving mutual exchange. In the current study, nine independent participants emphasised the therapeutic aspect of their work. In five cases, they had prior experience of work in caring professions outside the sex industry, including nursing, therapeutic massage and care work. Holistic practitioners such as Martin and Jemma spoke of the greater intimacy and emotional intensity involved in many encounters. Martin compared his current work as a psychosexual sex worker, where he emphasised the mutual emotional connection involved, with his early experiences in agency escorting and brothel work: ‘it was always an act then, so...I was acting for them. Whereas now it’s a lot more genuine...when I’m with a client’. Jemma described the range of skills and qualities involved in

providing a professional holistic service. She commented that the combination of emotional and interactive sexual labour was one of the elements of the job she enjoyed most and which enabled her to 'grow' and learn from her work:

I'd say empathy, erm, really good listening skills, erm, really non-judgemental, kind, sort of open attitude...warmth. Erm, being a really good conversationalist and being able to put people at ease very easily... and then of course very good sexual skills as well, and the ability to take charge of a situation and read it, and be able to read people if they are a bit shy, or....whatever they want. And also be sexually open-minded and comfortable with yourself. And other people's sexuality. Which is a really interesting thing, I don't know, it's so different....for each person.... So I like being able to encourage that, and find out what makes someone tick.

The potential for greater emotional involvement in these more protracted transactions might also require more intensive consideration of boundaries, as discussed later in this chapter. The balance of physical and emotional labour, the length of appointments and the more structured environment of brothels compared with independent sex work point to a continuum of both physical and emotional labour. Nonetheless, as Wolkowitz (2002) observes, there is a danger of creating a dualism through separating bodily from emotional labour and in practice the two are often interlinked.

### **7.2.2 Emotional labour and gender**

Much of the literature on emotional labour focuses on its impact on female workers. This may be in part because this form of labour is seen to be required primarily in service sector work, where female workers predominate (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). Emotional labour has also been associated with the commodification of stereotypically feminine attributes. Warhurst and Nickson (2009) observe that, as men increasingly enter interactive service work, they are also required to perform aesthetic and sexualised labour. They therefore suggest the need to re-consider the gendering of sexualised work.

Similarly, studies of sex work and emotional labour have tended to concentrate on female sex workers, with a few exceptions. Browne and Minichiello (1995), in their study of male sex workers in varied work settings, found they separated work and personal sex, partly through defining work sex as “not real sex”, which is similar to the findings from some studies of female sex workers, such as that by Oerton and Phoenix (2001). Smith, Grov and Seal (2008) also note that male sex workers using the Internet devise strategies to manage their emotional labour and differentiate their professional and personal lives, which can include reserving specific sexual acts for their personal relationships. Walby (2012) observes that some claims about male sex work may also be based on stereotypes of male sexuality, with assumptions sometimes being made that the emotional requirements for male sex workers are less than for their female counterparts because of the gendered nature of the role. Nonetheless, degrees of emotional labour may vary for men and women according to the type and level of work undertaken, as well as the expectations of clients. Koken et al. (2004) note that around a third of participants in their study of male Internet sex workers viewed themselves as providing an “altruistic” service to clients in need, which they saw as bearing similarities to the role of workers in other caring professions such as nursing or therapy. Walby’s (2012) study of male Internet sex workers found diverse sexual experiences and degrees of intimacy with clients. He argues that the boundaries between “real” and “feigned” emotions for male Internet workers are more porous than often presented in studies relating to female sex workers. As he acknowledges, however, some of the literature relating to emotional labour and the use of sexual “scripts” by female sex workers may be drawn from studies of specific sub-samples of the female sex working population and may not apply equally to all settings or types of encounter.

The data from the current study, derived from the same interview schedule for all participants, show that male, female and transgender independent sex workers often aimed to provide an interaction which made clients feel comfortable, valued and desirable, which incorporated considerable effort and skill. While this might sometimes involve the “surface acting” discussed in Chapter Three, participants also wanted the experience to be rewarding for

themselves, not only in terms of professional pride in giving a “good” service, but also their own enjoyment of the interaction. “Deep acting”, which required a more empathetic response resulting in an appearance of authenticity, was seen to be associated not only with greater customer satisfaction, but also increased job satisfaction for the worker, as the quotes below exemplify:

I mean I’m quite proud of what I do, erm it’s intimate, it’s very intimate, it involves kissing and, erm, just that sort of closeness that I suppose some guys just can’t have. Which is hard, because it’s acting on my part....but to them it is, they really are with a girlfriend. (Angel, transgender escort)

I don’t like it to feel...cold. ‘Cause I’m a very sort of warm person and everything. And...I wouldn’t want to feel used, I’d want to feel like it was a nice transaction. And the way that I sort of see it is like...that I’m kind of a bit like a therapist, in a way. Or not even a therapist...like I would go and get a reflexology session, or a massage session or something, to treat myself. I see it as...I’m like that, but they, erm, are coming to me for their relaxation. Erm, and they don’t have to worry about it, so they get what they need, which is a sexual relief, and release. (Elena, female escort)

...the kind of relationship that I establish with my clients is very...it’s pretty much what they call the Boyfriend Experience, because I like to connect with the person I’m with....you know, to break this distance and be.....you know, feel comfortable and make the other person feel comfortable and then go with the flow. (Demetrio, male escort)

The findings from the current study indicate that forms of emotional labour vary according to work context, type of work and sex workers’ personal circumstances. Workers may also perform different types of emotional labour within the same transaction, according to the nature of the encounter and the way in which they shape their response. These factors are not reflective of gender differences *per se*, but rather the way in which different circumstances influence how workers view and perform emotional labour. It may be useful, therefore, to view professional sex in the context of Zelizer’s suggested

continuum from intimate to impersonal relations in which 'both individual relations and social settings vary significantly' (Zelizer, 2005: 307).

### **7.3 *Managing identities: balancing commercial and non-commercial lives***

The role of emotional labour and the skills involved in managing identities in intimate work has been discussed by a number of theorists. For example, Browne and Minichiello (1995), Brewis and Linstead (2000b), Oerton and Phoenix (2001) and Sanders (2002; 2005a) have commented on the mechanisms used by sex workers to differentiate between commercial and personal sex. Sanders (2005a) concludes that sex workers perform both surface acting and deep emotion work in their role, which enables them to separate out private and commercial emotions. Participants in the current study outlined similar strategies to maintain boundaries between identities, with no clear distinction according to gender. Most did not disclose their real name to clients, but used a working name, which helped to separate the two identities, particularly as they tended to associate a different persona with the working name, sometimes speaking in the third person when they discussed their working self. For example, Alex commented, 'as 'Adam' I tend to exaggerate how much fun I have outside of work. As for balance, well when I'm alone I'm Alex. Out there I'm Adam'. Ruby also observed that she maintained very strict boundaries between her personal and working self:

...the working girl is Lily and people come and see Lily, and it's Lily that gets these ridiculous extravagant compliments, and flowers and champagne, and chocolates. The real me doesn't get treated nearly so well. The real me is lucky to get half a lager and, you know, a night watching a dance in a pub. Lily leads a *fabulous* life compared to me! I wish I'd been Lily sooner....But I do draw a very distinct line between what she does and what I do. And, erm, the money that Lily earns gets ring-fenced. So it's a business, all of the money that Lily earns goes into my account, goes into my tax return, and gets fully accounted for.

For some, the costume they wore during working hours was also a means of differentiating between identities. Female sex workers commented on how they associated their make-up with a mask that helped to separate the two identities. Elena spoke of the difference between her working self and what she described as 'the full me': '...you're always dressing up, and you're always putting on...it's like you've got a mask when you go into the bookings...you know, you're not...just you at your worst'. Many participants likened their working self to that of an actor. For example, Demetrio commented that 'your professional life is based on character and fantasy, you know, so I think that helps ...to separate this'. Chris also spoke of how he differentiated the two identities:

...it's like being an actor, you know, one day I'm Daniel, and I'm very different to how I am if I'm Chris. And I wear a sort of uniform, I wear different clothes when I go out to do escorting or do sex work. So I have a complete change of personality if you like, it becomes like an act.

While much emotional labour in sex work appeared to relate to creating an experience for clients that approximated a non-commercial intimate encounter, sometimes clients wanted workers to take part in specific role play. Some participants did not offer this service because they did not see it as forming part of their skills repertoire. Eleven independent participants stated they had engaged in role play, although some noted specific limits: for example, Angel commented that 'I don't do nuns on religious grounds'. Nonetheless, while participants often felt able to be selective about the roles they would perform and enjoyed this aspect of their work, there were occasions when dealing with these types of request could be stressful. While there was an element of acting involved in much sex work, as described above, the difference between the general enactment of the "girlfriend" role and specific role play was that more complicated scenarios were usually at the behest of the client, and two female participants stated that they had sometimes engaged in role play where they felt less comfortable. For instance, Tania commented that some clients in the parlours where she had worked earlier in her career had 'come in with a script, and...some of them wanted you to be like their wives, daughter or their

step-daughter'. Karen described some situations where 'you've got to perform in a submissive role', which she felt diminished her control and sense of self-respect. The ability to turn down such requests raises the question of the degree of agency for the worker in these instances.

Sanders (2005b) and Abel (2011) have noted that the manufactured identity constructed by some sex workers also functions as a strategy to insulate themselves from the stresses of selling sexual services and helps to protect their personal life from intrusion. These tactics are not unique to sex work, however: studies of other occupations also demonstrate the ways in which workers create mechanisms for separating and managing different identities. For example, Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2006) discuss the identity work performed by priests in order to manage different demands and tensions emanating from their social and personal lives. Participants in the current study generally saw the distinction they made between their working and private lives as indicative of their professionalism, as well as a means of managing their emotional health. Twelve participants commented on the need to be sufficiently detached from the work or, as Simona noted, 'you need to be really sorted in your head'. This was seen as an important attribute because, as discussed in Chapter Six, and as authors such as Vanwesenbeeck (2005) and Petro (2010) have observed, the prolonged intimacy involved in much sex work can be stressful as well as rewarding.

Spatial boundaries may also be important, particularly for workers taking in-calls. For instance, Jessica had separate working spaces in her home, with distinct furniture, bedding and crockery, which meant that she could differentiate between her personal and working life and possessions. Not all workers were able to maintain separate spaces, however, and Carla pointed to times when she felt that clients were crossing boundaries because of this:

...nowadays I don't work from home any more, just because, erm, I couldn't put things like photos up of my family, everything with my real name on I had to hide... Little things that you take for granted you have to be so careful with. Post, you have someone saying 'I saw this name on a letter

downstairs, is that you?'. And you just think 'come on guys, you know, this is my house. Please don't spy on me'.

An important element of boundary-separation for some sex workers, as noted by Sanders (2005b) is delimiting specific sexual acts, types of sexual behaviour or areas of the body. Sanders (2002; 2005b) argues that condom use represents not only a sexual health precaution but also enables sex workers to make psychological distinctions between commercial and private sex. Participants in the current study emphasised the dangers to sexual health of unprotected sex with clients, but some also stated that they did not use a condom for sex with regular partners. Brewis and Linstead (2000b) cite studies which have found that female sex workers often reserve what they see as more personal acts, such as kissing, for their private intimate relationships. In the current study, however, nearly all participants offered kissing at their discretion and only one, Tulisa, a parlour worker, specifically did not allow kissing, because 'obviously that's something you do with your partner, not like with a customer'. If customers persisted in trying to kiss her, she would terminate the appointment. For others, however, the distinction may be more a matter of maintaining an attitudinal separation between identities. For example, Jem spoke of how she differentiated working sex from sex with her husband:

It is the part most "outsiders" struggle to get their head around, that it is just a job. The problem is the subject of sex itself ... a lot of people still see sex as something sacred and special. It's only sacred and special when being done with someone sacred and special, sex with my husband is very, very different to sex with a client.

In some cases clients became emotionally attached to workers in both independent and managed settings, which was viewed by participants as a form of transgression of boundaries. Ten participants referred to an occasional need to reinforce boundaries with clients in this respect, usually by reacting firmly but diplomatically to dissuade them. While they were generally able to address the situation, in a small number of instances participants felt it



necessary to terminate the relationship. For example, while Jemma found that most clients understood the boundaries when she had explained them, one client had persisted in wanting to see her outside the commercial setting and she finally had to tell him bluntly: 'I'm not your friend, I'm not your girlfriend, I am nothing, I am a service provider to you. I don't call my hairdresser to hang out with for coffee afterwards'. Jake commented that 'I've had the odd few that've like called and called, like non-stop afterwards. Erm, you can tell they've fallen in love or somethin' like that. So I've had to tell them ...if they do that I can't see them again'. While most participants were clear about their own boundaries, there were times when such attachments could become emotionally taxing.

While they distinguished between their working and private identities, participants sometimes attached a degree of emotional value to transactions with certain clients, which also made the transaction meaningful to them. For example, Cleo was very clear about setting boundaries between her personal and working life, but at the same time maintained closer social and emotional ties with some regular clients, while keeping these within the parameters of the professional relationship. This might be compared with the way in which workers in caring professions may also build emotional attachments to their clients within the working context (e.g. Bolton, 2000; Stacey, 2005). It also relates to the "bounded authenticity" in contemporary sexual commerce described by Bernstein (2007a: 105), where 'emotional authenticity is incorporated explicitly into the economic contract'. Nonetheless, there may be instances when intimacy between sex worker and client becomes less delimited. While eight participants in managed settings in the current study and 22 in escorting/independent sex work stated that they maintained a clear separation between their working and private life, seven described occasions when they had transgressed their own boundaries and developed a more emotionally intimate relationship with a client that went beyond the commercial environment, particularly if they did not have a regular sexual relationship outside work. With one exception, these participants (male and female) worked independently. All these participants commented that they found blurring their own boundaries presented challenges for both their working and

personal relationships and nearly all had not repeated the experience. Because sex work is in the informal sector, there is no professional guidance or support for dealing with emotional attachments between workers and clients, as there is in other professions involving close one-to-one emotional or physical contact such as counselling or therapeutic massage, and sex workers are reliant on their own resources, or sometimes support from colleagues.

The ways in which sex workers managed different identities also related to the extent to which they kept their working life secret from others. Eleven participants stated that they endeavoured to be open about their sex work. For example, Jessica made a point of disclosing her working status to most people who asked, and her bank and mortgage advisor were aware of her occupation. In her view:

...I think if you behave as if you're doing something wrong then you're basically saying to people 'yes I should be ashamed of this'. If you don't.....if you act like you're just doing something perfectly ordinary most people treat you like you're doin' something perfectly ordinary.

Fourteen disclosed their status selectively to some family members or friends but not to others, and 12 kept their sex working a secret from friends and family, with the possible exception of one or two very close friends in some cases. The decision about whether to disclose had to be made on many occasions: each time a sex worker met someone new, they had to decide whether it was safe to reveal their working identity, even if they were generally open about their status. As Selena noted, once you have taken that decision 'You can't un-tell someone, can you?' and thus each situation needed to be considered carefully. Some migrant workers were cautious about disclosing their occupation because of concerns about their legal status in the UK. For example, although escorting is legal, Eva felt that 'my status in this country makes it a bit dubious'.

Degrees of agency in sex work may thus relate also to the extent to which workers feel able to be open about their working identity. Sanders (2002) has

noted that the mechanisms sex workers use to distance themselves from their work are partly a response to the way in which sex work is associated with stigma. As Koken et al. (2004) observe, the emotional effects of maintaining a secret identity are significant for male, as well as female escorts. Thus acceptance of occupational status is an important consideration in determining job satisfaction. As Jessica commented above, being comfortable with your working status and confident of disclosing it to others makes a statement to the outside world that you view yourself as a legitimate worker. In doing so, sex workers may also be able to exercise more autonomy over their work-life boundaries, because they do not have to put in place additional layers of organisation and self-management to avoid exposure of their hidden identity. Nonetheless, this can present a high risk because of the potential negative response of others, and thus such openness is not currently seen as possible by many sex workers.

#### **7.4 *Managing risk***

Part of the labour process in sex work involves anticipating and managing risk and the way in which sex workers approach this is also indicative of degrees of agency. There is a considerable literature on the risks involved in sex work, relating primarily to street-based work, although some studies also consider the potential dangers faced by those working in indoor settings and the way in which those workers manage risk (e.g. Sanders, 2004a; 2005a; Cunningham and Kendall, 2011). The management of risk in sex work and participants' attitudes to risk also need to be set in the context of the wider sociology of risk and studies on how workers approach and address occupational hazards. Lupton (2006) notes that in contemporary sociological perspectives, notions of risk and responses to risk are influenced by social and cultural norms, as well as individual knowledge and community conceptualisations of risk and danger. Medical and public health discourses also inform the way in which risks to health are constructed and categorised. Stigma is attached to groups deemed to pose risks to society, including deviant "others" seen as responsible for

dangers to sexual health, such as gay men or people with many sexual partners, or, indeed, sex workers (Lupton, 2006; Scambler and Paoli, 2008).

Higher levels of risk are attached to certain occupations: for example, health professionals, or people working in protective service occupations, such as prison officers tend to have a greater risk of violence at work (Packham, 2011). Workers in the night-time economy, such as bouncers, may face risk of violence due to having to manage groups of party-goers, who may often be intoxicated (McDowell, 2009). As Fox (1998) observes, workers in hazardous environments make calculated choices in order to balance the degree of risk against the freedom to undertake the work in a way that is most convenient or satisfying to them, based on their assessment of levels of risk according to their knowledge. Similarly, sex workers may make risk decisions on the basis of their awareness of occupational hazards and threats, and not only take steps to guard themselves against potential dangers, but also weigh up the likelihood of risk against work requirements and conditions for job satisfaction. Sex workers need to be vigilant with respect to various risks associated with their work, which include the danger of violence often experienced by stigmatised groups, or by lone workers, transgression by clients of boundaries, or more serious breaches of contract, and there are degrees to which they are able to keep themselves safe. Although, as discussed in Chapter Two, indoor-based sex workers are less likely than street-based workers to be exposed to violence in their work, there are still risks to negotiate, including from people attempting to rob premises or violent individuals posing as clients. Sanders (2004a) identifies three main areas of potential risk to sex workers: health, physical and emotional, including the emotional health associated with managing identities. Participants in the current study were generally aware of the potential risks associated with their work and took precautions to protect themselves in order to reduce possible dangers. Management of risk related to anticipation of potential difficulties, putting in place precautions to avert these problems as far as possible and dealing with situations in which the worker was placed at risk. There are also temporal dimensions to risk and it is notable that some participants in the current study preferred to work in the day-time rather than late at night.

#### 7.4.1 Safety precautions and screening procedures

In the current study, in brothel settings, the receptionist or manager usually undertook initial vetting of clients, although some premises were seen as more safety-aware than others. Establishments tended to have strict rules, not only about conduct and time-keeping of workers, but also in relation to their safety. As Rebecca noted of the flat where she worked, the receptionist made security checks over the telephone before agreeing to appointments. Many premises also had a peephole at the door and, in some instances, a CCTV system, enabling them to monitor visitors before they were admitted. Agencies usually undertook initial screening of clients, but again this varied. Most had a system for workers to call in before and after appointments, but from participants' comments, some appeared to undertake more safety checks than others.

Independent workers supervised all their safety procedures and risk assessments, albeit sometimes to varying degrees. Participants discussed the considerable effort and skills involved in screening clients, which included not simply relying on emails, but engaging them in conversation on the phone initially, in order to assess the questions they asked and the way in which they talked or behaved. This process also involved asking questions of callers, such as whether they wanted the appointment just for themselves or whether they were with others. Through doing an initial screening or vetting of clients in this manner, workers felt they could reduce the dangers associated with their work. Jem described it as 'trusting my gut instinct and staying sensible at all times'. Louisa stated that 'if I don't like the sound of them on the phone, I won't see them...because if they sound odd, they generally are'. Jodie noted that, although many of the clients she rejected may not be a threat: 'I'd rather....throw away 90 per cent of that stuff to avoid the one time when I'm in a very dangerous situation'. For Ruby:

I just have a rule that if *anything* sets off what I call my Spidey sense, if I'm talking to someone and anything sounds the slightest bit off, I just cancel. I just won't see them...this is a financial decision [to do escorting], but *nothing* is worth my peace of mind.

Participants thus tended to prioritise their safety over financial gain, although again, as some noted, this might vary according to the experience, skills and economic needs of individuals. Once a decision was made to accept an appointment, there were various safety precautions taken by independent sex workers or agency escorts. Safety protocols for participants taking in-calls included giving new clients directions to their location rather than their full address. One worker had panic buttons in her house, and some kept a charged spare mobile in a safe place to use if necessary. For outcalls, procedures included leaving details of location and expected length of appointment with a “safety buddy” and calling or texting them before and after each appointment. A key issue for participants in relation to risk was also avoiding taking drugs or drinking to a point at which they were not in control. Safety precautions thus tended to relate to exercising vigilance with regard to possible dangers and not taking unnecessary risks, which might be compared to the situation in which a lone worker in other sectors, such as a researcher conducting fieldwork, may sometimes find her- or himself.

For people working together, there was also ‘safety in numbers’, as Angel, an escort working co-operatively with her partner, commented. Kylie and Yulia both felt that the parlours they worked in were safer than either street-based work or lone escorting, because of the presence of others as well as the security mechanisms such as CCTV. In some brothels there was also a security guard, which increased workers’ feeling of safety. Rachel, who worked in a co-operative arrangement, noted that:

I think if you’ve got people working from the same place then yeah, it’s.... about... having someone to share. Erm.....the booking that turns up and you’re worried that actually, the guy over the road that you’ve just seen pull up, with three mates, on his phone, is the person you’re chatting to on the other end of the phone that you’re about to give the door number to. It’s those kinds of things that become....really obviously apparent as being why people wanna work together.

Nonetheless, as is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Eight, even collective working can create problems with sex workers' legal status. The current laws may thus increase risks to sex workers, potentially leaving them more vulnerable to dangerous individuals who may be aware of their lack of legal protection.

Most independent or agency participants in the current study (25 participants) stated that they were prepared to turn down potential business if they felt at all concerned about their safety. As some participants noted, however, the extent to which individual sex workers were prepared to put themselves at risk depended on their personal situation. If someone was financially vulnerable then, as Jodie commented, workers may be more likely to ignore their instincts or the risk assessments that others might put in place: 'there's the desperation and those dynamics can impact on safety considerations'. While indoor working may incur less risk than working on the street, therefore, the extent to which workers are able to protect themselves against potential dangers again relates to their personal circumstances and the degree of agency they can exercise in the decisions they make.

#### **7.4.2 Attitudes to risk: health and sexual health**

While some health care occupations may carry a risk of blood-borne infections such as HIV, the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) through multiple sexual partners differentiates direct sex work from other forms of labour. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that awareness of safer sex practices has increased amongst male and female sex workers, resulting in lower risk of STIs through commercial sexual activities (Connell and Hart, 2003; Ward et al., 2004). Within the current study, calculation of risk in terms of sexual health varied according to participants' personal and financial circumstances and levels of awareness of the issues, although certain sex acts posing a risk to sexual health were seen as out of bounds by all participants. Only one independent participant offered unprotected sex 'at my discretion' to certain trusted clients, but she was the exception, and all other participants across the

different settings always insisted on using a condom for penetrative sex. Other sexual acts tended to be at the worker's discretion, both for independent/agency workers and also participants in managed premises. Anal sex was off limits for all parlour workers and all but two female independent workers. For those who did include anal sex as part of their services, it was always protected.

Many participants demonstrated considerable awareness of the risks of STIs, possibly because most ensured they had regular visits to sexual health clinics for check-ups. While it was seen as unacceptable to take risks with unprotected penetrative sex, there were differing views on whether oral sex should be protected or unprotected, depending partly on the sexual health advice they accessed and also the worker's personal approach to risk. Certain workers, such as Angel and Ruby, felt that they would lose too much business if they insisted on oral sex with a condom and therefore financial need was a consideration, as well as calculation of the hazards posed to their sexual health. Ruby had researched the potential risks and felt they were sufficiently minimal to provide unprotected oral sex, with certain precautions. This was a risk that she had thus calculated was 'acceptable' to her, provided she undertook safeguards recommended by sexual health agencies:

I *do* do oral without, erm, but I've kind of researched as much as I can about the risks of that. And I don't clean my teeth like for an hour beforehand, so hopefully I've got no cuts in my gums or my teeth are OK. Erm, I kind of feel if there is a risk it's minimal. And it's acceptable to me. I also think if I didn't offer that I would put quite a dent in my business.

Certain participants, such as Elena and Demetrio, had also assessed the potential risks and taken the decision to continue with unprotected oral sex, because they felt that using protection in this context detracted from their job satisfaction. On the other hand, some took the view that any risk, however minimal, was unacceptable and therefore did not provide this service. In the same way that professionals in other occupations incurring potential health risks make informed choices about the levels of risk they are prepared to offset



against the benefits to them, as discussed earlier, sex workers may often make similar decisions. These may sometimes relate to their financial circumstances, however, raising the question of whether they might have made the same decisions under different circumstances.

## **7.5 *Managing the contract***

As Day (2007) and others have observed, while there is no legally binding contract in sex work, workers form agreements with clients that set out the conditions for the sale of sexual services and differentiate between consensual and non-consensual actions in such a way that it is relatively clear when these agreements are breached. There is an implicit contract between the sex worker and client in both managed and independent sex work, although within managed settings a third party undertakes a considerable amount of initial negotiation with clients. Brewis and Linstead (2000a) note that there is less likelihood of the contract being broken in self-owned premises than in other forms of sex work, particularly street-based work. This echoes findings by O'Connell Davidson (1998: 91) in relation to "entrepreneurial" sex workers, where in a sense 'both parties volunteer to enter into the contract, which implies a degree of power and control on both sides'. The way in which sex workers establish and maintain boundaries and handle the interaction with the client, with the potential for blurring or more conscious breaching of boundaries, is also indicative of degrees of agency. Participants in the current study with longer experience of sex work, such as Eva, Jem and Martin, commented that the ability to set and manage boundaries, as well as the propensity of clients to attempt to cross those boundaries, related to the age and experience of the worker as well as the extent to which workers felt able to turn away business.

### **7.5.1 Establishing terms and conditions**

In brothels, as noted in Chapter Five, the terms and conditions were outlined to clients by the receptionist, with specific services agreed in advance of the

appointment, although individual workers were also able to establish their own boundaries concerning additional services they were prepared to offer. Many independent sex workers set out their terms and conditions of booking on their websites, which they expected clients to read. This could help to discourage people who were looking for a different type of experience or service. Arguably, with the opportunity to set out conditions and expectations clearly on independent workers' websites, the terms of the contract are more transparent than was possible prior to the development of the Internet. As discussed in Chapter Five, however, while the Internet may be used to "screen out" time wasters and unwanted clients, prior negotiations in cyberspace may also leave some sex workers vulnerable, as although there is no legal contract as such, they might be interpreted as agreeing to certain acts to which they would not normally consent (Ashford, 2008). Management of the initial enquiry is therefore just one element of contractual negotiations. Participants noted that not all prospective clients read the information on the website and thus they needed to reiterate the terms over the phone and also at the beginning of the appointment.

Payments were generally made in advance to the receptionist in brothels, according to pre-determined rates, although independent workers determined their own arrangements for payment. In most instances, independent participants stressed that payment was agreed in advance of each transaction. This helped to avoid dispute about the amount, or under- or non-payment at the end of the appointment. Jenkins (2009: 152) has observed that some escorts 'feel no more need to demand upfront payment than would any other service-provider' and that to do so would indicate a lack of trust that might then be detrimental to the direction of the client-worker encounter. Nonetheless, eight independent participants in the current study commented that they had learned from certain negative experiences, particularly in the early days of being a sex worker, to put in place stricter conditions and be cautious about payment, except from more regular and trusted clients.

Despite the rates and terms being set out clearly on most websites, some potential clients tried to negotiate these. While participants observed that in

many instances these sorts of inquiries were from ‘timewasters’ who did not intend to purchase services and hence they were not considered clients, some sex workers also felt that this sort of behaviour was associated with the way in which they are stigmatised and not generally respected as workers with rights. Elena observed that she found such attitudes highly offensive and felt that they detracted from her sense of professionalism:

...there’s a lot of guys that ring up asking ‘can you do it for so and so amount?’, trying to get a discount or trying to get, like bartering basically, the way you would barter with ‘oh I’ve got cash and you know, will you take this?’. That really, really annoys me! ‘Cause I just think fair enough if I was a washing machine, or something or whatever, but I’m not. I’m...I’m a human being and I wouldn’t ring up my massage therapist, or my reflexologist or whatever and go ‘oh can you do it for 20 quid today, ‘cause that’s all I’ve got in me wallet?’. I just wouldn’t, it’s just totally disrespectful. So with that you may get very short shrift from me.

There was also, as some independent participants commented, a fine balance between setting the general terms of the interaction and not being too prescriptive. Some participants preferred not to display a whole list of “dos and don’ts” on their websites, because they felt clients might find this off-putting. Part of the skill involved in the interaction with clients was interpreting their desires whilst at the same time ensuring that certain boundaries were not crossed. As Chris commented, establishing the contract was partly a process of negotiation between worker and client and sometimes ‘you find out as you go along’. Thus, while there may be certain general conditions outlined on sex workers’ websites, or in prior discussions, the negotiation during the transaction was important for defining not only the worker’s but also the client’s limits. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter Six, disrespectful behaviour, either in initial enquiries or during the encounter, was generally viewed as unacceptable and demeaning.

### 7.5.2 Managing the encounter

As O'Connell Davidson (1998) has commented, contracts may need to be enforced or renegotiated, and managing the contract requires a considerable degree of skill and confidence. Jessica, an independent participant in the current study, noted the qualities she felt were essential to manage relationships with clients:

You need to be tough enough not to be easily manipulated and things like that, I think, you need to be able to sort of stick to your guns....you need a lot of self-confidence, I think you need the confidence, you know, to not be talked into things that you're not really comfortable doing.

Assertiveness may thus be seen as an essential skill in the process of negotiating the interaction with clients and enforcing the contract. Participants in both independent and managed settings described the processes involved in managing interactions with clients, often requiring considerable diplomatic and negotiation skills which, as noted in Chapter Five, not everyone possesses to the same degree. Their supervision of the encounter enabled them to retain a degree of control over the process, while at the same time aiming to meet the client's expectations as far as possible. For instance, Jemma, an independent escort, commented on how she steered the appointment in the direction she wanted, which she also saw as part of her professional role:

I manage the transaction completely....From start to finish. From opening the door, to getting them in, then making them safe, you know, making them feel relaxed and calm and the rest....to seeing what the mood is and what that person needs, and knowing what I've spoken to them about on the phone before, or what ...they've asked for.

Nonetheless, while some participants were often clear about their role in leading the encounter, there could sometimes be an element of uncertainty, particularly with new clients. Participants commented on the need to make

rapid assessments when they first met a new client and to interpret their wishes, which may not always be clearly expressed. This involved considerable skill as well as emotional labour, as Chris observed:

...when you meet someone who's a stranger, you have to judge them very quickly, as to what they like, don't like, what they're wanting, what they're *really* wanting. Because some people are very nervous when they first see you. And they may have a fantasy...but they're so nervous when they meet you...it's like your first date, you know, how far can they go, what can they do, what can you not do? And you have to judge, you know, what you're prepared to let *them* do, how far you're prepared to let them go, but also how far you can push them to let their fantasy really...happen.

This “reading” of the client’s expectations and needs, which is seen as an essential part of the transaction, might be compared with other occupations that include a therapeutic element involving one-to-one interaction. For example, Purcell (2013) notes the emotional demands of holistic massage, which draws on intuition and awareness. In the same way that some independent sex workers in the current study reinforced boundaries tacitly rather than explicitly, Purcell observes that massage therapists may also maintain boundaries through gentle tactile rather than verbal mechanisms.

Effective management of the encounter, particularly in independent sex work, thus involved a number of skills and qualities, including time management, creativity, assertiveness and the ability to engage physically and emotionally, while at the same time guiding the direction of the encounter. In relation to the emotional labour discussed earlier, this may require a combination of surface and deep acting skills, as well as specific attributes and attitudes to the work.

### **7.5.3 Addressing occupational problems and contractual infringements**

Participants were asked if they had ever encountered any problems in their working lives and if so, how they responded to these. This question was phrased deliberately in this way to allow interviewees to determine for

themselves what they viewed as problematic in their work. Although this might include violence, the question did not in itself presuppose that this was a necessary aspect of the work. Eight participants stated that they had not experienced any problems and 24, across all settings, commented that they had rarely encountered any difficulties in their work. The types of problems discussed related to a range of issues, including the effects of stigma, the impact of the law and contact with police and other agencies, which will be discussed in Chapter Eight. One issue mentioned by 17 independent participants was the irritation of dealing with timewasters, which was discussed earlier. This was generally viewed as an inevitable aspect of the independent escort's working life, because of the ease of accessing their marketing information on the Internet. As Rachel jokingly remarked, this was 'one of the perks of the job'. It was usually evident from the early stages of contact that these callers were not potential clients and, as Jem commented, it was normally possible to distinguish between timewasters and 'genuine clients'.

As Weitzer (2005b) has observed, certain ideological discourses which present sex work as inherently exploitative present all clients as abusive and dominating. These claims have been tested in other studies of sex work (e.g. Bernstein, 2007a; Sanders, 2008b) and participants' accounts in the current study also contested this one-dimensional representation. More than three quarters of participants commented that they were more likely in their present working situation to encounter pleasant than problem customers. Louise noted that if customers in parlours did not behave as expected: 'you are able to tell them to go. You're not forced to do anything. You hardly ever get problems in these kind of places'. Participants commented that most clients understood and respected the rules of contract. For example, Sasha observed of clients she had encountered in escorting and managed work:

...occasionally I might need to remind somebody of those rules. Erm, but then an awful lot of clients're completely, you know, just the opposite, they're probably like 'oh, can I touch your nipple?' You're like 'yes, of course you can darling'. ...And more clients are like that than are trying to, kind of...cross the sort of edge. Often if a client starts doing something that I

don't like, or if it's not something I do, or whatever, or...then I'll literally spring away, be like 'hey! What the hell do you think you're doing?' and they're 'ooh, sorry, sorry, sorry'. That doesn't actually happen a lot.

As Cohen et al. (2013) have noted, sex workers have more individualised interactions with clients compared with workers in other service sector occupations such as call centre work. Negotiation of the encounter thus requires certain skills and experience and, as discussed in previous chapters, sex workers have individual responsibility for managing interactions with clients. Participants sometimes saw themselves as having an obligation to establish standards of practice. For example, Yulia observed that: 'I think you need to know how to speak with a customer, and treat them, so you can have respect back'. Ruby, an independent worker, commented of her clients:

...they have to have like fairly good manners, otherwise...I won't see them. And if they're rude while they're here I won't see them again. But in my experience if you kind of set the tone, people will follow it. So I'm very courteous and I invite them through and say 'would you like a drink?' and treat them with all courtesy. Erm, and they tend to treat me the same.

While participants often viewed effective management of the encounter as part of their role, however, as Ruby emphasised here, this did not mean that workers' responsibilities in this regard absolved clients from mutual duties towards them. Participants stressed that if a client behaved disrespectfully, then the sex worker had the right to terminate the appointment. This expectation of reciprocal respect in contractual relations with clients challenges the contention, discussed in Chapter Two, that sex work as an institution confers automatic entitlement to access the sex worker's body.

Participants cited specific instances where clients had not respected the implicit code of conduct. Where participants had experienced problems with clients, these tended to relate primarily to occasional disputes over payment, a few clients with poor personal hygiene or sometimes a client turning up drunk. Three participants mentioned clients who had behaved roughly, such as

spanking them too hard or grabbing them. While some of this behaviour was seen as unacceptable under all circumstances, an action such as spanking was viewed by some participants as negotiable, provided that agreement was reached at the start of the appointment regarding acceptable levels. This again may differentiate sex work from many other occupations or self-employed services, in that while there may be a general agreement or contract determining the broad services to be provided by contractors, the informal contract negotiated between sex workers and their clients may be very specific in relation to bodily boundaries or types or levels of touch. This contract also extended both ways, and participants, particularly those offering domination services, also explored the degrees of physical contact that would be permissible to their clients.

A further issue mentioned by participants was when clients attempted to “push” boundaries, particularly in relation to extending the length of the appointment, but also asking for services they knew the worker did not offer, including unprotected sex. In most instances, the worker refused and this was accepted by the client, although seven female participants mentioned they had sometimes encountered clients who had attempted to remove the condom without asking. In Eva’s opinion, there were a few clients who tried to test the extent to which the worker would adhere to his or her boundaries, but they also expected to be challenged: ‘...every now and then you’ll get someone trying it ... but they’ll do it in a way that they expect you to go ‘ah, what are you doing?’. You know’.

Independent participants addressed these situations themselves, and participants in managed settings also commented that they personally dealt with such infringements, except in two instances where the worker had felt the need to call for support from the receptionist and/or security. For example Tulisa, who worked in a brothel, commented that there had been one occasion when she had been forced to call security, but that most of the time she was able to handle minor disagreements, such as clients asking for kissing, which was a service she did not provide:



... there was one case where a guy was very rude to me and I told him to leave and 'e wouldn't, but the security came up straight away. That was the only thing I've had in the whole time working here, like all the customers've been really nice, and...anythin' that we disagreed on, I've been able to sort it out myself.

Independent participants commented that they were firm but diplomatic in reiterating their rules, which was often a successful strategy to avert or resolve potential conflict. Ruby's preferred method of dealing with such situations was:

...I kind of make a joke about it. But I'm insistent, and I go from my 'don't do that' to '*don't do that*'. I use strong voice, short words, unequivocal sentiments. ... Erm, I think... you can't be at all ambiguous about saying 'no, please don't do that'.

Nonetheless, there were sometimes situations where a client was persistent in trying to challenge the worker's boundaries. Rebecca noted that she had experienced one incident, when she worked independently, where the client had tried to 'push levels': 'you just say 'no'. You just get out. I don't mind if I don't get the money. Just get out'. As participants such as Ruby and Rebecca commented, their own safety and wellbeing were more important to them than securing payment and thus their primary concern was to end the appointment as quickly as possible. Dealing with such incidents required judgement as well as assertiveness, as workers were aware that they were in a potentially vulnerable situation.

Independent workers would generally not give clients a repeat appointment if they failed to respect the contract and in managed premises clients were barred from future entry if they presented problems. In six instances, participants noted that they had felt it necessary to terminate an appointment. As noted in Chapter Six, Jessica had encountered one situation where a client had been drunk and she had turned him out, because one of her preconditions was that she would not accept clients who had been drinking heavily. Louisa

stated that she had terminated two appointments during her working life, one of which was with a client who spoke disrespectfully to her, and the other with a client who had persisted in asking for unprotected sex: 'I just said to him 'get up, get dressed and leave. You're not getting what you want. I'll get the police to you. Off you go'. And I made him leave'. Workers in managed premises also felt able to turn clients away if they were difficult, abusive or aggressive and, although this had happened rarely, they were confident that the management and/or receptionist would support them.

As was discussed in Chapter Two, sex work is presented as an inherently violent occupation in some discourses. Nonetheless, studies have contested these assumptions of universality and some have identified differences between street and indoor markets, with indoor-based sex workers found to be less likely to encounter violence in their work (Weitzer, 2005a; Jeal and Salisbury, 2007). This was confirmed by participants in the current study, nearly all of whom commented that they had not encountered what they would categorise as serious or violent incidents during their working lives. In part this was attributed by independent participants in the current study to prior interaction via email and telephone with those making enquiries, which meant that they could to an extent screen out potentially dangerous or difficult individuals. Nonetheless, as O'Connell Davidson (1998) has observed, putting into place such precautions does not necessarily *guarantee* sex workers' safety, although Kinnell (2006) found evidence that strategies amongst indoor workers for avoiding violence showed some effectiveness with regard to clients. Independent participants were aware of the potential risks of lone working and for this reason many would rather work with others if the current laws did not make this a risky venture. Cleo observed that: '...given how vulnerable we are by the law, I mean I've never had any problems of violence from clients....and I've been lucky enough to avoid people who will have presented as if they were clients'. This is an important distinction, as studies have found that physical violence linked to crimes such as robbery is more prevalent than sexual violence for indoor workers (Church et al., 2001; Kinnell, 2006). Other participants such as Jake also made this distinction between

clients and dangerous individuals who might target vulnerable groups such as sex workers:

...I hate that actually, when someone says 'oh, bad clients' or whatever. It's not really...yeah, 'cause it's not the client. The clients're gonna to turn up and they're gonna pay and they're gonna be decent and everything. But then there's, erm, I don't know, just abusive guys...in society I guess. But they're not clients, they're just general guys. That target weak groups of people.

Although most occupational problems mentioned by participants did not involve violence, five participants commented that they had experienced one or two occasions when clients had behaved aggressively. For example, Leon had one client who was drunk and became aggressive and who subsequently sent a threatening email after Leon had thrown him out. Jodie had one client who demanded his money back halfway through the appointment and was 'quite menacing'. Her response was to say quietly 'I can't do that. I can't do that. Sorry, I can't do that', which she said was effective and 'brought things down again'. Although participants stated that they had been able to handle these incidents themselves, agency may be compromised if workers lack the confidence or skills to manage difficult encounters, or if antagonism escalates to physical violence. Even where they had been able to deal with confrontational situations in the past, some female and male participants commented that they felt concerned they might not be in control of the situation if someone turned up who was stronger than them.

Some participants drew parallels with certain other occupations when considering the potential for violence in sex work. For example, Martin noted that when he was a care worker he was attacked with a knife by a client and observed that he felt equally vulnerable as a lone worker under those circumstances as he did as a self-employed sex worker. Karen commented that she had experienced more abusive and physically violent behaviour when she was working in customer services for an airline company:

I probably have more hassle with [the airline] regarding the customers than I do in the other side [escorting work]. I mean, well, I've been punched, I've been slapped, I've been called every name under the sun with [the airline] by passengers.

Sex workers, particularly those working on the street but also indoor workers may be vulnerable to rape and sexual assault, as well as physical violence (Alexander, 1998). This is not unique to sex work: for instance, there is a serious risk of sexual violence in some other occupations, as discussed earlier. Nonetheless, sexual violence is more strongly associated with certain occupations than others and, as Kinnell (2006) has observed, sex workers may be targeted by serial attackers because they are deemed to be vulnerable, due to their lack of legal protection, as well as their work in a stigmatised occupation. O'Connell Davidson (1998) has commented that the social and cultural context of sex work, with sex workers being regarded as social outsiders, is a contributory factor which distinguishes sex work from many other occupations:

No matter how displeased customers may be with the service provided and the prices charged, they are not going to feel that punching the plumber in the face is justifiable simply on the grounds that he or she *is* a 'dirty plumber'. Furthermore, because clients' hostility towards 'dirty whores' is grounded in a popular, conservative moral ideology, those who attack prostitutes can feel reasonably confident that the consequences of doing so will be minimal or non-existent. Their confidence is not misplaced, for it has been repeatedly proven that women who work as prostitutes find it difficult to press charges successfully against men for rape or battery. (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 64)

Three participants referred to serious incidents which they had been unable to control. Carla described one occasion where she had been unknowingly drugged by someone she met through an agency: 'I've never touched a drug in my life, ever, so that was the first time I'd ever tried drugs, which was a hideous experience anyway, but to have it done like that was horrible'. She

went to a hospital because of her symptoms, but found the staff unsympathetic and felt unable to disclose that she was a sex worker, as she believed their response would be that she deserved what had happened to her. Louise described an encounter with a client in the parlour where she had previously worked who had removed the condom without her knowledge. Rebecca described one client who forced unprotected sex, a regular who appeared to change his behaviour after seeming considerate in the past. Although both clients were subsequently barred from the respective premises, there were emotional consequences for the workers as well as sexual health considerations, with both requiring subsequent testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Rebecca described the incident as 'like a violation' and was unable to tell friends and family why she was so upset, because they did not know about her work, but was able to get emotional and practical support from an online forum for sex workers and staff in a sex work project, who also facilitated reporting of violent crimes through the National Ugly Mugs scheme. While condom removal or sabotage may count as non-consensual sex in some jurisdictions<sup>38</sup>, sex workers often do not report rape or sexual assault to the police, particularly because many keep their working life secret and also because they feel they may not be taken seriously by criminal justice agencies (Sullivan, 2007). There are also the potential legal implications if they are working in illegal settings. There is evidence of under-reporting of sexual crimes by women – and men - for a range of reasons, including shame, guilt and distrust of the justice system (Wheatcroft, Wagstaff and Moran, 2011). Transgender people also experience high rates of sexual violence and are reluctant to report these assaults to the police because of fear of victimisation (Stotzer, 2007). Nonetheless, sex workers may encounter additional barriers to reporting violent and sexual crimes because of the stigma attached to their occupation and their prior experiences of law enforcement practices. Mai (2009) also found that lack of legal immigration status can contribute to migrant sex workers' fear of contacting the police. While some participants in the current study stated they would be prepared to report violent

---

<sup>38</sup> For example, the supreme court in Canada recently ruled that condom sabotage in circumstances where someone consents to protected sex constitutes sexual assault: <http://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/13511/index.do>. [Accessed 10/03/14].

incidents to the police, others felt they would be reluctant to do so, partly because of stories they had heard about the experiences of other sex workers. Day (2007) reports situations where sex workers' credibility has been contested because of their occupation. As she comments, while attitudes towards sex workers are slow to change, the contractual basis of commercial sex has begun to be recognised in some courts of law, for example, in relation to acknowledging withdrawal of the sex worker's consent when clients insist on unprotected sex. Only one participant in the current study viewed violence as an inevitable consequence of the job, whereas others were clear about the distinction between consensual and non-consensual acts.

While most participants viewed the management of risk and intermittent need to enforce the contract as part of their professional role, for some this could become stressful and reduce job satisfaction. Similar impacts may be seen on workers in other professions with a risk of violence or other work-related tensions, such as social work or health care (e.g. Balloch, Pahl and McLean, 1998; Vanwesenbeeck, 2005). As Sanders and Campbell (2007) comment, the potential for violence is exacerbated by the legal situation which leaves sex workers vulnerable. This will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

## **7.6 Conclusions**

This study confirms findings from other research that shows sex workers in indoor settings are often able to manage boundaries effectively and develop strategies to differentiate between their working and private lives. It also expands on previous research to highlight that there are differences in labour processes both within and between sectors. As Bolton (2009) notes, the emotional labour process in the broader labour market differs according to the commercial, organisational and social context. The current study demonstrates similar diversity in emotional labour processes within the indoor sex industry. It contributes to the existing literature through considering the experiences of male, female and transgender sex workers and highlighting that degrees of intimacy and boundary management for both male and female

workers vary not only according to the work setting, but also factors such as sex workers' approach to their work, their personal preferences, circumstances outside work, structural dynamics and their relative agency. As others have argued regarding emotional labour more generally, degrees of intimacy and maintenance of boundaries may be viewed along a continuum, dependent on a range of factors.

As has been found in relation not only to sex work but other sectors, the practice of emotional labour, when under the control of the worker, can enhance job satisfaction. Other studies such as those by Sanders (2005a) and Petro (2010) have shown that sex workers frequently assert their own agency in terms of the way in which they negotiate the processes and context of their work. Levels of control over labour processes in the current study related not only to the work setting and degrees of independence from managerial supervision, but also to the personal and economic circumstances and background of the worker, including their age and experience.

The ability to turn down new or repeat business according to sex workers' preferences was also indicative of the degree of agency they experienced. While most participants in the current study asserted that they felt in a position to refuse clients if they wished, some had less opportunity to select clients, usually because of their personal and/or economic circumstances. This also related to sex workers' ability to manage risk, particularly if they were in a more vulnerable situation, such as lone working, which carried a general risk when visiting or receiving visits from clients who were unknown to the worker. Nonetheless, participants were careful to take precautions which, although they could not necessarily prevent violent or other crimes against them, served to minimise potential risks to their safety. Although there were some instances of confrontational circumstances encountered by male, female and transgender participants, the low levels of violence experienced by participants present challenges to the discourse of prostitution as not only intrinsically violent, but also essentially gendered violence. Despite the relatively low incidence of violence reported in the current research and in the other studies of indoor-based sex work discussed earlier, there was a heightened

awareness amongst participants of the potential risk of violence, which might in part be related to the consistent association between sex work and violence in media and policy reports. The absence of formal workplace rights and concerns regarding sex workers' lack of legal protection may also contribute to a sense of insecurity.

While sex workers may often be clear on the demarcation of boundaries, clients may sometimes try to transgress the terms of the contract. This may be partly due to the stigma associated with sex work and failure to acknowledge the sex worker as a professional, but may also reflect wider societal perceptions of the status of women, gay men and transgender people. Nonetheless, the effect of this is to deny sex workers their labour rights and detract from their sense of professional competence and agency. One aspect that differentiates sex work from mainstream therapeutic occupations is that these tend to have an infrastructure of guidance and regular support which is currently lacking in the sex industry. Thus sex workers often have to negotiate complex boundaries and identity conflicts in isolation. The importance of social networks in supporting professional practice is discussed in Chapter Eight.



## **Chapter Eight: Negotiating constraints and strategies of resistance in sex work**

### **8.1 *Introduction***

Previous chapters discussed the organisation of indoor sex work in Great Britain, patterns of entry, mobility and labour processes. These highlighted certain factors impacting on sex workers' relative autonomy and ability to act independently, including their age, experience, human capital and also the work setting. As touched upon in these chapters, there are also external factors which impinge on sex workers' safety, conditions of work and their relative agency. Particular constraints are the laws related to prostitution in the UK and the stigma attached to sex work, which is perpetuated through certain dominant policy and media discourses. Phoenix (2009) has commented on the way in which UK Government policy relating to sex work and subsequent legislative reforms in the twenty-first century have become increasingly punitive. As she argues, the discourse surrounding prostitution policy is driven by an abolitionist ideology which conflates the issues of human trafficking and prostitution. Sanders (2009) comments that the legislative changes have resulted in increased marginalisation of sex workers and have implications for sex workers' safer working practices, as will be discussed in this chapter. As Nussbaum (1998) has noted, criminalisation of prostitution reinforces the social stigma of sex workers. Arnold and Barling (2003) observe that the lack of social acceptance of prostitution, combined with absence of legal protection in many contexts, may also increase the propensity to violence towards sex workers. Nonetheless, decriminalisation alone is not sufficient to reduce the social stigma related to sex work, as negative stereotypes continue to be perpetuated through the media and moral discourses (Abel and Fitzgerald, 2010).

Drawing on the theories of Hughes (1951), Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argue that certain occupations are associated with physical, social or moral "taint" and are perceived by society as "dirty work", which they note is a socially

constructed value judgement. Workers in these occupations tend to be seen as personifying the work, hence becoming “dirty workers”. Certain occupations may be seen as “tainted” on more than one dimension: for example, prostitution may be associated with both physical and moral taint. Goffman (1963) argues that stigmatised individuals may sometimes accept their discredited status, but may also develop strategies to manage the information they disclose about themselves in order to avoid stigma, although there may be circumstances in which the stigmatised aspects of their identity are revealed without their control. Individuals who are stigmatised through their occupation or personal characteristics may also resist normative constructions based on negative stereotypes and develop strong occupational cultures and positive identities (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Similar reactions and mechanisms of resistance were evident in the data from the current study, particularly through sex workers’ collective action and use of Internet-based technologies, which enabled them to present themselves on their own terms.

This chapter discusses external constraints on participants’ working conditions and job satisfaction, particularly recent UK legislation and policy directions, which were perceived to affect sex workers’ ability to undertake the work as they might wish and detracted from or denied their agency. It explores how participants resisted normative constructions of prostitution through self-presentation and communities of support, as well as contributing their views on the need for policy changes. While research and anecdotal evidence demonstrating the effects of stigma and legal penalties on sex workers is not new, particularly in relation to street-based work, the current study adds to the existing literature by investigating the impact of recent legislative changes on sex workers in different indoor sub-sectors, particularly in relation to independent sex work, which is a relatively unexplored area of research. It also considers the ways in which stigma and the law affect male and transgender, as well as female sex workers in comparable occupations.

## **8.2 Constraints to working practices and aspirations**

Chapter Two discussed the ways in which legislation and policy directions in the UK create problems for sex workers' legitimacy, with legal constraints exacerbated by the social stigma experienced by many sex workers. Chapter Seven touched upon the effects of stigma and perceptions of criminal justice agencies on sex workers' willingness to report violent incidents or crimes against them. This chapter extends these discussions through exploring the ways in which participants described the impact of the law and dominant discourses on their working conditions. It considers how perceptions of the legal position affect collective working and safer working practices, as well as examining the impact of stigma on sex workers' personal lives and sometimes employment outside the sector.

### **8.2.1 Legal and policy constraints**

One of the principal differences between sex work and other occupations noted by participants was not intrinsic to the work itself, but related to external factors. While the primary focus of UK legislation has been on the effects of street-based sex work, certain laws also impinge on indoor-based sex workers. For example, while the 1956 Sexual Offences Act contained clauses relating to keeping, or assisting in managing a brothel and controlling a prostitute for gain, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 extended definitions and increased penalties for some offences.<sup>39</sup> Other recent legislation which has relevance for indoor sex work includes the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, which allows for assets to be seized if individuals are deemed to be keeping or letting premises for use as a brothel, or controlling prostitution for gain. Scoular and Sanders (2010) note that the conflation of the concepts of voluntary commercial sex, sexual exploitation and trafficking has contributed to an increasingly punitive policy approach, encapsulated in the Policing and Crime Act 2009, that not only seeks to criminalise men who buy sex when the person

---

<sup>39</sup> CPS guidance:  
[http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p\\_to\\_r/prostitution\\_and\\_exploitation\\_of\\_prostitution/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/prostitution_and_exploitation_of_prostitution/) [Accessed 06/03/13].

selling sex is deemed to be subjected to force, but also those who sell sex, through compulsory rehabilitation orders for street-based workers; and other mechanisms to disrupt sex markets. The 2009 Policing and Crime Act allows for closure of premises used for activities related to prostitution or pornography offences. As Carline (2011) has observed, while the original intention was that such orders would be used when there was evidence of exploitation or trafficking, the wording is such that the legislation can be used against managed premises where there is no evidence of exploitation, or, indeed against collective settings. This has been confirmed by certain cases where women working together for safety have been prosecuted.<sup>40</sup> The Crown Prosecution Service in their guidance<sup>41</sup> acknowledge that the legislation allows for raiding and disruption of off-street premises, where previous local policing policy may have been toleration when certain conditions were met, such as no selling of drugs or use of under-age workers. The potential consequences of such closures may be that workers are forced into more dangerous or exploitative forms of work, for example, in less supportive brothels, street-based work or working independently without the appropriate safety precautions in place (Sanders, 2009). The definition of a “brothel” can include not only premises where two or more people work together as prostitutes, but also where two or more work individually but in rotation from the same premises. Although prostitution is incorporated within an overall “Violence against women” strategy by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the language of the 2003 Sexual Offences Act and subsequent legislation became gender-neutral and thus potentially the legislation could affect male and transgender as well as female sex workers. Nonetheless, the CPS guidance tends to ignore the needs of male or transgender sex workers in relation to violent crime, thus reinforcing a gendered perspective of sex work.

The legal context surrounding sex work and recent legislative changes were seen to be a major constraining factor in many instances in the current study. Nearly three-quarters of participants (29, including 26 escorts/independent

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/may/03/prostitutes-vulnerable-brothel-law>. [Accessed 21/10/13].

<sup>41</sup> CPS guidance, *ibid*.

workers) commented on the implications of the current laws, which they felt failed to protect sex workers. Chris voiced his concern that the legal barriers could make working life very difficult in circumstances where sex workers wanted to work together, even in co-operative settings:

...the ideal situation is where you...have a separate premises where you can work from, and share those premises... Because then you've got companionship, added security, there's someone to spend a day with and, you know, interact with. Because of the legal situation you have to be very, very careful. Because obviously it's running a brothel, which has...you know, really dangerous consequences these days...the recent changes in the Policing and Crime Act have made even being an independent very difficult because now the police can presume, even if you're not, presume you're running a brothel. And they can close your premises or place of work down.

Participants who worked together in co-operative relationships expressed their unease that in the eyes of the law they might be seen as operating illegally. For example, Angel, who lived and worked with her partner, commented that their vulnerability, which related not only to their status as sex workers, but also social attitudes towards transgender people, was exacerbated by the current legislation:

...because we work together, obviously this could be classed as a brothel, the consequences could be very serious, the landlord....erm, they could close the building for so long, whatever. And obviously we could have all sorts of nasty things happen. This is one thing...that that is so wrong. We work in a safe environment because there's two of us. Erm, it's the safest we can make it, erm, and....we don't cause any nuisance, we don't work later than 10 o'clock at night, we take our last telephone booking at 8pm. So we don't have cars turning up. The guys that we do have turning up, they....they're very discreet, they park up, erm, and they come in, we never have any problem. We don't see people who are intoxicated on drugs or alcohol. If you are then we'll turn you away at the door. We've

never had any incident, touch wood, of, erm, trouble outside the house. We have thrown the odd guy out, but, erm, I think there's only two that I can remember in four years. And, erm, we've never caused any trouble to the neighbours, in any way, shape or form. ....I think it's a basic human right that we deserve, erm, to be safe in our job. We go to the nth degree to try and make it safe, and then we're hampered by....the people that are supposed to be looking after us, the judicial system.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Seven, the changes to the law in recent years were seen to place sex workers at greater risk of violence and increase their vulnerability, with some participants fearing that they might be penalised rather than supported by the police if they reported violent incidents but were seen to be working illegally. For example, Rachel, who shared a flat with another escort with whom she had a co-operative working arrangement, commented that 'working as we do makes us a target....for people that know we can't go to the police'. As Campbell (forthcoming, 2014) has observed, potentially violent individuals may target sex workers because they are aware of their vulnerability due to lack of legal protection. Because of the perceived attitudes of some police officers, participants in the current study noted that some sex workers who had been attacked or sexually assaulted might not report these crimes, even if they were deemed to be working legally. Fear of the way in which they might be judged by police sometimes acted as a deterrent to passing on information, not only about violent individuals but also people they encountered who were seen as suspicious for other reasons. This fear was sometimes substantiated by certain high-profile cases where sex workers rather than their attackers had been prosecuted, as noted above. Seven participants were aware of other sex workers who had been penalised for brothel management, not only those who had been involved in managing parlours, but also in two instances people who had been working with one or two other sex workers for safety. Leon also observed that undocumented migrant sex workers may find themselves at risk of deportation if they cooperate with the police, for example, in anti-trafficking initiatives.

There appeared to be variations according to local enforcement strategies. In some localities police were supportive if they encountered people working on the same premises in a safe and non-coercive relationship. For instance, Alexa, who managed a small working flat, commented that local police had left them alone, because there had never been any complaints from residents or local shopkeepers and they were 'very discreet and quiet'. They also had regular visits from a local sex work project, which promoted effective and safe working practices. She had worked in other premises in the past which had been subject to raids and closures, however, and felt that policies locally were less punitive. Delia, who worked in a parlour in another city, noted that while the police sometimes visited the premises, their concern had been for the workers' welfare and to ensure that they were not underage or being kept on the premises 'by force'. Verity, who worked in a co-operative arrangement with a colleague, commented that, so far:

...the police tend to leave us alone because we're... not causing any problems for anybody, we're keeping it quiet....so long as we keep it, y'know, a bit low key, and don't cause any problems for anybody, then I'd like to think they'd leave us alone. We're not out to screw anybody over or...create any hassle or anything, we're just trying to earn a living.

In other areas, however, police forces were less tolerant towards people working together, regardless of whether there was evidence of coercion or abuse. While police in the area where Carol ran a small parlour had previously only been concerned in instances where there was evidence of exploitative practices, and she had felt supported by them, in recent months they had started to take a more punitive approach towards all managed premises.

While most participants working in brothels did not express a view about current legislation, two sex workers, a manager and a receptionist commented on the negative implications. Carol had moved from direct sex work into managing the small parlour where she worked with friends, which had recently been raided by the local police. She voiced her concerns about the potential

application of the Proceeds of Crime Act (2002), fearing that all her assets could be seized, including her house, because 'I have to prove that it's not come from [sex] work. So I can't, because I've not got any other business'. The income she had received from running the parlour was minimal, sufficient to cover her living expenses and put aside a small amount for retirement, but the implications of the law were that she could lose any savings. As far as she understood the legislation, she could not engage in other paid work while her case was outstanding, as the earnings from this might also be taken away. She also commented on the detrimental consequences for her colleagues, who had been displaced by the police action and were working in less supportive environments. Susanna, a receptionist in a parlour, who enjoyed most aspects of her work, was also aware of the laws relating to management or assisting in managing a brothel and commented on how thinking about this made her 'anxious and worried and stressed'. Rebecca, working in a managed flat, observed that criminalising aspects of brothel management opened the way to more exploitative practices: 'The law just makes things so dangerous... It's not going to go away this job, obviously. So making it more and more dangerous just puts parlours underground'.

The possibility of arrest and seizure of assets could act as a deterrent to co-operative working. While some independent participants preferred working alone, five had been deterred from working collectively and six were aware of others who had been discouraged because of the legal implications. For example, Eva commented:

....I've been approached by a girl before who'd been attacked in her home. And she was looking for someone to work with her, 'cause she was terrified of working alone again. Erm, but had we done that, we would've run the risk of breaking the law. That I think is horrendous.

Moreover, the inconsistencies in the law, whereby individual sex workers may be legitimately self-employed, yet prohibited from working with others, deny them the rights accorded to other self-employed operators. Carla expressed her frustration at this contradiction:



It makes me angry that I pay tax, yet if I was to want to work with somebody else in another house for safety, or share a house with somebody to keep my costs down, it's illegal. It just makes me think 'you can't have both'.

This was a feature which differentiated sex work from other occupations and prohibited business development, as Jodie observed:

So....it's represented in a way as just another career, which it's not. Certainly not in....almost all countries of the world and in the UK it's very stigmatised. And there's an awful lot of society pressure against it, not just on individual members of society, but there's organised structures in place in our society that....I mean there's legislation against what I do. Examples would be...if I want to open a shop, or any sort of service, I can employ a load of employees. You can't do that with this job, I can't employ a load of other escorts. Indeed, I can't even work in a syndicate.

While a principal focus of participants' observations was on the direct implication of the legislation on their working practices, some also commented on pressures exerted by groups advocating further criminalisation. The Policing and Crime Act 2009, as discussed earlier, introduced an offence relating to 'paying for sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force', but there have been recent campaigns to change the law in parts of the UK to make payment for any sexual services a crime, along the lines of the "Nordic model". As Brooks-Gordon (2010) comments, these proposals are based on the conception that any purchase of sexual services constitutes violence and a belief that prohibition will result in eradication of prostitution. Yet, as she and others, such as Sanders (2008b) have observed, clients of sex workers are diverse and many regular customers have respectful relationships with sex workers. Although client behaviour varies according to work setting and individual workers' circumstances, nearly all participants in the current study also emphasised that the majority of their clients, particularly the regular customers, behaved courteously towards them. Participants felt that, while the current laws did not offer them protection, proposals to further criminalise

aspects of their work, rather than helping them, would make their work even more dangerous.

Twenty-nine participants, including two parlour workers, a manager and a receptionist, wanted changes to the law to improve sex workers' safety and conditions of work. Twenty-one participants commented that adult sex work should not be criminalised, with some advocating total decriminalisation, whereas others were less clear regarding whether decriminalisation or legalisation would be more appropriate. Those who were aware of campaigns to criminalise clients did not comprehend the rationale behind this, as it would take away their livelihood, did not reflect the generally positive relationships they had with their clients and impacted upon their rights as workers. The implications were that such a move would increase the risks to sex workers, as their usual safety procedures could be compromised. Moreover, as Scott noted, there could also be negative consequences for sexual health, if sex workers or their clients felt less able to access services or be open about their activities because of the potential legal repercussions. These concerns are reflected in some of the research studies assessing the impact of the change to the law in Sweden (e.g. Dodillet and Östergren, 2011). Sasha observed that if the purchase of sexual services was criminalised, the industry would become 'a much nastier, underground thing, you know, rather than it being normal'. This would have implications for workers in all settings, but arguably would be of particular note for the independent sector, as it would delegitimise consensual transactions between individuals. Workers such as Jessica, for example, would find it problematic to be transparent about their status, as this might pose a threat to their clients and thus the independent sector could become even more hidden than it is currently.

Twelve participants working in independent or agency sex work noted specifically that they felt one of the most important changes to the law should be allowing two or more sex workers to be based together. Eight participants also wanted to see some regulation of managed premises to address exploitative practices and ensure greater protection for workers. Abel and Fitzgerald (2010) have found that since decriminalisation in New Zealand, the

implementation of legal and employment rights for sex workers has given them greater control over their working conditions, has improved police attitudes to sex workers and given workers greater confidence that they will be supported by the police should any adverse incidents occur. Nonetheless, as Brents et al. (2010) observe, the regulatory context may also impose restrictions on workers and they suggest the encouragement of independent and collective, as well as managed forms of work. As the authors have commented, however, further consideration needs to be given to addressing the consequences of stigma on sex workers.

### **8.2.2 The impact of stigma**

Various commentators such as O'Neill (2001), Scambler (2007) and Sanders (2004b, 2005a) have discussed the impact of the "whore stigma" on female sex workers' working and personal lives and mechanisms they develop to cope with the effects. Koken et al. (2004) and Walby (2012) observe that male sex workers may also encounter stigma, which may relate to their sexuality as well as their working status and also to public health discourses concerning "risky" male-to-male sex and HIV/AIDS. While there is limited research on transgender sex workers, Weinberg et al. (1999) and Edelman (2011) have commented that transgender sex workers experience comparatively high levels of discrimination because of their status as "other" in society. One of the main problems experienced by participants in the current study was the social stigma they encountered, which affected male, transgender and female sex workers. As discussed in Chapter Seven, nearly three-quarters of participants kept their working life secret from many people because of the stigma attached to sex work. Those who were more open about their working status felt this helped to reduce stigma, although they were nonetheless aware of dominant discourses about prostitution and sex work and sometimes encountered situations where they felt required to defend their status as a sex worker, or to keep silent.

Chapter Two discussed the way in which recent policy in the UK continues to represent sex work as a degraded industry, drawing on a very narrow evidence base to portray people who work in the industry, particularly female sex workers, as exploited and lacking agency, which exacerbates the perception of female sex workers as a stigmatised group. As authors such as Cusick et al. (2009) have shown, policy statements prior to the implementation of the 2009 Policing and Crime Act presented inflated figures relating to issues such as trafficking which had no evidential basis, or drew on misleading statistics that related only to small sub-samples of the sex work population, particularly young people or female street-based workers, often with complex social problems. For example, the Government report *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004: 11), while stating in its introduction that sex workers are ‘far from a homogenous group’, then went on to describe common characteristics as being: abuse, difficult lives, homelessness and problematic drug abuse. Although it acknowledged the latter issue relates particularly to street-based workers, the report contained limited counter-examples showing the differences in off-street work. A one-sided picture therefore emerged, with subsequent reports and media articles tending to repeat and sometimes misrepresent the more sensational aspects of sex work to present all sex workers as degraded and powerless, focusing almost exclusively on female sex workers and ignoring male and transgender workers. An example of this is the London Mayor’s report on violence against women and girls (Mayor of London, 2010), which inflates limited statistical evidence to assert that:

Regardless of whether they have been trafficked, the vast majority of women and girls involved in prostitution are violated and sexually exploited. Though there may be different degrees of coercion, control and violence perpetrated against the women and girls involved, violence is intrinsic to prostitution. Forty-five per cent of women in prostitution report experiencing childhood sexual abuse and 70 per cent have spent time in care.<sup>42</sup> Seventy-five per cent of women in prostitution became involved when they were

---

<sup>42</sup> These statistics are drawn from the Home Office report *Paying the Price* (2004). Where they are verifiable, they relate to small-scale studies with young people aged 18 or under recruited through specialist services, particularly those working with vulnerable young people.

under 18.<sup>43</sup> Research shows that women in prostitution have higher mortality rates, are at greater risk of physical and sexual violence, and suffer the same mental health consequences as survivors of torture.<sup>44</sup> (Mayor of London, 2010: 28-9)

Hallgrímsdóttir et al. (2008: 120), who analysed newspaper narratives over different time periods in a Canadian city, note that social stigma of sex workers is enduring and 'it is through the media that most of us, including academics and policy makers, acquire much of our knowledge of sex work'. As the current study has also found, much policy and media reporting does not reflect the experiences of many sex workers, particularly those working in different indoor settings. Nor do many reports acknowledge that male or transgender sex workers can also be subject to exploitation and that coercion and domination relate to specific sets of working conditions, as well as the circumstances and experience of individual workers, as discussed in Chapter Six. Chris, an independent participant in the current study commented that:

We're a very diverse group of people, from all different backgrounds, all different types of education, all different types of working. And I think that the problem is, amongst some academics, among the media, amongst the "antis", they tend to concentrate on the worst examples of sex work because it's the most viable....you know, happy people living in a nice middle-class street doesn't sell copy as much as thirteen year old on the streets, high on crack.

Participants who had encountered such narrow perspectives on their profession, either in meetings or online dialogue, frequently contextualised their work in relation to these views. For Jessica, it was incomprehensible that anyone would question the benefits of managing her own sex work business compared with her previous low-paid jobs, yet she observed that there was a tendency in some moral or abolitionist discourses to focus primarily on sex work rather than other occupations when discussing women and exploitation:

---

<sup>43</sup> This relates to one study of 30 street-based workers, whom the authors acknowledge tend to be considerably younger than women who work in other forms of prostitution.

<sup>44</sup> No references are given to support this assertion.

...they never seem that interested in those of us who sort of do it and get on with it. No, I can never see why they think it's so strange that somebody would want to earn, you know, maybe three hundred pound in two hours. And then not have to do anything for the rest of the week. You know and then they could get on with their studying and their work....they don't think anything's strange about people working, you know, twenty odd hours in Burger King to earn half that.

Although an emphasis of such discourses is often on sexual exploitation and violence, as other studies have shown and as the current study has also confirmed, many transactions between indoor-based sex workers and their clients adhere to mutually-understood rules of engagement, although degrees of exploitation and violence also relate to specific settings and circumstances. While the gaze of external critics is often purely on the sexual nature of the work, sex workers' concerns tend to concentrate on the "labour" component of sexual labour, and thus considerations of exploitation, control and job satisfaction often relate to issues such as economic exploitation and degrees of autonomy. There is therefore a dissonance between the way in which sex workers normalise their occupation and make comparisons with other forms of labour, and the lens applied by some external observers, who limit their focus to sex and sexuality without considering the broader context of labour market exploitation.

Some participants noted the tendency for sex workers' views to be ignored in discussions about their industry, leading to policies which increased their marginalisation. Angel voiced her frustration at the lack of inclusion of sex workers in consultations: 'when they have these consultations, *why* do they never speak to us? ...they tend to speak to people who have no idea about the sex industry'. As Pascal observed, not only were sex workers' rights not recognised, but the implication was that they were not considered as responsible adults:

...we'd have better working conditions if we were not criminalised and if we were recognised as workers with rights...yeah, I think it [sex work] can

provide, yeah, all this freedom, erm, at the same time as stigma....when you're a sex worker...I think the worst thing with stigma is that...people think [because] you're a victim or that you're alienated, that your opinion doesn't matter....yeah, it's like denying your intelligence, it's denying who you are basically. It's like...whatever you can say...the system knows better for you. And I think viewing you like a child, I think it's horrible.

The exclusion of sex workers' voices from public debates about sex work also served to reinforce stigma and perpetuate stereotyped notions of sex workers, with few counter-examples being presented. These stereotypes, as was discussed earlier, related almost entirely to female sex workers, which reflects the gendered nature of the "whore stigma". Nonetheless, male and transgender, as well as female participants in the current study, commented on the stigma they encountered and the ways in which this affected their lives. For example, Angel spoke of how she saw herself as an entrepreneur running a business with her partner and drawing on various skills to do so, 'Yet we're still seen as something outside the norm....as far as I'm concerned we live in stealth'. Kieran expressed his concern at the way the legislation concerning sex work affected public perceptions of sex workers and impinged on his personal life:

....the laws affect my working life because I don't like feeling like what I'm doing is wrong. And, so...it affects me because everyone knows that [the] law's against what I'm doing. And so that kind of gives me a problem...in my personal life really...coming from people's opinions because of what the law's telling them.

One of the greatest risks to many participants was seen to be the danger of their work identity being disclosed. While close friends and family members might sometimes know about the sex worker's occupation, some did not reveal this because of fear of the consequences if they were discovered to be sex working. The stigma attached to being a sex worker was seen to affect many aspects of participants' lives, including personal and professional relationships, living circumstances, current working conditions and future employment

possibilities. Although some participants commented that they had partners who knew about their work and did not find this problematic, others had sometimes found their work created difficulties for their partner, if they had one. For example, Leon spoke of a previous partner who felt uncomfortable dating a sex worker and did not feel able to introduce Leon to his family because of his work. This related to normative views on sexuality, as well as stigmatised conceptions of sex workers, and although sex workers may be able to separate work sex and personal sex, sometimes partners may not find this so easy.

While some female sex workers already had children, five participants commented that at some point they might like to have children but were concerned about the potential impact of stigma. For example, Angel and Leon commented that they would not want to raise children while being a sex worker, because their children might be stigmatised if their parents' status were to be known. Parents with young children, such as Tania and Elena, worried about whether they would say anything about their work in the sex industry to their children when they were older and if so, how much they would feel comfortable revealing to them. They were also afraid that their children might learn about their sex work from someone else and were anxious about the potential impact and shame for them under these circumstances. Some participants were also concerned that neighbours might find out about their working status and that some would react negatively, with the potential implications being eviction from rented premises, reporting them to police, or possible harassment.

The social stigma associated with sex work was seen to set it apart from most other forms of work. Although many participants tended to view sex work as comparable to other forms of work in other ways, they were also aware that sex work was not recognised as a job in wider society because of the legal position and accompanying stigma. This could then compound discrimination and detract from sex workers' agency. For those who also worked in jobs outside the sex industry, the danger of losing their other job if they were revealed as sex workers was a constant worry, even though escorts working



alone are not operating outside the law. There were also implications for future employment if participants wished to move out of the sex industry, in terms of explaining gaps in their CV, if they did not want to disclose details of their sex working, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Stigma and stereotyping could be seen to impact on sex workers' lives in other ways and sometimes reduce their sense of self-worth. For example, participants such as Jemma and Elena noted that they had encountered judgemental attitudes from some health professionals. Carla commented on how a doctor at a sexual health clinic behaved in a friendly manner towards her until she revealed that she worked as an escort. The change in his behaviour made her feel depreciated:

And I said oh well I'm this [i.e. an escort] and his face dropped, and his body changed, it changed the way he acted towards me, and I thought 'I'm feeling very responsible because I've come for a check-up every three months, he can see, I'm still a human being...'. And I just kind of felt really...kind of second class citizen when that happened.

Although not all participants had experienced stigma themselves, most recounted situations in which others had encountered problems with neighbours, employers in other settings, schools or service providers such as financial institutions. For Jemma, although there were many aspects of her work that she enjoyed:

...the worst thing to me in this job is the social stigma. By far ... And the way that I sort of duck and dive my neighbours so that I don't bump into anyone, I can't make friends with them....it just does my head in, and I use the back entrance of the building, so the skulduggery, and the threat of being caught, and the social stigma attached to the other things that drive me absolutely mad, those are the things that I can't stand about it....because I just think it's ridiculous. It's...it's sex. It's not something evil or something bad or something wrong.

Fear of stigma, as well as the legal situation, can also make sex workers reluctant to report crimes or give evidence on behalf of themselves or others. For example, Verity spoke of an occasion when she had to give evidence against a suspected paedophile and how difficult she found it because of the way in which she was denigrated in court:

But it was absolutely awful, I was....really torn to shreds by... the defence lawyer. Erm, I was called a prostitute and therefore a liar. But it got so bad that the judge actually had to say to him, y'know 'tone it down a bit'. Erm....yeah. Because I'm standing up there admitting to....whoever, that this is what I do for a living. And it just....it's not the kind of thing you want to....publicly announce.

Rachel also commented on how she felt that the combination of social stigma and the need for secrecy because of legal constraints might have a long-term impact on some sex workers' wellbeing:

...but I think that it's all brought about by the fact that....it is constantly pushed.....and there is such a massive kind of....I'm trying to think of the right word....it's almost like a forcing of statistics and opinion on people that everyone that does this is a victim and vulnerable. I'm sorry but that's completely false. And actually the law makes us vulnerable. And victims.

The potential effects of the internalisation of stigma on sex workers were discussed in Chapter Six, in relation to individual trajectories. Goffman (1963) has observed that stigmatised individuals may feel ambivalent about themselves, at times becoming socialised into their disadvantaged status, although at others they may use tactics such as humour to resist or minimise their inferior categorisation. Jenkins (2004) has also commented on how labelling by others can actively constitute individual identities. A small number of participants in the current study spoke of occasions when they had started to accept a stigmatised persona, or had struggled with fear of stigma. In reflecting on this, they situated this self-identification in the context of their ability at other times to move away from this perspective to view themselves in

more positive terms. For instance Martin spoke of his initial fears that other students or tutors on a course he was undertaking would judge him negatively if they discovered he was also a sex worker, which caused him to maintain secrecy about his status. Towards the end of the training, he decided to reveal this to a tutor and then to others, and found that they still accepted him:

Cause I was accepting myself more... And I think my psychotherapy training helps a lot with that, because I started, towards the end of my training, I started to tell people what I was doin'. For a living on the side. And nobody judged me. And that really helped... So it's actually the social stigma and the social judgement of it, that I was internalising. And as I got more confident with it, now, erm, if I'm out and about and people ask me what I do, then... I say I'm a sex worker. Very often, you know, there'll be a little bit of a shock, but 9 times out of 10 they always ask me what it involves.

Jemma also spoke of the impact of stigma on her self-perception and commented that as a result she intended to participate in campaigns for sex workers' rights as a form of resistance. It is important, therefore, as Jenkins (2004: 75) also observes, to consider 'the capacity of individuals to resist external identification'. Wilcox (2006) describes such strategies of resistance, even by those in constrained circumstances, as "agentic stances". Scambler and Paoli (2008) suggest that stigmatised groups such as sex workers develop strategies to combat "enacted" stigma imposed by others on moral or normative grounds, without necessarily encountering "felt", or internalised stigma. As Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) have observed, stigmatised groups often develop a strong occupational culture which helps them to sustain a more positive self-image. While their agency may be denied by others, therefore, they are sometimes able to assert it through resisting normative categorisations. The mechanisms by which sex workers build resistance will be discussed later in this chapter.

Stigmatised groups may also develop other strategies for managing stigma, for example, through viewing themselves as superior to others whom they

perceive to be more disadvantaged (Goffman, 1963). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) note the relevance to “dirty work” of social comparison theory, whereby individuals gain self-esteem through downward social comparisons. They argue that “dirty” workers may compare themselves favourably with other occupations they perceive as inferior and may also make sub-group comparisons to contrast themselves with others in different strata of their sector. This analysis is also relevant when considering different occupational strata in the sex industry: for example, some groups of sex workers may distinguish themselves from others in terms of perceived levels of skill and “professionalism” (Brewis and Linstead, 2000a; Bernstein, 2007a). This stratification may be exacerbated by differential policy and legal approaches to different forms of sex work. Leon, an independent participant in the current study, commented on the lack of a shared perspective amongst sex workers, which is also reflected in the sex workers’ rights movement, with a distinction sometimes made between the ‘respectable side of the sex industry’ and other forms of work, such as street-based work, which are seen to bring the industry into disrepute.

As Nussbaum (1998) and others have argued, removing the illegal status from different forms of sex work may help to improve working conditions and reduce vulnerability. While legalisation or decriminalisation might arguably go some way towards decreasing sex workers’ marginalisation, social stigma will continue to be an issue for many. Nonetheless, some participants commented that changes to the law might eventually result in a reduction in stigma, comparing this with, for example, the abolition of the laws criminalising homosexuality. If there were to be legal recognition that sex workers have rights, then, as Chris suggested, it would be possible that ‘people’s attitudes would also change’. Abel and Fitzgerald (2010) note that, while media and social discourses in New Zealand continue to perpetuate negative stereotypes about sex workers and thus their stigmatisation has continued, decriminalisation has given sex workers a sense of legitimacy that supports their resistance to such stigma.

### **8.3    *Sex workers presenting themselves***

Sex workers' voices have in the past often been mediated through academic writing (Nagle, 2002). Sex worker activism is not a new phenomenon and sex workers' social movements emerged in different parts of the globe during the 1970s and 1980s, stemming from feminist as well as prostitution rights groups campaigning for legal recognition and civil and human rights of sex workers (Jenness, 1990; Sanders et al., 2009). The threat of stigmatisation has deterred many from open political engagement (Matthieu, 2003). Nonetheless, sex workers have been able to form "virtual" communities through the Internet, developing opposition to Government policies, and stereotypical representations of sex workers (Ashford, 2009).

There has been little consideration to date of ways in which sex workers use blogging as an extension of their online activities, which may also counter dominant discourses. One of the consequences of increased Internet use generally has been the rise of blogging as a mechanism of political resistance:

Blogs are fast becoming sophisticated listening posts of modern democracy. To blog is to declare your presence; to disclose to the world that you exist and what it's like to be you; to affirm that your thoughts are at least as worth hearing as anyone else's; to emerge from the spectating audience as a player and maker of meanings. (Coleman, 2005: 274)

Nonetheless, as commentators such as Min (2010) have noted, there continues to be a "digital divide", between those who do or do not have access to Internet-based technologies. Fuller (2004) found that social status rather than gender influences access to online information and political engagement, although as van Zoonen (2002) comments, cultural and social contexts also shape the relationship between gender and Internet use. While blogs enable people to speak for themselves rather than their voices being mediated through others, there is also a tendency for readers to access sites which reinforce their views or which present the voices of those with established reputations (Coleman, 2005). These divisions relating to access or Internet

use raise the question of whose voice is counted. While sex workers may establish mechanisms of collective resistance, therefore, this does not necessarily mean their views will be acknowledged by those in authority.

A degree of digital divide was evident amongst participants in the current study. While all independent participants had a website and online profile, Internet use was varied amongst participants in managed settings and not all had access to a computer at home. Twelve independent participants, in equal numbers of men and women, engaged in blogging, with their blogs serving a number of purposes. The blogs of those involved in sex worker activism often reflected on sex work as labour, stigma and campaign issues. Blogs could also be an extension of marketing activities, enabling participants to present other aspects of themselves to target certain types of customer. Sex workers also discussed not only work-related matters but other interests outside their work in their blogs. Jade commented that she saw blogging as being 'fun and sexy' as well as being 'a way of showing a more balanced view of our day to day experiences'. As Bernstein (2007a) has commented, many sex workers now use blogging to make their work more satisfying, as well as providing opportunities for self-expression. This is reflected in the comments from Jade above and also in email correspondence from Anna, who observed that although her blog was initially intended as a marketing tool, she wrote it for her own pleasure in 'a style that I like to read myself'.

While blogs tended to be chatty and informal, often written in a humorous style, some also communicated more serious messages about issues such as sexual health and safety, showing the educational role of some sex workers. For instance, Mark gave tips on relaxation techniques, and presented his views on autonomy and safe working practices for sex workers. Some gave links to other sites for advice and information. They could promote the wellbeing of sex workers and clients and link in to networks of support. Some online commentators also addressed issues such as preconceptions about body image. For instance, blogs by certain participants, including those who categorised themselves as "BBW", emphasised the sex worker's comfort with her/his body, in contrast to popular conceptions of the "ideal" body and

narratives of thinness and dieting. Rose directly engaged with prejudice against fat people in her blog. Participants such as Anna and Jade spoke frequently about their love of food and included pictures of tempting dishes, which also served to reinforce the association between food and sex.

As indicated above, one of the key functions of blogging or online networking was for sex workers to present a counter-narrative to the stigmatised discourses or policy and media stereotypes of prostitution discussed earlier. As various authors have argued (e.g. Day, 2009; Weitzer, 2010; Carline, 2011), these representations do not reflect the experiences and agency of many of those engaging in sex work, but simplify the economic and social complexities of the sex industry, as well as making it difficult to frame discussions on prostitution in other ways. The blogs of participants could be seen as fulfilling a function of “normalising” sex work and sex workers through presenting aspects of their personality, with a range of interests and pursuits outside as well as related to their working context. Thus, even when bloggers did not engage directly with media and policy discourses, they constantly emphasised their agency and comfort with their status, in contrast to these narratives. For instance, Rose blogged about a social event with other escorts, where they discussed their work and aspects they enjoyed, as well as their interactions with clients. She noted that, in contrast to predominantly negative media representations of relationships between sex workers and clients, most comments in their discussion were ‘fond, polite and affectionate’. Jade described sex work as a ‘calling’ which she loved, and emphasised that her work involved ‘consensual sexual behaviour between adults’.

Some participants engaged directly with political debates. Although Anna wrote her blog in an informal style that covered a range of observations relating to her personal life, she also frequently interspersed these observations with comments on abolitionist campaigns or potential legal changes relating to sex work. For example, she noted in one blog that the Nordic or “Swedish model” proposed by some campaigners intensified stigma and increased violence against sex workers and therefore, despite claims to the contrary, ‘does not protect sex workers’. Jade also commented that she

saw part of the purpose of her blog as to challenge the perceptions of those who think that all sex workers are 'oppressed, depressed, controlled or high. So shattering false illusions and the social stigma that surrounds this lovely trade is part of my quest'. Some participants also contributed to sex worker activist sites, which aimed to promote their voices in response to political debates, to challenge stereotypes, emphasise the perspective that sexual labour is work and their agency in deciding to engage in sex work.

Nonetheless, as Cruz (2013) has noted, there is not necessarily a consistent message across the sex workers' rights movement. Bernstein (2007a) and Ray (2007) have observed that sex workers presenting themselves online tend to be those working in particular indoor settings, whereas street workers, for example, are less likely to have access to these opportunities. What may serve the interests of one group of sex workers may not necessarily apply to all sectors and sometimes interests may conflict (West, 2000; Arnold and Barling, 2003). The data from interviews with participants in the current study suggested, as noted in Chapter Six, that there is a perceived hierarchy within indoor settings and a differentiation between the interests of indoor-based and street-based sex workers. The working lives of independent sex workers are far removed from those of street workers and their online expressions may have limited relevance to the organisation of work in managed indoor sectors. Nonetheless, the Internet has given some groups of sex workers a mechanism for expressing themselves not previously afforded through other channels. The question remains, however, to what extent these voices are heard by those outside networks of activists and others supporting them, and in particular by policy-makers.

#### **8.4 *Communities of support***

While the legal context surrounding sex work is an important influence on its organisation, there are other factors which help to shape the sex industry, including the role of intermediaries such as sex workers' collectives and support groups (West and Austrin, 2005; Sanders et al., 2009). Chapter



Seven discussed the lack of a professional support infrastructure in sex work and Chapter Six touched on the effects of isolation and lack of social support on sex workers' job satisfaction. Those engaged in what is perceived to be "dirty work" often find themselves turning to their peer group for support and reaffirmation, which may then exacerbate their sense of separation from others who are not a part of their sub-culture (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Arnold and Barling, 2003). Some participants in the current study confirmed this: for example, Pascal, an independent sex worker, commented on the way in which some groups of sex workers built their own separate communities based on shared interests:

...all these things around the stigma, to protect yourself, you develop your own community. In a way I like...I like being part of this community as well. So it's more than the work itself, it's also the culture attached to the sex worker community.

For many participants in the current study, the main purpose of such communities was less about developing forms of resistance than offering mutual support. For those who kept their working life secret, such as Ruby and Rebecca, there were few places to which they could turn for support and having online networks or colleagues with whom to share experiences was important. Exchanges could relate to sharing positive experiences, discussing advice on health and safety, receiving supportive feedback from colleagues or, as Jodie put it, simply 'letting off steam' after a difficult day or problematic encounter. These online communities thus replaced the networks of support sometimes provided by friends or family for people in non-stigmatised jobs, or workplace communities in employed settings. Ruby commented on the supportiveness of one website run by and for escorts and how important such help and encouragement was for lone workers.

Sometimes just reading a post and sometimes all you can put is like 'I'm sorry it happened to you' or 'sorry you feel that way', but just....if you post something like that and somebody just puts 'oh man, that's bad', it makes you feel so much better.

Korczynski (2003) notes the importance of collective 'communities of coping' in other forms of front-line customer service work, particularly on occasions when workers experience anger and abuse from customers. While workers in managed or collective settings in the current study commented on the support they received from colleagues in their workplace, these forms of support were not available in the same way to lone independent sex workers. Certain websites, such as networking sites for escorts, gave substantial advice on keeping safe and also posted warnings about dangerous individuals or timewasters. Sixteen participants, primarily female independent sex workers, noted they were able to obtain support from these forums and could share information about any difficult experiences to alert others. There did not appear to be a similar forum for male sex workers, although a small number involved in sex worker activism felt they had support from colleagues in the sex workers' rights movement. While workers in mainstream sectors may have the structured support available through these organisations, including trade unions, as well as professional bodies, sex workers in the main are reliant on peer support.

Workers in managed settings and some independent sex workers were also able to find support from sex work projects in the voluntary or statutory sectors, particularly where they were seen to take a non-judgemental approach to sex work. The support offered by external organisations may vary according to the sector and traditionally, the focus of much publicly-funded service support has been on female street-based sex workers (Pitcher, 2010). There is also considerable variety amongst projects supporting sex workers, with some being ideologically-driven, which may impact upon the nature of support offered and conditions attached to provision, depending on whether they view commercial sex as labour or exploitation (Pitcher, 2006).

Participants in independent and managed settings contacted sex work projects for advice on sexual health issues, resources such as free condoms or referral to clinics. Many projects and sex worker support organisations also participate in the National Ugly Mugs scheme, which links intelligence on perpetrators of violent crimes against sex workers in different areas and enables sex workers to report violent incidents to projects rather than approaching the police

directly (Laing and Pitcher, 2013). Some participants preferred to speak to staff in support projects if they encountered any problems, as they felt they would act as an intermediary and enable the worker to remain anonymous. As Jake noted, these schemes provided an important source of support lacking elsewhere: 'I think it's schemes like Ugly Mugs and stuff like that... those are the people that we need really'.

Within the UK there is now a trade union for sex workers, which is a branch of the GMB union. This provides advice and support, including free legal advice on criminal prosecution. Although the branch has a limited membership, the GMB has represented its members in the sex industry in a number of situations, not only against employers, but also in legal cases against them (Gall, 2012). Nonetheless, there are challenges to recruitment because of the legal and social context surrounding sex work and the lack of visibility of many sex workers. While sex worker activists may agree that sex work is a valid form of labour, there are also divergences within the sex workers' rights movement regarding the mechanisms required to realise their rights (Cruz, 2013). Very few participants in the current study, particularly those outside London, were aware of the trade union branch (only seven mentioned this) and not all of those actively participated in the union.

Many sex workers are thus distanced from support for a range of reasons, including their marginalisation and secrecy, lack of reach of support groups or organisations and current lack of a comprehensive and inclusive forum representing diverse groups of sex workers. New forms of work, particularly in the service sector, and the rise of global markets pose challenges for labour movements generally and some unions have yet to adapt to flexible and fragmented workforces with varied interests (Hyman, 1997; Cobble and Merrill, 2009). The semi-illegal nature of sex work, particularly in managed or collective settings, further prohibits labour organisation in this sector. Mainstream labour movements do not always support sex worker organising, which presents an additional barrier (Gall, 2012). This is further exacerbated by the promotion of abolitionist messages in some trade union sectors, which contribute to sex workers' social exclusion because of a failure to accept

sexual labour as work and hence to recognise sex workers' labour rights (Sanders et al., 2009). Thus the legal context, social stigma, the diverse nature of the sex industry with sometimes conflicting interests, as well as the secrecy attached to much sex work, combine to prevent cohesive representation of sex workers in the UK.

## **8.5 Conclusions**

One of the principal factors constraining sex workers' agency is not intrinsic to the sex industry *per se*, nor individual characteristics of sex workers, but imposed externally through complex and inconsistent laws and variable interpretations of the law across localities, which prohibit the activities of adult sex workers. Policies in the twenty-first century have moved from a focus primarily on street-based sex work to encompass indoor work, although there is little distinction in policy terms between different forms of working, or between examples of good and bad practice. The needs of male and transgender sex workers have also tended to be ignored. Furthermore, policies are premised on a particular model of (male) clients as abusive and exploitative, whereas evidence from this and other studies shows that clients are a diverse group and sex workers may often have agreeable relationships with their clients. This is also contingent on the work setting, as well as the comparative experience of individual workers and thus there are varying degrees of resistance and agency according to these factors, although current policy fails to acknowledge these.

While there has been extensive discussion in the academic literature on the impact of UK legislation on female street-based sex workers, there has been less scrutiny of the way in which the laws impinge on the working and personal lives of indoor-based workers, particularly those working independently, including male and transgender workers. The current research study demonstrates the impact of the law on male, female and transgender independent sex workers, as well as those working in managed settings, and the way in which the legal and policy context contributes towards a climate

where sex workers are often afraid to report crimes against them and sometimes creates barriers to safer working practices. As some participants noted, the illegality of managed premises also prohibits the development and regulation of effective practice and thus exploitation is allowed to go unchecked.

Lack of clarity in the law and fears that people working collectively might be at risk of prosecution have served as a deterrent for independent sex workers considering working together for safety or companionship. There were local variations and police strategies in some areas were less punitive than in others. Nonetheless, there were concerns that approaches were subject to change and participants were often nervous about contact with the police because of the potential repercussions for them. This is a crucial factor which distinguishes sex work from many other service sector occupations and seriously impinges on sex workers' agency.

The research shows the enduring effects of stigma, experienced by most participants and often perpetuated through media discourses and exacerbated by punitive laws. These combined discourses may be associated with the institutionalised forms of misrecognition touched upon in Chapter Six, which Fraser (1998) suggests deny equal participation in society to those groups or individuals who are misrecognised. As a consequence of the social condemnation of their profession, many participants maintained secrecy about their working status, which increased their isolation and alienated them from sources of support in some instances. The stigma attached to sex work also affected some participants' plans for the future, not only in relation to their personal but also their professional lives.

The experience of stigma could sometimes give impetus to forms of resistance among some sex workers and the development of counter-cultures, although participation was constrained by legal and social structures. This also raises the issue of which groups of sex workers are able to express themselves through new social media, as well as activist forums, and therefore how representative these forums can be. There is also a question regarding the

degree of impact these forms of resistance may have, if sex workers are excluded from debates and consultations concerning their livelihood. Sometimes counter-cultures may serve to further distance marginalised groups such as sex workers from mainstream society, particularly if their concerns are not heard by those with the power to make policy changes. From the current research and other studies, it appears that a combination of punitive laws and moral discourses denying sex workers' agency also suppress the voices of sex workers who try to assert their agency through self-organisation.

Most participants wanted to see changes to the law, particularly with respect to removing the criminal penalties from their occupation, although there were differing opinions as to how this should happen. While the current laws and policy climate have made sex workers' lives much more difficult, they have not deterred them from continuing to work in the sex industry, although arguably they make their working conditions more dangerous. The findings from this study raise some important policy implications, which will be discussed in the final chapter.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusions

This final chapter brings together the main findings from the analysis of fieldwork data, relating them to the principal aims of the research. It then contextualises the findings in relation to labour market theories and the organisation of work in a broader sense. A key aim of the research was to explore the exercise of agency in sex work, in the context of wider social structures. A further theme which emerged during the research fieldwork and analysis was the notion of respect, which is interconnected with degrees of agency and the two are discussed together later in this chapter. Finally, this chapter considers methodological issues, the limitations of this research and the implications for policy directions and further research.

The research also aimed to test certain prevailing perspectives on prostitution and sex work, particularly in relation to discourses of gendered exploitation. The literature review in Chapter Two considered competing theoretical standpoints and explored some of the more nuanced debates regarding the organisation of sex work and degrees of agency and control within the industry. The thesis moved beyond previous analyses through explicitly framing the research theoretically as an occupational study of sex work, with questions similar to those that would be asked of workers in any occupation. This opened up useful ways of viewing its characteristics as labour and situating the study within the context of broader theoretical perspectives on labour market structures and processes.

Chapter Two noted that state responses to sex work, policy reports and some of the literature presented from a radical feminist and/or abolitionist perspective present a very limited picture of sex work, which does not reflect the diversity of those working in the industry, nor the organisation of sex work. As Weitzer (2007: 28) has observed, the “oppression model” presented in these depictions tends to draw on the ‘most disturbing cases’, usually in the street sector, which are then extrapolated to represent the whole industry. The current study confirms the findings of earlier research showing not only the

difference between street-based and indoor sex work, but also the varied experiences of those working in the indoor sex industry. It is not my intention to rehearse the theoretical divides in this chapter, as they have been explored earlier in this thesis, but it is important to emphasise that, as with any occupation, the organisation of sex work is complex and multi-faceted. A perspective which draws on the extreme circumstances of the few, either those who experience severe economic deprivation and have encountered the most exploitative or dangerous of conditions, or those who experience a high degree of autonomy and an affluent lifestyle, is limited both empirically and methodologically and does not represent the multiplicity of experiences and situations. A comparable example might be to extrapolate from studies focusing on forced labour in certain restaurants or, at the opposite extreme, the position of celebrity chefs, and to assert that either of these scenarios is representative of the entire restaurant sector. As the current study shows, the experience of those working in the indoor sex industry is as varied as that of many workers in mainstream occupations, with similar everyday tensions between factors which facilitate or frustrate job enjoyment.

## **9.1    *Key findings***

The principal aim of this study was to explore the working experiences of adults in indoor-based direct sex work, as well as to consider labour market structures, occupational characteristics and working conditions in indoor markets. The previous four chapters focused on the organisation and management of sex work in different sub-sectors of the indoor industry and the labour processes involved. They also explored transitions into, within and from sex work and the way in which, while sex work may be viewed as a temporary working option for many, some make longer-term careers as independent entrepreneurs or progressing through different sub-sectors or occupations within the industry. Where relevant, differences between the experiences of male and female sex workers were highlighted and comparisons made with other industries, particularly in the service sector. The factors contributing to or detracting from job satisfaction were an important



feature in the interview data and are discussed below. Equally of importance was the influence of external factors such as Government policy and legal constraints. While the sale of sex is not illegal, this research reinforced the findings of other studies which have concluded that ambiguities in the law and criminalisation of certain activities constrain sex workers' ability to optimise their working conditions and may intensify their vulnerability to exploitation (e.g. Brooks-Gordon, 2006; Jenkins, 2009). The way in which certain meanings of sex work are sustained and the challenges presented by the interview data to dominant discourses of prostitution in the political and moral spheres are considered below in the context of the emergent themes. The overview of findings is presented in the order of the preceding four chapters.

While previous studies such as those by Brewis and Linstead (2000a) and Sanders (2005a) have shown the diversity amongst sex workers in indoor locations and have explored the structures and processes in indoor sex work, the primary focus of much research has to date been on female sex workers, or specific subdivisions of the indoor sex industry. The current research extended the focus of earlier studies through considering comparative working practices and conditions across different sub-sectors and according to gender. The analysis in Chapter Five found that structures of indoor sex work are gendered in ways which reflect work organisation in the broader economy. It confirmed the findings of previous studies showing that "dependent" self-employment in the brothel and agency sectors in Great Britain is more prevalent for female than for male sex workers. This may be partly as a result of demand, accompanied by many women's need for flexible working practices which accommodate their domestic commitments. Nonetheless, independent work features significantly in indoor sex markets and appears to be a growing sector for both male and female sex workers. While independent workers prefer the autonomy this affords, there are also disadvantages which may arise from this mode of working, including safety considerations, possible social isolation and financial uncertainties. The structures of indoor sex markets are often seen as hierarchical, with independent work, with its higher earnings and greater control over working conditions, tending to be viewed as the upper end of the indoor sector. Nonetheless, some may prefer the set

hours and more delineated organisation of brothel work in order to accommodate other aspirations. Because of the additional layer of third party administration and lack of regulation in the managed sector, there is greater potential for exploitation within this sector. Furthermore, the feminised nature of the managed sector means that the incidence of exploitation is likely to be higher for women than for men, although on an individual level the study found similarities between the experiences of male and female participants who had worked in the brothel sector. Regulation alone, however, is not sufficient to address exploitative conditions and, as with other mainstream occupations, inequalities and more abusive practices may be normalised in workplace cultures. There is, therefore, a need to give critical consideration to working structures and processes in the broader labour market, not just in sex work. An ideal mode of working for some sex workers might be independent self-employed work, but within a collective setting. This is currently prohibited by the way in which the laws relating to brothel management and controlling for gain are interpreted and applied in different local areas and thus the organisation of the indoor sex industry is also driven by external factors.

The Internet has presented new opportunities for independent sex workers to market their services and extend their advertising material, to present more detailed information about themselves, their preferences and the types of services they offer. Nonetheless, there are also risks that come with Internet advertising, particularly as it is difficult to remove material once it has been in the virtual sphere. Sex workers may be selective about the information they provide online, in order to conceal their identity. This can sometimes be more of an issue for female sex workers, particularly because they tend to be stigmatised by society and state in ways which are not experienced to the same degree by their male counterparts. Representations of the “whore” and associated social disapproval are essentially entwined with normative constructions of female sexuality. While the omission of identity may be for pragmatic reasons, however, and although independent sex workers in particular take control of their marketing material which extends beyond the visual image, a cursory scanning of online advertising might result in the conclusion that marketing of female sex workers perpetuates sexualised

images which reduce them to body parts and sustains objectification. Certain radical feminist critics of the sex industry such as Hughes (2000) and Jeffreys (2009), for example, disregard the independent dimension of sex work and portray all online marketing of (female) sex workers as under the control of and for the benefit of men alone. In doing so, they propagate messages of female disempowerment and themselves frequently reduce portrayal of female sex workers to their body parts which, it may be argued, reinforce the depersonalisation they claim to be challenging. Furthermore, they do not represent the diverse ways in which sex workers use the Internet, nor the relationships between sex workers and their clients (Soothill and Sanders, 2005). Attwood (2013) has observed that some sex workers who manage their online sites do not dissociate their bodies and sexuality from other aspects of their personality, but present them as an integral part of their identity, albeit within a commercial context. They are also active in determining how their identity will be displayed, often designing their own websites in order to provide not only personal information, but also to engage with debates about sexuality. Furthermore, it is not only women but also men who are objects of 'erotic gazing' in the media and in cyberspace (Attwood, 2013: 205). Online commercial sex also needs to be contextualised in relation to the proliferation of non-commercial sexual consumption on the Internet, through networking sites, blogging and webcam use. As McNair (2009) has argued, it is important to move beyond binaries of passivity and free choice and set analyses of sexual representation in the context of changes to mainstream culture and constructions of gender. At the same time, as Gill (2009b) has noted, we need to continue to be aware of ways in which discourses of female empowerment may be simply re-writing certain sexual stereotypes. We cannot hold sex workers responsible for normative constructions of masculinity and femininity, however, and sex work may be seen as a reflection, rather than cause of such norms. It is important therefore to consider ways to address gendered stereotypes, diverse sexualities and the concept of agency in the context of both commercial and non-commercial sex.

Chapter Six highlighted that agency in sex work is relative not only to structural constraints or opportunities, but also to individual resilience, a person's life-

stage and aspirations. The gendering of labour markets and unequal distribution of domestic work were seen as contributory factors to some women's pathways into sex work, particularly brothel work. Nonetheless, while gender inequalities may be a significant factor, it is also important to set an analysis of sex work in the broader context of the unequal distribution of resources. While economic need may influence transitions into sex work, however, it is not the only rationale for engaging in the work and it is important to note that most people undertake any paid work primarily for economic reasons. As Weeks (2011: 37) comments:

...we work because we must: while some of us may have a choice of where to work, in an economy predicated on waged work, few have the power to determine much about the specific terms of that employment, and fewer still the choice of whether or not to work at all.

A distinction may be made between economic need, which drives most labour market engagement, and economic vulnerability which may limit individuals' capacity to exercise agency. While a small number of participants in the current research might be viewed as vulnerable financially and emotionally when they first engaged in sex work, this was not typical of the experience of the majority. Many took an instrumental approach to their involvement in sex work, including migrant workers as well as UK nationals, and some who remained in the industry for longer, or planned re-entry into sex work after taking time out, viewed it as an entrepreneurial venture. For others, sex work was seen as preferable to alternative limited options as a means of getting by financially. For some, sex work was seen as an additional part-time activity accompanying their career in another sector. Enjoyment of the work for itself was also sometimes a motivating factor. Within all these categories, distinctions between participants' transitions related less to gender than to their age, skills, experience and aspirations and no one transition could be said to be more typical than the others.

Similarly, no clearly gendered patterns emerged when considering factors influencing job satisfaction. The social interaction with clients was viewed by

most participants as an important contributor to their job satisfaction and more than a third of participants, across different gender groups, also mentioned enjoying the sexual element of their work. As with studies of occupations in other sectors, comparative job satisfaction in sex work also related to a number of other factors, including relative autonomy, workplace social relations and support, as well as the economic benefits. Unlike other occupations, however, social stigma featured significantly in participants' accounts and was viewed as detracting from job enjoyment at times. This confirms the findings by Vanwesenbeeck (2005) and Petro (2010), who have also noted the impact of social stigma on sex workers' levels of self-esteem. Nonetheless, more than a quarter of participants in the current study reported that sex work had *contributed* to their positive self-regard, despite the perceptions of the outside world. In part, this may relate to the way in which those constructed as "dirty" workers establish their own sub-culture, which affirms their identity as well as offering mutual support. As Honneth (1995) notes, those who are socially disenfranchised or disrespected can, through collective resistance, establish more positive forms of self-identification.

Chapter Seven confirmed that sex workers in both independent and managed settings are able effectively to manage emotional and physical boundaries in their work and to demarcate their working and private lives. This confirms the findings of other studies, including Browne and Minichiello (1995), Sanders (2002) and Brents and Jackson (2013), which have shown how male and female sex workers respectively manage their emotional labour and identity separation. While Walby (2012) identified greater porosity between boundaries amongst male Internet escorts compared with studies of female sex workers, the current research found that, where men and women work in similar sub-sectors such as independent sex work, the way in which they employ emotional labour and impression management varies less according to gender than to personal preferences and individual circumstances. Degrees of intimacy and boundary management also relate to the work setting. The more prolonged interactions in independent sex work compared with brothel work mean that emotional boundaries may be tested more frequently. Some clients may become too emotionally attached, which for some male and

female participants was a signal to end the commercial relationship, in part because this was viewed as detracting from their self-perception as professional workers. While a few participants on occasion crossed their own boundaries to develop emotional attachments with clients outside the confines of the commercial relationship, they were aware of the challenges this presented and tended not to repeat the experience. Although there was some evidence of blurring of boundaries, therefore, this was less extensive than suggested in Walby's (2012) study and the majority of participants in the current study maintained a professional separation between work sex and personal sex. While they might develop emotional bonds with some clients, this emotional interchange was usually contained within the limits of the professional relationship, which corresponds with the "bounded authenticity" described by Bernstein (2007a), where both parties tacitly understand the rules of interaction. The findings of the current study also concur with Zelizer's (2005) notion of a continuum of intimacy which accommodates both commercial and non-commercial relations. They counter the assertions, discussed in Chapter Two, that a person's selfhood is inextricably attached to their sexuality, and confirm the findings of other studies that indicate that sex workers' ability to draw boundaries is not dissimilar from the way in which workers in other occupations make distinctions between different identities. Although other occupations involving close physical or emotional engagement also require considerable emotion work to maintain boundary separation, however, the lack of formal recognition of sexual labour as work means it does not have the same infrastructure of professional supervision, support and guidance provided within mainstream occupations.

A key function of the sex worker's role within all settings is managing the transaction with clients. While terms and conditions for clients may be set out prior to the encounter, through independent workers' websites and prior negotiations, or through third parties in brothels such as receptionists, workers also have to guide the interaction to ensure adherence to the implicit "contract". Contrary to narratives which portray sex work as an inherently violent occupation, few participants experienced incidents of either physical or sexual violence and the breaches of agreement which needed to be

addressed related far more to what were seen as incidences of discourtesy, including depersonalising language and clients' drunkenness or drug use. Rude or abusive language is something which may be encountered by workers in many frontline occupations with a customer interface. Nonetheless, while the occurrence of violence or abuse in other occupations may be seen as a specific problem to be addressed in order to ameliorate working conditions, sex work appears to be treated differently in policy discourses, where violence is often presented as an ineluctable feature of the work. Furthermore, its conception as essentially gendered violence leaves little room for consideration of how male and transgender sex workers may also be vulnerable in some circumstances. There is an awareness amongst sex workers of the potential risks in their work, which are associated not only with the general risks encountered by those whose work involves engagement with strangers, particularly lone contractors, but also the consequences of social attitudes to sex workers, compounded by their lack of state protection as workers with rights. While they may take precautions to protect themselves from potential dangers, however, the fact that sex work is not considered a legitimate occupation makes sex workers more vulnerable to attack, particularly in situations where their work status is illegal, which can be a deterrent to reporting criminal acts against them. The precariousness of sex work may be exacerbated for some migrant workers, who may not have awareness of their rights or access to networks of support and advice; and who may have concerns over their legal immigration status, as well as fear of exposure and stigmatisation (O'Connell Davidson, 2006a; Mai, 2009). Studies of sex work in states where it is legalised or decriminalised have shown that the likelihood of violence is reduced where it is regulated and where sex workers have the same recourse to legal protection as other citizens (Abel and Fitzgerald, 2010; Brents et al., 2010). This is not to argue that there is *no* violence in sex work, but that it is important to view the risks associated with sex work in the context of different markets, working practices and legislative and social structures, as well as considering issues relating to occupational health and safety in the broader labour market. Undoubtedly, there is a significant risk of violence for women working in street markets (Pitcher et al., 2006). Violence is associated with street life generally and related to factors

such as drug use and homelessness. Street-based sex workers are often affected by a number of interlocking factors and thus it is difficult to separate different explanatory factors connected to their experience of violence (Cusick, 2006). Nonetheless, as McKeganey and Barnard (1996) have observed, such violence is also partly grounded not only in the position of women in society, but that of female sex workers in particular, who through their deviant sexuality are seen to have relinquished any rights to respect. While indoor workers are less visible and face fewer risks than street-based sex workers, as Sanders and Campbell (2007) have argued, policies concerning both groups of sex workers have a role to play in countering negative stereotypes which foster a culture wherein violence against sex workers is seen as inevitable. Such violence is neither inevitable nor excusable and, as with any occupation where there are such risks, it is important to consider the steps that might be taken by state and society, as well as by sex workers themselves, to reduce those risks.

This theme was continued in Chapter Eight which found that, rather than protecting sex workers from potential dangers, the current legislation exacerbates the risks they face, through enforced isolation and lack of recognition as equal citizens. British state policy is often premised on a model of women as victims and male clients as abusers, yet the experience of participants in the current study confirms the findings of other studies of indoor-based workers which contradict these gendered stereotypes. While the evidence shows that the majority of sex workers are female, a significant number are male and some are transgender. Similarly, there is much diversity amongst clients and sex workers often enjoy mutually beneficial relationships with their clients. It is unhelpful to get into a battle over statistics, but equally it is necessary to emphasise that the unidimensional model of exploitation is an inadequate explanatory vehicle for relations and structures in sex work. While it is important to consider the gendered nature of sex work, the possibilities for a more nuanced analysis are significantly reduced when the exploitation model is repeatedly seen as the accepted interpretation of commercial sexual relations. Furthermore, returning to Honneth's (1995) notion of different levels of disrespect, it may be argued that certain radical feminist and/or moralistic narratives of victimhood and slavery not only deny women's capacity for



agency but, when translated into state discourses, actively remove their agency. This is a topic to which I will return in section 9.3 below. While the experience of disrespect may sometimes motivate collective resistance, there are questions regarding the effectiveness of such resistance if state structures limit or deny mechanisms for sex workers' self-expression.

In summary, the research identified a number of comparative findings relating both to gender and to diverse work settings. The overall structures of sex work are gendered, which may be seen as reflecting broader labour market trends. Male and transgender sex workers are more likely to be concentrated in independent self-employed sex work, which tends to afford greater autonomy for individuals in determining their working conditions, whereas women work across independent and managed settings. Nonetheless, there are also disadvantages to working independently, including safety considerations and the potential for social isolation, although online networks may sometimes provide supportive communities. While collective work might be a form of work organisation preferred by many sex workers, the current legal situation makes this a problematic option, as discussed below. The choice thus tends to be between lone independent work, which involves a greater commitment in terms of time and responsibility and may be difficult for women with young children, or working within managed establishments, where management practices can be variable. While some parlours and managed flats operate according to implicit principles of good practice, there is a greater potential for financial and sexual exploitation in these settings, where a third party defines the rules of working. Selective application of the laws can also increase the precariousness of this form of work.

Although the main distinctions between participants related primarily to their work setting, individual circumstances and aspirations, certain gender-specific differences emerged from the data. Stigma was experienced by female, male and transgender workers across settings, although the gendered discourses relating to prostitution and sex work affected female workers in particular. Concealing work identity appeared to be a greater issue for women than for

men and the need to maintain secrecy was also seen to contribute to social stigma.

Nonetheless, there were areas of working practice where gender differences were less apparent. Many female, male and transgender sex workers across settings maintained a clear separation between their working and private life, for example, although some male and female independent workers developed more emotionally intimate relationships with certain clients. The factors contributing to job satisfaction appeared to relate less to gender than to participants' working circumstances and aspirations. Social interaction with clients was a source of job satisfaction for participants across settings and expectation of respect was also emphasised by participants.

While policing practices vary geographically, workers across all settings felt the current laws fail to protect sex workers and place them at risk of violence. For independent workers, the laws prohibit collective working which might offer greater safety than lone working. Although this option may also appeal to some male and transgender participants, cooperative working if it were a legitimate option is a form of work organisation that might be preferred by some women working in brothels as well as independently (Cruz, 2013; Pitcher and Wijers, 2014). A change to the law in this regard might potentially have a greater impact on women working in the sex industry and is a key issue for policy.

Table 9.1 below discusses the comparative findings in relation to gender and work settings, where applicable. While managed premises may be called parlours, saunas or flats, depending on the geographical context, I have below incorporated all these under the term 'parlour'. This also distinguishes managed settings from collective arrangements, which may also be considered as brothels in UK law.

**Table 9.1 Comparative findings according to gender and work setting**

<b>Work characteristics and processes</b>	<b>Similarities/ differences by gender</b>	<b>Similarities/differences by type of work setting</b>
<b>Characteristics across work settings</b>	Male/transgender sex workers mainly work independently. Women more likely to work across independent and managed settings.	Sex workers in managed premises were younger than independent workers. Most parlour workers were aged 18-30 and most independent workers in their 30s or older. Female parlour workers more likely than independent workers to have young children
<b>Working status</b>	No evident gender differences in work organisation for independent sole operators. Some female & transgender participants worked collectively	Independent sex workers similar to lone self-employed operators, managing their own business. Workers in collectives also independent and manage own labour. Workers in agencies and parlours also self-employed, although in parlours this is a nominal status and they are similar to “disguised” employees in other sectors.
<b>Relationships with third parties</b>	Potential for exploitation higher where third party determines rules of working - female workers in parlours may be disproportionately affected by variable management practices.	Independent workers may sub-contract some tasks to third party. Agencies managed by third party: sex workers tend to set their rates, hours and services. Parlours managed by third party who sets overall terms & conditions; sex workers may negotiate hours/some services. Other third parties in parlours may include receptionist & sometimes security guard.
<b>Rates and appointment lengths</b>	Hourly rates tend to be higher for independent female & transgender workers than for male sex workers. Appointment lengths similar for all independent workers	Rates for independent and agency sex workers higher than those in parlours. Agencies and parlours take a percentage of workers’ earnings. Appointment lengths tend to be longer for independent/agency workers than in parlours.
<b>Types of service and labour processes</b>	Degrees of emotional labour for independent workers related more to individual circumstances/type of work than gender differences.	Services in parlours tend to relate to specific sexual acts as well as appointment lengths; variation across premises and sometimes more extended encounters requiring greater emotional intimacy. In independent/agency work sexual services tend to be part of more holistic intimate transaction.
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	As well as economic benefits, social interaction with clients major feature of job satisfaction across all settings/genders. Autonomy of self-employment significant for independent workers of all genders. Respect important precondition for job satisfaction across settings/genders & disrespect from clients/others detracted from this.	

**Table 9.1 contd. Comparative findings according to gender and work setting**

<b>Work characteristics and processes</b>	<b>Similarities/ differences by gender</b>	<b>Similarities/differences by type of work setting</b>
<b>Transitions into and from sex work and working patterns</b>	Transitions or motivations for participating in sex work related less to gender than to factors such as age, experience & aspirations, and broader structural inequalities which may also influence transitions in mainstream economy.	Parlour work more likely to be short-term for instrumental reasons although some may move into managerial/admin roles. Independent workers sometimes shorter-term but some remain for longer period and may develop their business. Job satisfaction, aspirations and alternative options key related factors. Some move between sex industry and other sectors or balance sex work with mainstream occupation.
<b>Occupational health and safety</b>	While most participants stated that they had rarely experienced problems in their work, some instances of problematic clients reported by female, male and transgender sex workers. Female sex workers more likely to refer to incidents where clients would try to remove condoms.	Independent workers supervise own safety procedures & transactions with clients. Agencies undertake some screening of clients but this variable; workers negotiate transactions with clients & some agencies provide security back-up. Managed premises usually have security procedures & manager/receptionist & sometimes security guard there if workers have problems with clients they don't feel able to handle themselves. While reported incidents were rare across settings, problems could relate to difficult clients, the impact of the law, contact with police & social stigma.
<b>Balancing identities</b>	Degrees of intimacy/ identity management varied less by gender than personal preference/individual circumstances. Most participants kept professional separation between work/private relationships.	Participants across all settings balanced work and private identities and managed emotional and physical boundaries. Workers in parlours sometimes found that having set hours and premises of work helped to demarcate work and private identities.
<b>Experience of stigma</b>	Female, male and transgender sex workers encountered social stigma, although gendered policy discourses intensified stigma for female workers, who were less likely than males to disclose their occupation.	Stigma affected workers across settings. Some independent workers open about their status and felt this helped to reduce stigma.

## 9.2 *Understanding sex work in context*

In framing this research as an occupational study, it was situated in the context of theories of labour market structures and processes. Participants themselves viewed sexual labour as work, with many similarities to occupations in mainstream sectors, as well as differences relating partly to the interactive nature of the service and to the socio-legal context. While the sex industry may be seen as a broadly gendered institution, in that the majority of sex workers are female and the majority of clients male, it does not necessarily follow that all activities and structures within indoor sex work are equally gendered or paradigmatic of unequal patriarchal relations. While sex workers as providers of sexual services and clients as consumers of those services hold different positions in the contractual relationship, this does not inevitably entail an imbalance of power, although there may be instances where the exercise of financial or physical power by one may constrain the freedoms of the other. Clearly there are situations in which inequalities exist, particularly, but not exclusively, in dependent self-employment where a third party is in some form of management relationship with workers, but the current study found that this is not markedly dissimilar from mainstream occupations. Despite national equalities legislation and health and safety protocols, there are examples of exploitation and dubious working practices in many sectors, particularly in precarious service sector jobs, which also tend to be feminised occupations. In analysing unequal relations in sex work, therefore, it is important to set these within the context of broader gender inequalities in the labour market, rather than interpreting sex work as the *cause* of patriarchal relations, which is the inference of certain radical feminist and abolitionist discourses. This is an important distinction, as it governs approaches to the regulation of sex work. If unequal relations in sex work are viewed as stemming from broader societal inequalities, then attempting to address these inequalities in one industry alone does nothing to counter patriarchal relations *per se*, which continue to permeate both workplace and private relationships. Furthermore, as I will argue later in this chapter, blanket approaches which attempt to control demand through criminalisation do nothing to tackle

instances of exploitation or coercion, particularly as they do not enhance, but actually detract from workers' ability to express their agency through reducing their already limited rights.

The relevance of certain labour market theories to sex work was evident in the current study, particularly regarding the division of labour. While there is a broadly gendered aspect to these divisions, however, the dynamics of inequality in cultural and workplace relations are, as Bradley (1996) argues, multi-dimensional. Although there are local and context-specific variations, contemporary labour markets are also set within the economic framework of global capital and flows of labour across borders. Gender relations are one dynamic, but it is important to take into account other aspects, particularly social class, the unequal distribution of wealth and differences according to ethnicity, age and sexuality. The extent to which individuals are able to express their agency also depends on various factors, including their personal relationships, their human capital, social networks and the labour market opportunities available to them at different stages in their lives. It might be argued that many participants in the current study exercised a degree of rational choice in taking the decision to enter, remain in or leave sex work, particularly considering the extent to which they deliberated the advantages and disadvantages of their involvement, which included balancing the financial gains against potential social stigma and isolation. Nonetheless, sex work, as with other occupations, needs to be viewed in the context of persistent social hierarchies which limit many people's choices. The rational choice model also does not take into account the gendered construction of self-interest (Hughes, 2002). Women who pursue their own interests may thus come into conflict with normative expectations of feminine behaviour and notions of what it is to be a "good" wife and mother.

The current study found that, while the economic benefits of sex work were often a key motivating factor for participants' engagement, this was not the sole explanation for working in the sex industry. Contrary to narratives which focus on economic need to the exclusion of other accounts, participants had diverse reasons for undertaking sex work and their motivations were often

similar to those of workers in other industries. Once in sex work, there were varied and sometimes contradictory experiences. Some participants enjoyed their job and found sex work preferable to any other occupation in which they had worked, others had previously found it satisfying but no longer found it rewarding, or experienced burnout as a result of pressures that were intrinsic or extrinsic to the work, whereas for some it was simply a means to an end. These experiences were not dissimilar to those in many forms of work, which may be at times stimulating and at others frustrating, and often tedious. As Weeks (2011) comments, there are many problems with the way in which work is lauded politically and socially as a means of enhancing personal dignity. Nonetheless, sex work activists emphasise the importance of categorising sex work as labour, because by being excluded from the class of “worker” they are denied social recognition and hence entitlement to dignity and respect. They are also prevented, through legislative restrictions in Great Britain, from organising their work in ways which might improve their business efficiency and job satisfaction, which differentiates sex work from mainstream occupations. It might also be questioned why, if sex workers are not given the same rights as other workers, they are still bound to adhere to the same duties. Participants raised the issue of the inherent contradiction whereby self-employed sex workers are expected to pay tax and contribute to the economy, yet at the same time are not entitled to equal rights. The lack of social validation which helps to sustain sex workers’ “outsider” status links to their ability to function as agents.

### ***9.3 Agency and compulsion in sex work: recognising diversity***

The research findings emphasised how individuals’ capacity to exercise agency related not only to their personal and working circumstances, but also their relationships with others and their engagement with the outside world. They challenge the abolitionist contention, discussed in previous chapters, that all female sex workers are inescapably victims of gendered oppression and therefore engagement in sex work can never be considered a choice. While economic necessity may be a prime consideration influencing many people’s

entry into sex work, with global inequalities and constraints particularly shaping the engagement of women and migrant workers in the industry, from the data in this study it cannot be said that sex work was the *only* option available to most participants. The evidence demonstrates that many participants took an informed decision to enter sex work, based on assessment of the alternatives available to them. While these may have been limited in some cases, sex work was still seen as the option which best met their requirements at that time, in terms of financial needs and enabling a lifestyle which would not have been possible in other jobs with lower pay and much longer hours of work. While many may view sex work as a short-term pathway for instrumental purposes, others may remain in the industry for longer because of the comparative benefits they encounter, particularly in independent sex work.

The findings confirm other studies which demonstrate that the position of indoor-based sex workers, who form the majority of the sex work population, is often markedly different from that of street-based workers, who have tended to be the focus of many studies and whose experience has informed most policy debates (Weitzer, 2005a; Sanders et al., 2009). The study also goes beyond previous research in considering degrees of agency and exploitation across diverse indoor settings and according to gender. The findings suggest that the potential for exploitation is linked to the extent of third party involvement as well as individual circumstances. Both young women and men reported experiences of coercion in some managed premises, although their capacity to move into less exploitative workplace settings related to factors such as their age, prior work experience in the industry, financial circumstances, aspirations and personal resilience. While the gendered nature of the sex industry plays a significant role in determining workplace structures and relations, therefore, it is equally important to develop an understanding of exploitation which moves beyond simple conceptions of gendered oppression and relates it to individual circumstance and the conditions which may exacerbate or reduce inequalities and mistreatment. As the data from this study show, external factors such as the current laws relating to prostitution, social stigma and dominant discourses of female victimhood contribute to the circumstances in which sex workers may be vulnerable to exploitation.



In relation to considerations of agency and compulsion, Honneth's (1995) three broad categorisations of disrespect may be seen to intersect with conceptions such as self-esteem, autonomy and the conditions which influence individuals' working circumstances. These relate to structural exclusion from certain basic human rights, physical maltreatment where a person is deprived of the ability freely to exercise control over the use of his/her body and instances of social denigration or humiliation. The current study found that interactions between sex workers and clients at an individual level may be mutually rewarding emotionally and, sometimes, sexually, with the potential for greater reciprocity than suggested in analyses of prostitution and sex work which view it as paradigmatic of essentially unequal power relations. The construction of the commercial sexual transaction as a fundamentally unequal exchange is also reflected in state strategies, which have tended to pay little attention to the human or labour rights of sex workers. Arguably this disregard by the state institutionalises their "otherness" and may license further forms of disrespect, because sex workers are not socially recognised or protected.

Fraser (1995; 1998) has contended that misrecognition is not simply a matter for self-realisation, but for social justice, and suggests that injustices of recognition need to be understood in relation to inequalities in the distribution of resources, as the two intersect and impinge on one another. She cites campaigns to suppress prostitution as an example of how claims to recognition of equal status for women can have detrimental effects on sex workers' economic position. Many sex workers may utilise the financial gains of their work for purposes such as maintaining a family, paying off debts or avoiding costly loans; and were such campaigns to be actualised they might have the contradictory impact of returning women to reliance on the state and/or partner, rather than being independent wage-earners. I would further argue that such campaigns have the dual effect of damaging not only the economic, but also the cultural status of female, male and transgender sex workers, through competing claims to recognition. Through emphasising female sex workers' vulnerability and victimhood, they further detract from their agency.

Moreover, the form of criminalisation proposed by those advocating the “Nordic” model would, if adopted, result in the paradoxical situation whereby, at a time when the state has endorsed recognition of lesbian and gay sexualities, it would be returning to prohibition of certain “deviant” forms of consensual gay male sexual exchange, thus potentially reinforcing stigmatisation and secrecy. In the course of purportedly addressing one social injustice, therefore, such campaigns may simply create other forms of injustice. If women’s participation in sex work is seen as resulting from their economic inequality, however, it might be argued that redressing this inequality should lead to a reduction in the numbers of women becoming sex workers as a means of survival. Nonetheless, as the current study has shown, this is not the sole motivation for the engagement of women or men in commercial sex and therefore people will continue to engage in sex work for other reasons.

I concur with writers such as Hardy (2013) that recognition of prostitution as work is a necessary precondition for sex workers’ labour rights and to reduce instances of physical and social disrespect. Being respected by the state would in principle give sex workers greater ability to assert their rights to recognition within their workplace. While the state continues to “dirty” sex work, it creates the conditions for more material forms of disrespect. Although the relationship sex workers have with some clients may already involve mutual respect, arguably recognition of sex work as a form of labour would facilitate a more equal status, similar to that obtained by contractors and clients in other sectors. Nonetheless, this would not necessarily address the social inequalities that perpetuate gendered stereotypes and notions of deviant sexualities, which in turn fuel the “whore” stigma. In considering labour relations in sex work, it may also be timely to problematise the notion of the “sovereign consumer” which has become normalised in institutional practices, in order to conceptualise not only what it is to be a “good” worker, but also the moral obligations that might be expected of the “good” customer.

In developing a continuum of agency, it is important to incorporate overlapping concepts such as respect, recognition and economic status and to include

both commercial and private intimate relations. The role of third parties in the management of sex work and as intermediaries is also a consideration. At the end of the continuum would be the situation where disrespect takes an extreme form of structural exclusion, such as forced labour, which would reduce individual freedom and the capacity for agency to a minimum. It is difficult to conceive a vision of how its polar opposite might be represented, given that, as Lukes (2005) reminds us, our preferences and perceptions are socially influenced and we are all subject to social constraints in one way or another. Nonetheless, it is possible to conceptualise levels of agency in sexual relations, including commercial sex, in terms of a gradation in which greater degrees of freedom would be shaped by a combination of state and social recognition, economic independence, workplace autonomy and mutual respect between sexual parties in both private and commercial intimate relations. The current research has developed understanding of the varied experiences of those sex workers who, similar to most wage labourers, are neither compelled nor entirely free, but rather are subject to certain economic and social constraints to self-determination. In doing so, it creates a conceptual space for further consideration of sex work as a labour market activity and the extent to which regulatory reforms might enhance working conditions in different sectors and enable sex workers to organise their work more effectively. The policy implications will be discussed later in this chapter.

#### **9.4 *Methodological reflections and limitations***

A number of methodological considerations and limitations were discussed earlier in this thesis. Due to the methodology, the intention was not to achieve a statistically representative sample but to generate rich data from in-depth exploration of sex workers' experiences and perceptions. Nonetheless, the study also aimed to draw some comparisons between the experiences of sex workers in different work settings, as well as between female, male and transgender sex workers. While it was possible to conceptualise differences between female independent and brothel workers, and between male and female independent workers, the sample of transgender workers was too small

to make more generalised inferences and therefore the data are more illustrative of their experiences. The recruitment of third parties was not a central aim of the study. Although a small number of managers and receptionists did participate, they were all former sex workers and not necessarily typical of the indoor sex industry. Nonetheless, their experiences contributed an additional dimension to the analysis in some chapters, although it should be noted that these participants were based in premises that tended to operate supportive management principles and it would be more difficult to recruit third parties whose practices might be seen as exploitative.

While participation was sought through a range of recruitment processes, self-selection bias was a potential issue to consider, although this would be more problematic in a study seeking to claim representation of indoor sex workers as a whole. Rather than searching for objective “truths”, however, the study was designed to consider ways in which sex workers construct their experiences and how they interpret their “realities”. As Williams (1998) has observed, the role of the researcher is to situate these experiences and the meaning participants assign to them in the context of the broader processes and structures which influence their actions, in order to develop understanding of the social world. There may also be benefits to self-selection: for example, participants may have been motivated because the issues were of importance to them and they may have reflected on these issues prior to engagement in the research. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that there are limitations with any recruitment method and it is possible that a different approach might have generated alternative conclusions.

An important feature of the methodological approach of this study was to listen to the voices of sex workers, who are often socially marginalised. During the process of analysis and writing, I discussed the themes emerging from the data through ongoing contact with participants, which enabled me to review my interpretation of the research findings. While a process of consultation was built into different stages of the research, however, it should be noted that the study was not designed as participatory research and my analytical approach involved generating concepts and theories from the data, as well as selecting

quotes from the transcripts to illustrate the coded themes. In this sense, as Letherby (2003: 117) has observed, the researcher 'holds the balance in that they take away the 'words' and have the power of editorship'.

The current study has emphasised the diversity in indoor-based sex work and drawn comparisons between the labour market position of sex workers and workers in other occupations. It both contributes to and extends on existing research, but also emphasises the limitations of studies which draw on specific sub-groups of sex workers yet purport to represent the experiences of all sex workers. As Skeggs (1997) has commented, it is the researcher's role to challenge partial accounts, which have become accepted as legitimate knowledge. In doing this, the current study makes an important contribution to the existing literature on sex work. It also enhances understanding of the way in which male and female sex workers, and those in different work settings, make sense of their work and lives outside work and thus addresses some of the gaps in research identified by Weitzer (2005a) and O'Neill (2008). Nonetheless, there is the potential for further research to take these issues further, as I discuss below.

## **9.5 *Policy implications and future research***

It is clear from participants' accounts that the current policy and legal frameworks in Great Britain do not reflect the complex structures and spectrum of working conditions within the indoor sex industry. Furthermore, current and proposed policy approaches fail to acknowledge the diverse experiences of sex workers and in doing so may undermine their agency. As a consequence sex workers' capacity to control their working situation and organise their work to maximise personal safety and support is diminished. There is also an assumption that third parties in the sex industry are by definition exploitative, whereas, as the current and other studies have found, there are diverse styles of management, similar to those in other sectors. My findings suggest that the potential for more exploitative practices is intensified through criminalisation, which prohibits the development of industry-wide occupational health and

safety standards. The interview data present strong reasons for considering decriminalisation as a first step towards realising sex workers' agency and according them respect and most of the policy implications which follow would be dependent on this. Treating sex work as labour in principle opens up opportunities for reconsideration of the sexual contract and clarification of the distinctions between consensual and non-consensual acts. Lifting the current criminal penalties on the organisation of sex work, however, while a necessary precondition for equal recognition, would alone neither address inequalities within the industry, nor the social stigma attached to sex workers. As O'Connell Davidson (2006a) has argued, relaxation of the laws without consideration of labour regulation or occupational standards would do little to correct exploitative working conditions. Introducing regulatory reforms can be fraught with difficulties, however, as protective mechanisms can also create constraints, and tensions may arise between strategies of state control and sex workers' desire for autonomous working conditions. Furthermore, where regulatory changes place legal restrictions on migrant workers, a likely consequence is that they will be further marginalised and pushed into the informal economy, creating a dual labour market (Mai, 2009; Pitcher and Wijers, 2014).

Current policy in Great Britain appears to be moving further away from recognising sex work as labour, with deliberations instead taking place on the potential for further criminalisation. During the production of this thesis, an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade was established in England and Wales, driven by a focus on prevention and exiting. The APPG has presented proposals to introduce a general offence for the purchase of sexual services (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, 2014). Given the current political climate, therefore, there appears to be little motivation for considering decriminalisation of sex work. Nonetheless, it is important to continue to press for this as a basis for according sex workers equal labour rights and my research contributes to the body of evidence supporting this as a way forward. As previous authors have noted (e.g. Sanders, 2009), sex industry workers have not been consulted on legislative or policy proposals which affect them. Research such as the

current study provides a mechanism for representing the diverse experiences of sex workers and challenging certain preconceptions, and therefore it is important to consider means of disseminating the findings, although this should be seen as an addition to, rather than a substitute for systematic policy consultation.

Were there to be a change in policy direction towards recognition of sex work as an occupation, the involvement of sex workers and acknowledgment of their expertise should be a central feature in deliberations regarding the mechanisms for structural reform. Although there may be context-specific issues, which cannot be translated from one state to another, lessons may also be drawn from other countries where sex work has been decriminalised and reforms implemented. While the current study has provided a vehicle for a small group of sex workers to express their voices, however, it should be reiterated that the experience of indoor-based workers may be considerably different from that of street workers and thus consultations should be wide-ranging. It is also important to move away from binaries of choice versus exploitation and to broaden policy debates beyond these binaries, in order to take into account the diverse nature of the sex industry and those working within it, and to develop specific policy approaches shaped according to different circumstances and settings. Current political debates focus almost exclusively on the most vulnerable segments of the industry, ignoring the experience of many sex workers (arguably the majority), but also fail to take into account the needs of male and transgender sex workers when considering policy directions. I would also propose that it is timely to consider a new language to conceptualise sex work, moving beyond broad categorisations to encompass the varied occupational structures and work roles within different sub-sectors.

Finally, this study has extended analyses of sex work as a form of labour, through considering occupational characteristics and working conditions across a broad spectrum of indoor sex work, rather than focusing on specific groups according to gender or workplace setting. It has explored comparative workplace autonomy in various settings, relative agency and longer-term

transitions of sex workers, drawing parallels with other occupations based on participants' broader labour market experience. In doing so, it has also highlighted certain issues that might usefully be explored in future. In particular, there is a need for further comparative research between sex workers and workers in other comparable sectors, to analyse factors such as job satisfaction and working conditions across diverse occupations, as well as longer-term trajectories. It would also be fruitful to consider a larger occupational study exploring differences according to gender, ethnicity and sector, to incorporate a broader cross-section of the sex industry, including both street and indoor-based workers, as well as those involved in the management of sex work and other third parties in the different markets. This would further enhance understanding of how policy responses might be tailored to specific work settings, in order to advance recognition of sex workers' rights in different circumstances.



## Glossary

**BBW/BBM** – refers to larger women or men providing commercial sexual services or advertising on specialist online dating sites.

**BDSM** (bondage, domination/submission, sadomasochism) - a sexual practice in which the partners derive additional pleasure through physical restraint or binding. Also known as S&M.

**Brothel** – definition in Great Britain is a house or establishment used by more than one person, for the purposes of prostitution. Also known as a massage parlour or sauna.

**Criminalisation** – prohibition of either or both the seller and purchaser of sexual services and often third parties.

**Decriminalisation** – the removal of criminal penalties relating to adult prostitution.

**Emotional labour** – a concept coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild. Jobs involving emotional labour are those which require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact and require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person.

**Escort** – a sex worker who works for an agency or independently.

**Exotic dance** – sexualised dance in clubs – usually another term for stripping/striptease dance.

**Girlfriend experience (GFE)** – a more emotionally intimate service which may incorporate kissing, massage and social interaction as well as sexual services and sometimes more extended appointments which include dinner and overnight stays. A similar service (BFE) is provided by some male sex workers.

**In-calls** – where independent/agency sex workers see clients in their own home.

**Lap dancer** – a night club stripper who dances close to clients and sits briefly on their laps.

**Legalisation** – making prostitution legal under certain conditions: for example, through use of toleration zones for street prostitution, or through regulation of premises. Legalisation is often accompanied by conditions for sex workers, such as compulsory health checks.

**Loitering** – (for prostitutes) in a street or public place for the purposes of prostitution.

**Maid** – a receptionist in a brothel, massage parlour or sauna, who acts as the first point of contact for the client.

**Outcalls** – where independent or agency sex workers visit clients in hotels or private premises.

**OWO** – oral sex without a condom.

**Pimp** – a person who lives off the earnings of a prostitute, or who solicits for a prostitute or brothel and is paid for his/her services.

**Parlour** – see *Brothel*.

**Punter** – slang term for a customer of sex workers.

**Receptionist** see *Maid*

**Regulation** – (in relation to sex work) a means of controlling legalised sex industry premises through licensing, where official agencies take control.

**Sex market** – the context in which buying and selling of sex takes place.

**Sex tourism** – travel undertaken to take advantage of the relatively lax laws on prostitution in some countries.

**Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)** – infections such as Syphilis and Chlamydia which are passed on during unprotected sex.

**Soliciting** – (for prostitutes) to make advances in a street or public place for the purposes of prostitution.

**Trafficking** – as distinct from people smuggling (where migrants are seen as willing participants), human trafficking is where the intention behind the facilitation is the exploitation of those migrants when they reach their destination (Home Office, 2004).

**Ugly Mugs schemes** – usually relates to schemes for reporting dangerous/violent individuals to projects so that information can be shared with other sex workers to improve their safety and evidence gathered for potential prosecution. The National Ugly Mugs scheme shares data anonymously with the police, with sex workers' consent, for the purposes of prosecution.

**Walk-up** – used to describe private rented premises or managed flat in certain cities such as London, where clients can walk in without an appointment.

**'Whore' stigma** – social stigma attached to sex work as a 'deviant' activity, usually related to normative conceptions of female sexuality. Stigma can also apply to male/transgender sex workers.

## References

- Abbott, P, Wallace, C and Tyler, M (2005) *An introduction to sociology: feminist perspectives*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Routledge.
- Abel, G M (2011) 'Different stage, different performance: The protective strategy of role play on emotional health in sex work'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 72: 1177-1184.
- Abel, G and Fitzgerald, L (2010) 'Decriminalisation and stigma' in Abel, G. Fitzgerald, L, Healy, C, & Taylor, A (eds.), *Taking the crime out of sex work: New Zealand sex workers' fight for decriminalisation*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Adkins, L (2001) 'Cultural Feminization: "Money, Sex and Power" for Women'. *Signs*, 26 (3): 669-695.
- Agustín, L. M. (2003) 'A migrant world of services. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 10 (3): 377-396.
- Agustín, L. M. (2005) 'New research directions: the cultural studies of commercial sex'. *Sexualities*, 8 (5): 618-631.
- Agustín, L. M. (2006) 'The Conundrum of women's agency: migrations and the sex industry' in Campbell, R and O'Neill, M (eds.) *Sex work now*. Cullompton: Willan.
- Agustín, L M (2007) *Sex at the margins: migration, labour markets and the rescue industry*. London: Zed Books.
- Aldridge, J (2007) 'Picture this: the use of participatory photographic research methods with people with learning disabilities'. *Disability and Society*, 22 (1): 1-17.
- Alexander, P (1998) 'Sex work and health: a question of safety in the workplace'. *Journal of American Medical Women's Association*, 53 (2): 77-82.

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade (2014) *Shifting the burden: Inquiry to assess the operation of the current legal settlement on prostitution in England and Wales*. Available at: <http://appgprostitution.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/shifting-the-burden.pdf>.

Anderson, N and Hughes, K D (2010) 'The business of caring: women's self-employment and the marketization of care'. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 17 (4): 381-405.

Archer, D (1999) 'Exploring "bullying" culture in the para-military organisation'. *International Journal of Manpower*, 20 (1/2): 94-105.

Arnold, K A and Barling, J (2003) 'Prostitution: an illustration of occupational stress in 'dirty work'', in Dollard, M, Winefield, H R and Winefield, A H (eds.) *Occupational Stress in the Service Professions*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Ashford, C (2008) 'Sex work in cyberspace: who pays the price?'. *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 17 (1): 37-49

Ashford, C (2009) 'Queer theory, cyber-ethnographies and researching online sex environments'. *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 18 (3): 297-314.

Ashforth, B E and Kreiner, G E (1999). ' "How can you do it?" Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity'. *Academy of Management Review*, 24 (3): 413-434.

Atkinson, P (1992) 'Transcriptions'. Reprinted in Seale, C (ed., 2004) *Social research methods: a reader*. London: Routledge.

Attwood, F (2013) 'Through the looking glass? Sexual agency and subjectification online'. In Gill, R and Scharff, C (eds.) *New femininities: postfeminism, neoliberalism and subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bagilhole, B and Cross, S (2006) ' 'It Never Struck Me as Female': Investigating men's entry into female-dominated occupations'. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 15 (1): 35-48

Balloch, S, Pahl, J and McLean, J (1998) 'Working in the Social Services: job satisfaction, stress and violence'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 28: 329-350.

Bampton, R and Cowton, C (2002) 'The e-interview'. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung /Forum: qualitative social research*, 3 (2), Art 9.  
[www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/848](http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/848).

Barnard, A (2008) 'Modelling the gender pay gap in the UK: 1998 to 2006'. *Economic & Labour Market Review* 2 (8): 18-24.

Bazeley, P (2007) *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. London: Sage.

Becker, S (1985) 'Human capital, effort and the sexual division of labor'. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 3 (1): S33-S58.

Becker, S (1993) 'Nobel lecture: the economic way of looking at behavior'. *Journal of Political Economy*, 101 (3): 385-409.

Begum, N (2004) 'Employment by occupation and industry'. *Labour Market Trends*, June: 227-234.

Bell, D (1976) *The cultural contradictions of capitalism*. London: Heinemann.

Bellamy, K and Rake, K (2005) *Money, money, money. Is it still a rich man's world? An audit of women's economic welfare in Britain today*. London: Fawcett Society.

Bernstein, E (2007a) *Temporarily yours: intimacy, authenticity and the commerce of sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bernstein, E (2007b) 'Sex work for the middle classes'. *Sexualities*, 10(4): 473-488.

Bimbi, D S (2007) 'Male Prostitution: Pathology, Paradigms and Progress in Research'. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 53 (1): 7-35.

Bindman, J with Doezeema, J (1997) *Redefining prostitution as sex work on the international agenda*. Vancouver: Commercial Sex Information Project/Network of Sex Work Projects.

Blackburn, R M, Jarman, J and Brooks, B (2000) 'The puzzle of gender segregation and inequality: a cross-national analysis'. *European Sociological Review*, 16(2): 119-135.

Blanchflower, D (2000) 'Self employment in OECD countries'. *Labour Economics*, 7: 471-505.

Böheim, R and Muehlberger, U (2006) *Dependent forms of self-employment in the UK: identifying workers on the border between employment and self-employment*. IZA Discussion Papers, No. 1963, <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/33534> [Accessed 23/07/13]

Bola, M (1996) 'Questions of Legitimacy?: The Fit Between Researcher and Researched' in Wilkinson, S and C Kitzinger (eds.) *Representing the Other: a feminism and psychology reader*. London: Sage.

Bolton, S C (2000) 'Who cares? Offering emotion work as a 'gift' in the nursing labour process'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32 (3): 580-586.

Bolton, S C (2009) 'Getting to the heart of the emotional labour process: a reply to Brook'. *Work Employment & Society*, 23 (3): 549-560.

Bolton, S C and Boyd, C (2003) 'Trolley dolly or skilled emotion manager? moving on from Hochschild's Managed Heart'. *Work, employment and society*, 17 (2): 289-308.

Boris, E, Gilmore, S and Parreñas, R (2010) 'Sexual labors: interdisciplinary perspectives toward sex as work'. *Sexualities*, 13(2): 131-137.

Brace, L and O'Connell Davidson, J (2000) ' Minding the gap: general and substantive theorizing on power and exploitation'. *Signs*, 25 (4): 1045-1050.

Bradley, H (1996) *Fractured identities: changing patterns of inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bradley, H and Devadason, R (2008) 'Fractured transitions: young adults' pathways into contemporary labour markets'. *Sociology*, 42(1): 119–136.

Brennan, D (2002) 'Selling sex for visas: sex tourism as a stepping-stone to international migration' in Ehrenreich, B and Hochschild, A (eds.) *Global woman: nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy*. London: Granta.

Brents, B G and Hausbeck, K. (2005) 'Violence and legalized brothel prostitution in Nevada: examining safety, risk and prostitution policy'. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (3): 270-295.

Brents, B G and Hausbeck, K (2010) 'Sex work now: what the blurring of boundaries around the sex industry means for sex work, research, and activism' in Ditmore, M H, Levy, A and Willman, A (eds.) *Sex work matters: exploring money, power, and intimacy in the sex industry*. London: Zed Books.

Brents, B G, Jackson, C A and Hausbeck, K (2010) *The state of sex: tourism, sex, and sin in the new American heartland*. New York: Routledge.

Brents, B G and Jackson, C (2013) 'Gender, emotional labour and interactive body work: negotiating flesh and fantasy in sex workers' labour practices' in Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brewis, J and Linstead, S (2000a) *Sex, work and sex work: eroticizing organization*. London: Routledge.

Brewis, J and Linstead, S (2000b) ' 'The worst thing is the screwing' (1): consumption and the management of identity in sex work'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7 (2): 84-97.

Brewis, J and Linstead, S (2000c) ' 'The worst thing is the screwing' (2): context and career in sex work'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7 (3): 168-180.

Brooks-Gordon, B. (2006) *The price of sex: prostitution, policy and society*. Cullompton: Willan.

Brooks-Gordon, B (2010) 'Bellweather citizens: the regulation of male clients of sex workers'. *Journal of Law and Society*, 37 (1): 145-170.

Brown, D. and McIntosh, S. (2003). 'Job satisfaction in the low wage service sector'. *Applied Economics*, 35 (10): 1241-1254.

Browne, J (2006) *Sex segregation and inequality in the modern labour market*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Browne, J. and Minichiello, V. (1995) 'The Social Meanings Behind Male Sex Work: Implications for Sexual Interactions'. *British Journal of Sociology* 46 (4): 598-622.

Bruckert, C and Law, T (2013) *Beyond pimps, procurers and parasites: mapping third parties in the incall/outcall sex industry*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, Department of Criminology/Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada.

Bruckert, C and Parent, C (2006) 'The in-call sex industry: classed and gendered labour on the margins' in Balfour, G and Comack, E (eds.) *Criminalizing women: gender and (in)justice in neo-liberal times*. Halifax: Fernwood.

Bryant, A and Charmaz, C (2007) 'Grounded theory research: methods and practices' in Bryant, A and Charmaz, K (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. London: Sage.

Bryman, A (2008) *Social Research Methods*, Third edition, Oxford University Press.

Burgess, J, Connell, J and Winterton, J (2013) 'Vulnerable workers, precarious work and the role of trade unions and HRM'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24 (22): 4083-4093.

Butler, J (1993) *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge.



Cabezas, A L (2006) 'The eroticization of labor in Cuba's all-inclusive resorts: performing race, class and gender in the new tourist economy'. *Social Identities*, 12 (5): 507-521

Campbell, R (forthcoming, 2014) 'Not getting away with it: linking sex work and hate crime in Merseyside' in Chakraborti, N.A. and Garland, J. (eds.) *Hate crime: bridging the gap between scholarship and policy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Carline, A (2011) 'Criminal justice, extreme pornography and prostitution: protecting women or promoting morality?'. *Sexualities*, 14 (3): 312-333.

Castells, M (2004) 'Informationalism, networks, and the network society: a theoretical blueprint' in Castells, M (ed.) *The network society: a cross-cultural perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Castells, M (2005) 'The network society: from knowledge to policy' in Castells, M and Cardoso, G (eds.) *The network society: from knowledge to policy*. Washington: John Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations.

Castells, M (2010) *The rise of the network society: information age: economy, society and culture v1*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chichester: John Wiley.

Castle, T and Lee, J (2008) 'Ordering sex in cyberspace: a content analysis of escort websites'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11 (1): 107-121.

Chapkis, W (2000) 'Power and control in the commercial sex trade' in R. Weitzer (ed.) *Sex for Sale*, London: Routledge.

Charmaz, K (1990) 'Discovering' chronic illness: using grounded theory'. *Social Science and Medicine*, 30 (11): 1161-1172.

Charmaz, K (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.

Church, S., Henderson, M., Barnard, M. and Hart, G. (2001), 'Violence by clients towards female prostitutes in different work settings: questionnaire survey'. *British Medical Journal*, 322: 524-525.

Cobble, D A and Merrill, M (2009) 'The promise of service worker unionism'. In Korczynski and Macdonald (eds.) *Service work: critical perspectives*. Oxford: Routledge.

Cohen, R L, Hardy, K, Sanders, T and Wolkowitz, C (2013) 'The body/sex/work/nexus: a critical perspective on body work and sex work' in Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Coleman, S (2005) 'Blogs and the new politics of listening'. *Political Quarterly*, 76 (2): 272-280.

Comte J (2013) 'Decriminalization of sex work: Feminist discourses in light of research'. *Sexuality and Culture* 18(1): 196–217.

Connell, J. and Hart, G. (2003) *An Overview of Male Sex Work in Edinburgh and Glasgow: The Male Sex Work Perspective*. Glasgow: MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Occasional Paper, June.

Corbin, J and Strauss, A (2008) *Basics of qualitative research 3e: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Coy, M (2009) 'This body which is not mine: the notion of the 'habit' body, prostitution and (dis) embodiment'. *Feminist Theory*, 10 (1): 61-75.

Crompton, R (1998) 'Women's employment and state policies'. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences*, 11 (2): 129-146. [downloaded from ebscohost.com, 7/02/11]

Crompton, R and Sanderson, K (1990) *Gendered jobs and social change*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Cruz, K (2013) 'Unmanageable work, (un)liveable lives: the UK sex industry, labour rights and the welfare state'. *Social and Legal Studies*, published online before print, 23 May: DOI: 10.1177/0964663913484639.

Cunningham, S and Kendall, T D (2011) 'Prostitution 2.0: The Changing Face of Sex Work'. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 69 (3): 273-287.

Cusick, L (2006) 'Widening the harm reduction agenda: From drug use to sex work'. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 17: 3–11.

Cusick, L, A Martin and T May (2003) *Vulnerability and Involvement in Drug Use and Sex Work*. Home Office Research Study 268. London: Home Office.

Cusick, L, Kinnell, H, Brooks-Gordon, B and Campbell, R (2009) 'Wild guesses and conflated meanings? Estimating the size of the sex worker population in Britain'. *Critical Social Policy*, 29 (4): 703-719.

Davies, P and R Feldman (1997) 'Prostitute men now' in Scambler, G and Scambler, A (eds.) *Rethinking prostitution: purchasing sex in the 1990's*. London: Routledge.

Day, S. (2007) *On the Game. Women and Sex Work*. London: Pluto Press.

Day, S (2009) 'Renewing the war on prostitution: the spectres of 'trafficking' and 'slavery' '. *Anthropology Today*, 25 (3): 1-3.

Day, S (2010) 'The re-emergence of 'trafficking': sex work between slavery and freedom'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16: 816-834.

Deshotels, T and Forsyth, C J (2006) 'Strategic Flirting and the Emotional Tab of Exotic Dancing', *Deviant Behavior*, 27 (2): 223-241.

Dickens, L (2012) 'Fairer workplaces: making employment rights effective' in Dickens, L (ed.) *Making employment rights effective: issues of enforcement and compliance*. Portland: Hart Publishing.

Dodillet, S and Östergren, P *The Swedish Sex Purchase Act: Claimed Success and Documented Effects*, Conference paper, 2011.  
<http://www.petraostergren.com/upl/files/54259.pdf>.

Dodsworth, J (2013) 'Sexual exploitation, selling and swapping sex'. *Child Abuse Review*. Published online: Doi:10.1002/car.2282.

Drinkwater, S and Greenwood, H with Melrose, M (2004) 'Young people exploited through prostitution: a literature review'. In Melrose, M with Barrett, D (eds.) *Anchors in floating lives: interventions with young people sexually abused through prostitution*. Lyme Regis: Russell House.

Du Gay, P (1996) *Consumption and identity at work*. London: Sage.

Dwyer, P (2004) 'Creeping Conditionality in the UK: From Welfare Rights to Conditional Entitlements?' *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29 (2): 265-287.

Edelman, E A (2011) ' "This Area Has Been Declared a Prostitution Free Zone": Discursive Formations of Space, the State, and Trans "Sex Worker" Bodies'. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58 (6-7): 848-864.

Ehrenreich, B and Hochschild, A (2002) (Ed.) *Global woman: nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy*. London: Granta.

English Collective of Prostitutes (2011) *Perverse prosecution undermines women's safety*. Press release issued 3<sup>rd</sup> February.

Ernst, E (2000) 'The role of complementary and alternative medicine'. *British Medical Journal*, 321: 1133-1135.

Ess, C and Association of Internet Researchers (2002) *Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee*. Available online: [www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf](http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf).

Farley, M. (2004) '"Bad for the Body, Bad for the Heart": Prostitution Harms Women Even if Legalized or Decriminalized', *Violence Against Women* 10 (10): 1087-1125.

Featherstone, M (1990) 'Perspectives on consumer culture'. *Sociology*, 24 (1): 5-20.

Figart, D (2005) 'Gender as more than a dummy variable: feminist approaches to discrimination'. *Review of Social Economy*, LXIII (3): 509-536.

Fine, M (1998) 'Working the hyphens: reinventing self and other in qualitative research' in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Finlay, L (2002) 'Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice'. *Qualitative Research*, 2 (2): 209-230.

Flax, J (1990) 'Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory' in Nicholson, L J (ed.) *Feminism/postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

Fogarty, G J, Machin, A, Albion, M J, Sutherland, L F, Lalor, G I and Revitt, S (1999) 'Predicting occupational strain and job satisfaction: the role of stress, coping, personality, and affectivity variables'. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54 (3): 429–452.

Fox, N (1998) 'Risks', 'Hazards' and Life Choices: Reflections on Health at Work'. *Sociology*, 32 (4): 665-687.

Fraser, N (1995) 'From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a "Post-Socialist" age'. *New Left Review*, 212: 68-94.

Fraser, N (1998) *Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, participation*. Discussion paper. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Forschungsschwerpunkt Arbeitsmarkt und Beschäftigung, Abteilung Organisation und Beschäftigung, No. FS I 98-108.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10419/44061> [downloaded 29 Apr 2014].

Fuller, J (2004) 'Equality in cyberdemocracy? Gauging gender gaps in on-line civic participation'. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85 (4): 938-957.

Gaffney, J (2007) 'A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy and Response to *Paying the Price* – but what about the men?' *Community Safety Journal*, 6 (1): 27-33.

Gaffney, J. and Beverley, K. (2001) 'Contextualising the Construction and Social Organisation of the Commercial Male Sex Industry in London at the beginning of the Twenty-first century'. *Feminist Review*, 67, Spring: 133-141.

Gall, G (2007) 'Sex Worker Unionisation: An Exploratory Study of Emerging Collective Organisation'. *Industrial Relations Journal* 38 (1): 70-88.

Gall, G (2012) *An agency of their own: sex worker union organizing*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Game, A and Pringle, R (1984) *Gender at work*. London: Pluto.

Gibson, L (2010) *Using email interviews*. ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Realities Toolkit #09. University of Manchester, Morgan Centre for the Study of Relationships and Personal Life.  
[www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/realities/toolkits/email-interviews/index.html](http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/realities/toolkits/email-interviews/index.html).

Giddens, A (1987) *Social theory and modern sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gill, R (2007) *Gender and the media*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gill, R (2009a) 'Breaking the silence: the hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia' in Flood, R and Gill, R (eds.) *Secrecy and silence in the research process: feminist reflections*. London: Routledge.

Gill, R (2009b) 'Supersexualize me! Advertising and the 'Midriffs' in Attwood, F (Ed.) *Mainstreaming sex: the sexualisation of Western culture*. London: I B Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Glaser, B G and Strauss, A L (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glick, E (2000) 'Sex positive: feminism, queer theory and the politics of transgression'. *Feminist Review*, 64: 19-45.

Glucksmann, M (2005) 'Shifting boundaries and interconnections: extending the 'total social organisation of labour' in Pettinger, L, Parry, J, Taylor, R and Glucksmann, M (eds.) *A new sociology of work?* Oxford: Blackwell.

Glucksmann, M (2009) 'Formations, connections and divisions of labour'. *Sociology*, 43 (5): 878-895.

Goffman, E (1959) *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books (reprinted Penguin, 1990).

Goffman, E (1963) *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall (reprinted Penguin, 1990)

Goffman, E (1974) *Frame analysis*. New York: Harper & Row.

Grandey, A A (2003) 'When "the show must go on": surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 46 (1): 86-96.

Grandey, A A, Fisk, G M and Steiner, D D (2005) 'Must "service with a smile" be stressful? The moderating role of personal control for American and French employees'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90 (5): 893-904.

Grant, R W and Sugarman, J (2004) 'Ethics in Human Subjects Research: Do Incentives Matter?'. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 29 (6): 717-738.

Guba, E G and Lincoln, Y (1998) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research' in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hakim, C (2004) 'Lifestyle preferences versus patriarchal values: causal and non-causal attitudes'. *Changing Life Patterns in Western Industrial Societies: Advances in Life Course Research*, 8: 69-91.

Hakim, C (2007) 'Dancing with the Devil? Essentialism and other feminist heresies'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 58 (1): 123-132.

Hakim, C (2010) 'Erotic capital'. *European Sociological Review* 26 (5): 499-518. DOI:10.1093/esr/jcq014, available online at [www.esr.oxfordjournals.org](http://www.esr.oxfordjournals.org).

Hallgrímsdóttir, H K, Phillips, R, Benoit, C and Walby, K (2008). 'Sporting girls, Streetwalkers, and inmates of houses of ill repute: media narratives and the historical mutability of prostitution stigmas'. *Sociological Perspectives*, 51 (1): 119-138.

Harcourt, C, Egger, S and Donovan, B (2005) 'Sex Work and the Law'. *Sexual Health*, 2: 121-128.

Harding, S (1990) 'Feminism, science and the anti-enlightenment critiques' in Nicholson, L J (ed.) *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

Harding, S (2004) 'A socially relevant philosophy of science? Resources from standpoint theory's controversiality'. *Hypatia*, 19 (1): 25-47.

Hardy, K (2013) 'Equal to any other but not the same as any other: the politics of sexual labour, the body and intercorporeality'. In Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hartmann, H (1976) 'Capitalism, patriarchy and job segregation by sex'. *Signs*, 1: 137-68.

Hartsock (1983) 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism' in Harding, S and M B Hintikka (eds.) *Discovering Reality*. Amsterdam: D Reidel.

Herr, R S (2010) 'Agency without autonomy: valuational agency'. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 6 (3): 239-254.

Hester, M., and Westmarland, N, (2004). *Tackling Street Prostitution: Towards an Holistic Approach*, Home Office Research Study 279, Development and Statistics Directorate. London: Home Office.

Hine, C (2005) 'Virtual methods and the sociology of cyber-social-scientific knowledge' in Hine, C (ed.) *Virtual methods: issues in social research on the internet*. Oxford: Berg.

Hochschild, A R (1983, rev. ed. 2003) *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hodson, R (1991) 'The active worker: compliance and autonomy at the workplace'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 20 (1): 47-78.



Home Office (1957) *The Wolfenden Committee's Report on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*. London: HMSO.

Home Office (2004) *Paying the Price: A Consultation on Prostitution*. London, Home Office

Home Office (2006) *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy*. London, Home Office.

Honneth, A (1995) *The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hood, J (2007) 'Orthodoxy vs. power: the defining traits of grounded theory' in Bryant, A and Charmaz, K (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. London: Sage.

Hossain, M S (2010) 'enforced ab/normalcy: the sex worker *hijras* and the (re)appropriation of s/he identity' in Ditmore, M H, Levy, A and Willman, A (eds.) *Sex work matters: exploring money, power, and intimacy in the sex industry*. London: Zed Books.

Howard, P N (2002) 'Network ethnography and the hypermedia organization: new media, new organizations, new methods'. *New Media & Society*, 4 (4): 550-574.

Hubbard, P (2002). 'Sexing the self: geographies of engagement and encounter'. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 3 (4): 365-381.

Hubbard, P and Sanders, T (2003) 'Making space for sex work: female street prostitution and the production of urban space'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (1): 73-87.

Hubbard, P, Matthews, R. and Scoular, J. (2008) 'Re-regulating sex work in the EU: prostitute women and the new spaces of exception' *Gender, Place and Culture* 15 (2): 137-152.

- Hughes, C (2002) *Key concepts in feminist theory and research*. London: Sage.
- Hughes, D (2000) 'The Internet and sex industries: partners in global sexual exploitation'. *Technology and Society Magazine*, 19 (1): 35-42.
- Hughes, E C (1951) 'Work and the self' in Rohrer, J H and Sherif, M (eds.), *Social psychology at the crossroads*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Hughes, K (2003) 'Pushed or pulled? Women's entry into self-employment and small business ownership'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 10 (4): 433-454.
- Hurlbert, J (1991) 'Social networks, social circles and job satisfaction'. *Work and Occupations*, 18: 415-430.
- Hyman, R (1997) 'Trade unions and interest representation in the context of globalisation'. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 3: 515-533.
- Jacobs, J A (1993) 'Men in female-dominated fields' in Williams, C L (ed.) *Doing "Women's work": men in non-traditional occupations*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Jagger, A (1983) *Feminist politics and human nature*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Jeal, N and Salisbury, C (2007) 'Health needs and service use of parlour-based prostitutes compared with street-based prostitutes: a cross-sectional survey'. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 114 (7): 875-881.
- Jeffreys, S. (1997) *The idea of prostitution*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.
- Jeffreys, S (2009) *The industrial vagina: the political economy of the global sex trade*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, R (2004) *Social identity*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, S (2009) *Beyond gender: an examination of exploitation in sex work*. Unpublished PhD thesis, April, Keele University.

Jenness, V (1990) 'From sex as sin to sex as work: COYOTE and the reorganization of prostitution as a social problem'. *Social Problems*, 37 (3): 403-420.

Jones, S (1985) 'The Analysis of Depth Interviews' in Walker, Robert (ed.) *Applied Qualitative Research*, London: Gower.

Jordan, A (2012) *The Swedish law to criminalize clients: a failed experiment in social engineering*. Washington College of Law, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Issue paper 4.

Kalleberg, A L (2000) 'Nonstandard employment relations: part-time, temporary and contract work'. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26: 341-365.

Kantola, J. and Squires, J. (2004) 'Discourses surrounding prostitution policies in the UK'. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11 (1): 77-101.

Ken, I (2007) 'Race-class-gender theory: an image(ry) problem'. *Gender Issues*, 24 (2): 1-20.

Kesler K (2002) Is a feminist stance in support of prostitution possible? An exploration of current trends. *Sexualities* 5 (2): 219–235.

Kinnell, H (1999) *Sex workers in England and Wales*: Unpublished briefing paper for Department of Health, National Sexual Health Strategy.

Kinnell, H (2006) 'Murder made easy: The final solution to prostitution?' in Campbell, R & O'Neill, M (eds.), *Sex work now*. Cullompton: Willan

Kofman, E (2004) 'Gendered Global Migrations'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6 (4): 643-665.

Koken, J (2010) 'The meaning of the 'Whore': how feminist theories on prostitution shape research on female sex workers, in Ditmore, M H, Levy, A

and Willman, A (eds.) *Sex work matters: exploring money, power, and intimacy in the sex industry*. London: Zed Books.

Koken, J, Bimbi, D, Parsons, J and Halkitis, N (2004) 'The experience of stigma in the lives of male internet escorts'. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 16 (1): 13-32.

Korczynski, M (2003) 'Communities of Coping: Collective Emotional Labour in Service Work'. *Organization*, 10(1): 55-79.

Korczynski, M (2013) 'Touching moments: an analysis of the skilful search for dignity within body work interactions'. In Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Korczynski, M and Ott, U (2004) 'When production and consumption meet: cultural contradictions and the enchanting myth of customer sovereignty'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41 (4): 575-599.

Korczynski, M, Hodson, R and Edwards, P (2006) 'Introduction: competing, collaborating, and reinforcing theories' in Korczynski, M, Hodson, R and Edwards, P (eds.) *Social theory at work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kotiswaran, P (2011) *Dangerous sex, invisible labor: sex work and the law in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kreimer, M (2004) 'Labour market segregation and the gender-based division of labour'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 11 (2): 223–246.

Kreiner, G E, Hollensbe, E C and Sheep, M L (2006) 'Where is the "me" among the "we"? Identity work and the search for optimal balance'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49 (5):1031-1057.

Laing, M and Pitcher, J, with A Irving (2013) *National Ugly Mugs pilot scheme evaluation report*. Newcastle: Northumbria University.

Lee-Gonyea, J A, Castle, T and Gonyea, N E (2009) 'Laid to order: male escorts advertising on the Internet'. *Deviant Behavior*, 30 (4): 321-348.

Leigh, C (1997) 'Inventing sex work' in Nagle, J. (ed.) *Whores and other feminists*, London: Routledge.

Letherby, G (2003) *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lever, J. and Dolnick, D. (2000) 'Clients and Call Girls: Seeking Sex and Intimacy', in R. Weitzer (ed.) *Sex for Sale*, London: Routledge.

Lewis, M A (2006) 'Nurse bullying: organizational considerations in the maintenance and perpetration of health care bullying cultures'. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 14: 52-58.

Lindsay, C (2005) ' 'McJobs, 'good jobs' and skills: job-seekers' attitudes to low-skilled service work'. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 15 (2): 50-65.

Lopes, A 2006 'Sex Workers and the labour movement in the UK', in Campbell, R and O'Neill, M (eds.) *Sex work now*, Cullompton: Willan.

Lukes, S (2005) *Power: a radical view*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lupton, R (2006) 'Sociology and risk' in Mythen, G and Walklate, S (eds.) *Beyond the risk society: critical reflections on risk and human security*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

MacDonald, R (2009) 'Precarious work: risk, choice and poverty traps' in Furlong (ed.) *Handbook of youth and young adulthood: new perspectives and agendas*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Macleavy, J (2007) 'Engendering New Labour's Workfarist Regime: Exploring the intersection of welfare state restructuring and labour market policies in the UK'. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 14 (6): 721-743.

Mai, N (2009) *Migrant workers in the UK sex industry – Final policy-relevant report*. ESRC final project report. <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research-units/iset/projects/esrc-migrant-workers.cfm>.

Mai, N (2012) 'Embodied cosmopolitanisms: the subjective mobility of migrants working in the global sex industry'. *Gender, Place and Culture*, iFirst article, 2012, 1–18. DOI:10.1080/0966369X.2011.649350.

Markham, A N (2004) 'Internet communication as a tool for qualitative research' in Silverman, D (ed.) *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Marlowe, J., (2006) 'Thinking outside the box: men in the sex industry' in Spector, J (ed.) *Prostitution and pornography: philosophical debate about the sex industry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Mathisen, G E, Einarsen, S and Mykletun, R (2008) 'The occurrences and correlates of bullying and harassment in the restaurant sector'. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 49: 59-68.

Matthieu, L (2003) 'The emergence and uncertain outcomes of prostitutes' social movements'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 10 (1): 29-50.

May, T., Harocopos, A., & Hough, M. (2000). *For Love or Money: pimps and the management of sex work*. London: Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit.

Maynard, M (1998) 'Feminists' knowledge and the knowledge of feminisms: epistemology, theory, methodology and method' in May, T and Williams, M (eds.) *Knowing the social world*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mayor of London (2010) *The way forward: taking action to end violence against women and girls: Final strategy, 2010-2013*. London: Greater London Authority.

McCoyd, J L M and Schwaber Kerson, T (2006) 'Conducting intensive interviews using email: a serendipitous comparative opportunity'. *Qualitative Social Work*, 5 (3): 389-406.

McDowell, L (2009) *Working bodies: interactive service employment and workplace identities*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

- McKay, C (1999) 'Is sex work queer?'. *Social Alternatives*, 18 (3):48-53.
- McKay, S, Jefferys, S, Paraksevopoulou, A & Keles, J (2012) *Study on precarious work and social rights, carried out for the European Commission*. London: London Metropolitan University, Working Lives Research Institute.
- McKeganey, N. and Barnard, M. (1996) *Sex work on the streets*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McNair, B (2009) 'From porn chic to porn fear: the return of the repressed?' in Attwood, F (ed.) *Mainstreaming sex: the sexualisation of Western culture*. London: I B Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Meager, N (2007) *Self-employment dynamics and 'transitional labour markets': some more UK evidence*. Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.
- Melrose, M (2010) 'What's love got to do with it? Theorising young people's involvement in prostitution'. *Youth & Policy*, 104: 12-31.
- Miller, J and Glassner, B (2004) 'The "inside" and the "outside": finding realities in interviews'. In Silverman, D (ed.) *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage.
- Miller, P and Rose, N (1995) 'Production, identity and democracy'. *Theory and Society*, 24: 427-467.
- Min, S-J (2010) 'From the Digital Divide to the Democratic Divide: Internet Skills, Political Interest, and the Second-Level Digital Divide in Political Internet Use'. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 7 (1): 22-35, DOI: 10.1080/19331680903109402.
- Miriam, K (2005) 'Stopping the traffic in women: power, agency and abolition in feminist debates over sex-trafficking'. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 36 (1): 1-17.
- Morgan, D (1993) 'You too can have a body like mine' in Jackson, S and Scott, S (eds.) *Gender: a sociological reader*. Abingdon, Routledge.

Mossman, E (2010) 'Brothel operators' and support agencies' experiences of decriminalisation'. In Abel, G, Fitzgerald, L, Healy, C, & Taylor, A (eds.) *Taking the crime out of sex work: New Zealand sex workers' fight for decriminalisation*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Nagle, J (2002) 'Making power, making freedom'. Book review. *Signs*, Summer: 1177-1183.

Nast, H J (2000) 'Queer patriarchies, queer racisms, international'. *Antipode*, 34 (5): 874-909.

Nussbaum, M (1998) ' "Whether from reason or prejudice": taking money for bodily services'. *Journal of Legal Studies*, 27: 693-724.

O'Connell Davidson, J (1998) *Prostitution, power and freedom*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

O'Connell Davidson, J (2005) *Children in the global sex trade*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

O'Connell Davidson (2006a) 'Will the real sex slave please stand up?' *Feminist Review*, 83: 4-22.

O'Connell Davidson, J (2006b) 'Men, middlemen, and migrants: The demand side of "sex trafficking" ', *Eurozine.com*, 27<sup>th</sup> July.  
<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-07-27-davidson-en.html>. [Accessed 30/07/13].

O'Connell Davidson, J (2014) 'Let's go outside: bodies, prostitutes, slaves and worker citizens'. *Citizenship Studies*, 18 (5): 516-532.

O'Neil Green, D, Creswell, J W, Shope, R J and Plano Clark, V L (2007) 'Grounded theory and racial/ethnic diversity' in Bryant, A and Charmaz, K (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. London: Sage.

O'Neill, M (1997) 'Prostitute women now', in Scambler, G and Scambler, A (eds.) *Rethinking prostitution: purchasing sex in Britain in the 1990s*. London: Routledge.



O'Neill, M (2001) *Prostitution and feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

O'Neill, M (2008) 'Beyond binaries: interventions in sex work, politics and policy'. Paper presented at conference on *Investigating the theory and practice of gender and sexuality in the workplace*, University of Surrey, 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> June.

O'Neill, M, and Campbell, R (2001) *Working together to create change: Walsall Prostitution Consultation Research*. Walsall: Staffordshire University/Liverpool Hope University/Walsall Health Authority. Available online at [www.safetysoapbox.co.uk](http://www.safetysoapbox.co.uk).

Oerton, S and Phoenix, J (2001) 'Sex/bodywork: discourses and practices'. *Sexualities*, 4 (4): 387-412.

Oliver, D G, Serovich, J M and Mason, T L (2005) 'Constraints and opportunities with interview transcription: towards reflection in qualitative research'. *Social Forces*, 84 (2): 1273-1289.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2000) 'The partial renaissance of self-employment'. *OECD Employment Outlook*. Paris: OECD.

Outshoorn, J (2004) 'Pragmatism in the Polder: changing prostitution policy in the Netherlands'. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 12 (2): 165-176.

Overall, C (1992) 'What's wrong with prostitution? Evaluating sex work'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 17 (4): 705-724.

Packham, C (2011) *Violence at work: findings from the 2009/10 British Crime Survey*. London: Health and Safety Executive/Home Office.

Pateman, C (1983) 'Defending prostitution: charges against Ericsson'. *Ethics*, 93 (3): 561-565.

Pateman, C (1988) *The sexual contract*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Pateman, C (2007) 'On critics and contract' in Pateman, C and Mills, C W *Contract and domination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Patton, M Q (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Pearce, J with M Williams and C Galvin (2002) *'It's someone taking a part of you': a study of young women and sexual exploitation*. London: National Children's Bureau for Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Pendleton, E (1997) 'Love for sale: queering heterosexuality'. In Nagle, J (ed.) *Whores and other feminists*. New York: Routledge.
- Perkins, R., and Bennett, G. (1985) *Being a Prostitute: Prostitute Women and Prostitute Men*. Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Perkins, R and Lovejoy, F (2007) *Call Girls: Private Sex Workers in Australia*. Crawley: University of Western Australia Press.
- Petro, M (2010) 'Selling sex: women's participation in the sex industry' in Ditmore, M H, Levy, A and Willman, A (eds.) *Sex work matters: exploring money, power, and intimacy in the sex industry*. London: Zed Books.
- Pettinger, L (2005) 'Gendered work meets gendered goods: selling and service in clothing retail'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12 (5): 460-478.
- Pettinger, L (2011) ' 'Knows how to please a man': studying customers to understand service work'. *The Sociological Review*, 59 (2): 223-241.
- Phoenix, J. (1999) *Making sense of prostitution*. London: Macmillan.
- Phoenix, J (2009) 'Frameworks of understanding' in Phoenix, J (ed.) *Regulating sex for sale: prostitution policy reform in the UK*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Phoenix, J. and Oerton, S. (2005) *Illicit & illegal. Sex, regulation and social control*. Cullompton: Willan.

Pilcher, K (2007), 'A gendered 'managed heart'? An exploration of the gendering of emotional labour, aesthetic labour, and body work in service sector employment'. *Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research*, Launch Issue, <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinventionjournal/pastissues/launchissue/paper5> [Accessed 08/03/11].

Pitcher, J (2006) 'Support services for women working in the sex industry' in Campbell, R and M O'Neill (eds.) *Sex Work Now*. Cullompton: Willan.

Pitcher, J (2010) *Exploring diversity within the sex industry: an investigation into the structure and composition of sex markets in Britain*. Unpublished dissertation for the MRes in Social Research, Loughborough University.

Pitcher, J and Wijers, M (2014) 'The impact of different regulatory models on the labour conditions, safety and welfare of indoor-based sex workers'. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Published online 22 April. DOI: 10.1177/1748895814531967.

Pitcher J., Campbell, R., Hubbard, P., O'Neill, M., and Scoular, J. (2006) *Living and working in areas of street sex work: from conflict to coexistence*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Pitcher, J., Campbell, R., Hubbard, P., O'Neill, M., and Scoular, J., (2008) 'Diverse community responses to controversial urban issues: the contribution of qualitative research to policy development' in Maginn, PJ, Thompson, S and Tonts, M (eds.) *Qualitative Urban Analysis: an international perspective*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Plummer, M and Young, L E (2010) 'Grounded theory and feminist inquiry: revitalizing links to the past'. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 32 (3): 305–321.

Polachek, S W (1981) 'Occupational self-selection: a human capital approach to sex differences in occupational structure'. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 63 (1): 60-69.

- Pollert, A (1996) 'Gender and class revisited; or, the poverty of patriarchy'. *Sociology*, 30 (4): 639-659.
- Power, N (2009) *One dimensional woman*. Ropley: Zero Books.
- Purcell, C (2013) 'Touch in holistic massage: ambiguities and boundaries'. In Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Queen, C 1997) 'Sex radical politics, sex-positive feminist thought, and whore stigma' in Nagle, J (ed.) *Whores and other feminists*, London: Routledge.
- Ray, A (2007) *Naked on the internet: hook-ups, downloads and cashing in on internet sexploration*. Emeryville: Seal Press.
- Richardson, L (2002) 'Writing sociology'. *Cultural Studies*  $\leftrightarrow$  *Critical Methodologies*, 2 (3): 414-422.
- Rose, N (2000) 'Government and control'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 40 (2): 321-339.
- Rose, N & Miller, P (2010) 'Political power beyond the State: problematics of government'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 61 (1), 271-303.
- Rosetta, A (2009) *Whatever she wants: true confessions of a male escort*. Reading: Ebury Press.
- Rubery, J (2009) 'How gendering the Varieties of Capitalism requires a wider lens'. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 16 (2): 192-203
- Rubin, G (1999) 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' in Aggleton, P and Parker, R (eds.) *Culture, society and sexuality: a reader*. London: UCL Press.
- Sadler, A G, Booth, B M, Nielson, D and Doebbeling, B N (2000) 'Health-related consequences of physical and sexual violence: women in the military'. *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 96 (3): 473-480.

Sagar, T (2007) 'Tackling on-street sex work: anti-social behaviour orders, sex workers and inclusive inter-agency initiatives'. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 7 (2): 153-168.

Sanders, T (2002) 'The condom as psychological barrier: female sex workers and emotional management'. *Feminism & Psychology*, 12 (4): 561-566.

Sanders, T (2004a) 'A continuum of risk? The management of health, physical and emotional risks by female sex workers'. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 26 (5): 557-574.

Sanders, T (2004b) 'Controllable laughter: managing sex work through humour'. *Sociology*, 38 (2): 273-291.

Sanders, T (2005a) *Sex work. a risky business*. Cullompton: Willan.

Sanders, T (2005b) ' 'It's just acting': sex workers' strategies for capitalizing on sexuality'. *Gender, Work and Organization*. 12 (4): 319-342.

Sanders, T (2005c) 'Researching the online sex work community' in Hine, C (ed.) *Virtual methods: issues in social research on the internet*. Oxford: Berg.

Sanders, T (2006a) 'Behind the personal ads: the indoor sex markets in Britain' in Campbell, R and O'Neill, M (eds.) *Sex work now*. Cullompton, Willan.

Sanders, T (2006b) 'Sexing up the subject: methodological nuances in the female sex industry'. *Sexualities*, 9 (4): 471-490.

Sanders, T (2007a). 'Becoming an ex-sex worker: making transitions out of a deviant career'. *Feminist Criminology*, 2 (1): 1-22.

Sanders, T (2007b) 'Protecting the health and safety of female sex workers: the responsibility of all'. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 114:791-793

Sanders, T (2007c) 'No room for a regulated market? The implications of the Co-ordinated Prostitution Strategy for the indoor sex industries'. *Community Safety Journal*, 6 (1): 34-44.

Sanders, T (2008a) 'Selling Sex in the Shadow Economy'. *International Journal of Social Economics*. 35 (10): 704-728.

Sanders, T (2008b) 'Male sexual scripts: intimacy, sexuality and pleasure in the purchase of commercial sex'. *Sociology*, 42 (3): 400-417.

Sanders, T (2009) 'UK sex work policy: eyes wide shut to voluntary and indoor sex work' in Phoenix, J (ed.) *Regulating sex for sale: prostitution policy reform in the UK*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Sanders, T and Campbell, R (2007) 'Designing out vulnerability, building in respect: violence, safety and sex work policy'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 58 (1): 1-19.

Sanders, T, O'Neill, M and Pitcher, J (2009) *Prostitution: sex work, policy and politics*. London: Sage.

Sassens, S (2002) 'Global cities and survival circuits' in Ehrenreich, B and Hochschild, A (eds.) *Global woman: nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy*. London: Granta.

Satz, D (2006) 'Markets in women's sexual labor' in Spector, J (ed.) *Prostitution and pornography: philosophical debates about the sex industry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Scambler, G. (2007) 'Sex work stigma: opportunist migrants in London'. *Sociology*, 41 (6): 1079-1096.

Scambler, G and Paoli, F (2008) 'Health work, female sex workers and HIV/AIDS: Global and local dimensions of stigma and deviance as barriers to effective interventions'. *Social Science and Medicine*, 66: 1848-1862.

Scoular, J (2004a) 'The 'subject' of prostitution: interpreting the discursive, symbolic and material position of sex/work in feminist theory'. *Feminist Theory*, 5 (3): 343-355.

Scoular, J (2004b) 'Criminalising 'Punters': evaluating the Swedish position on prostitution' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 26 (2):195-210.

Scoular, J (2010) 'What's law got to do with it? How and why law matters in the regulation of sex work'. *Journal of Law and Society*, 37 (1): 12-39.

Scoular, J and M O'Neill (2007) 'Regulating prostitution: social inclusion, responsabilization and the politics of politics of prostitution reform'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 47 (5): 764-778.

Scoular, J and Sanders, T (2010) 'Introduction: the changing social and legal context of sexual commerce: why regulation matters'. *Journal of Law and Society*, 37 (1): 1-11.

Scoular, J, Pitcher, J., Campbell, R., Hubbard, P., and O'Neill., M (2007) 'What's anti-social about sex work? The changing representation of prostitution's incivility'. *Community Safety Journal*, 6 (1): 11-17

Scoular, J, Pitcher, J., Campbell, R., Hubbard, P., and O'Neill, M (2009) 'What's anti-social about sex work? Governance through the changing representation of prostitution's incivility' in Phoenix, J (ed.) *Regulating sex for sale: prostitution policy reform in the UK*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Seale, C (2004) 'Sampling in qualitative research' in Becker, S and Bryman, A (eds.) *Understanding research for social policy and practice*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Sharp, K. and Earle, S. 2003 'Cyberpunters and Cyberwhores: Prostitution on the Internet', in Y. Jewkes (ed.) *Dot Cons. Crime, Deviance and Identity on the Internet*, Cullompton: Willan.

Shaver, F (2005) 'Sex work research: methodological and ethical challenges'. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20 (3): 269-319.

Shrage, L (1994) 'Comment on Overall's "What's wrong with prostitution? Evaluating sex work"'. *Signs*, 19 (2): 564-570.

Silverman, D (2006) *Interpreting qualitative data*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Skeggs, B (1997) *Formations of class and gender: becoming respectable*. London: Sage.

Skilbrei, M-L and Holmström, C (2011) 'Is there a Nordic prostitution regime?' *Crime and Justice*, 40 (1): 479-517.

Sloan, L and Wahab, S (2000) 'Feminist voices on sex work: implications for social work'. *Affilia*, 15 (4): 457-479.

Smith, M, Grov, C and Seal, D (2008) 'Agency-based male sex work: a descriptive focus on physical, personal, and social space'. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 16 (2): 193-210.

Snyder, K A (2004) 'Routes to the informal economy in New York's East Village: crisis, economics, and identity'. *Sociological Perspectives*, 47 (2): 215-240.

Soothill, K and Sanders, T (2005) 'The Geographical mobility, preferences and pleasures of prolific punters: a demonstration study of the activities of prostitutes' clients'. *Sociological Research Online* 10 (1), [www.socresonline.org.uk/10/1/soothill.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/1/soothill.html).

Stacey, C (2005) 'Finding dignity in dirty work: the constraints and rewards of low-wage home care labour'. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 27 (6): 831-854.

Stein, A and Plummer, K (1994). ' "I can't even think straight". "Queer" theory and the missing sexual revolution in sociology'. *Sociological Theory*, 12 (2): 178-187.

Stotzer, R (2007) 'Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data'. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14: 170-179.



Sullivan, B (2007) 'Rape, prostitution and consent'. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 40 (2): 127-142.

TAMPEP International Foundation (2007) *TAMPEP VII Final report: Activity report*. Amsterdam: TAMPEP International Foundation.

Taylor, S and Tyler, M (2000) 'Emotional labour and sexual difference in the airline industry'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 14 (1): 77-95.

Tewkesbury, R (1993) 'Male strippers: men objectifying men' in Williams, C L (ed.) *Doing "Women's work": men in non-traditional occupations*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Tremblay, D-G (2008) 'From casual work to economic security; the paradoxical case of self-employment'. *Social Indicators Research*, 88 (1):115–130.

Tuttle, R and Garr, M (2009) 'Self-employment, work–family fit and mental health among female workers'. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 30: 282–292.

Vanwesenbeeck, I (1994) *Prostitutes' well-being and risk*. Amsterdam: V U University Press.

Vanwesenbeeck, I (2001) 'Another decade of social scientific work on sex work: a review of research 1990-2000'. *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 12: 242-289.

Vanwesenbeeck, I (2005) 'Burnout among female indoor sex workers'. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 34 (6): 627–639

Walby, K (2012) *Touching encounters: sex, work, & male-for-male internet escorting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Walby, S (1988) 'Segregation in employment theory' in Walby, S (ed.) *Gender segregation at work*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press

Walby, S (1990) *Theorizing patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Ward, H, Day, S, Green, A, Cooper, K and Weber, J (2004) 'Declining prevalence of STI in the London sex industry, 1985 to 2002'. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 80: 374-378.
- Warhurst, C and Nickson, D (2007) 'Employee experience of aesthetic labour in retail and hospitality'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 21 (1): 103-120.
- Warhurst, C and Nickson, D (2009) "'Who's got the look?' Emotional, aesthetic and sexualized labour in interactive services'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16 (3): 385-404.
- Weeks, J. (1998) 'The Sexual Citizen', *Theory, Culture and Society* 15 (3-4): 35-52.
- Weeks, K (1998) *Constituting feminist subjects*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Weeks, K (2011) *The problem with work*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Weinberg, M S, F M Shaver and C J Williams (1999) 'Gendered sex work in the San Francisco Tenderloin'. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 28 (6): 503-521.
- Weitzer, R (2005a) 'New directions in research on prostitution'. *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 43: 211-235.
- Weitzer, R (2005b) 'Flawed theory and method in studies of prostitution'. *Violence against Women*, 11 (7): 934-949.
- Weitzer, R (2007) 'Prostitution: facts and fictions'. *Contexts*, 6 (4): 28-33.
- Weitzer, R (2010) 'The mythology of prostitution: advocacy research and public policy'. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 7: 15-29
- Wengraf, T (2010) *Interviewing for life histories, lived situations and ongoing personal experiencing using the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM)*. *The BNIM Short Guide*, version 10.07a. London: University of East London.

West, J (2000) 'Prostitution: collectives and the politics of regulation'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7 (2): 106-118.

West, J and Austrin, T (2002) 'From work as sex to sex as work: networks, 'others' and occupations in the analysis of work'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 9 (5): 482-503.

West, J and Austrin, T (2005) 'Markets and politics: public and private relations in the case of prostitution' in Pettinger, L, Parry, J, Taylor, R and Glucksmann, M (eds.) *A new sociology of work?* Oxford: Blackwell.

Wheatcroft, J M, Wagstaff, G F and Moran, A (2011) 'Revictimizing the victim? How rape victims experience the UK legal system'. *Victims & Offenders: An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 (3): 265-284.

Whowell, M and Gaffney, J (2009) 'Male sex work in the UK: forms, practice and policy implications' in Phoenix, J (ed.) *Regulating sex for sale: prostitution policy reform in the UK*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Wibberley, G (2013) 'Getting the bodies of the workers to the bodies of the clients: the role of rotas in domiciliary care' in Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilcox, P (2006) 'Communities, care and domestic violence'. *Critical Social Policy*, 26 (4): 722-747.

Williams, C L and Connell, C (2010) ' "Looking good and sounding right": aesthetic labor and social inequality in the retail industry'. *Work and Occupations*, 37 (3): 349-377.

Williams, M (1998) 'The social world as knowable' in May, T and Williams, M (eds.) *Knowing the social world*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Wolkowitz, C (2002) 'The social relations of body work'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 16 (3): 497-510.

- Wolkowitz, C, Cohen, R L Sanders, T and Hardy, K (eds.) (2013) *Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualized labour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wood, E A (2000) 'Working in the fantasy factory: the attention hypothesis and the enacting of masculine power in strip clubs'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 29 (1): 5-31.
- Wouters, C (1989) 'The sociology of emotions and flight attendants: Hochschild's *Managed Heart*'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 6: 95-123.
- Yagil, D (2008) 'When the customer is wrong: A review of research on aggression and sexual harassment in service encounters'. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 13: 141-152.
- Young, I M (2005) 'Lived body vs. gender: reflections on social structures and subjectivity'. In *On female body experience: "Throwing like a girl" and other essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Young, M C (2010) 'Gender differences in precarious work settings'. *Industrial Relations*, 65 (1): 74-97.
- Zatz, N D (1997) 'Sex work/sex act: law, labor and desire in constructions of prostitution'. *Signs*, 22 (2): 277-308).
- Zelizer, V A (2005) *The purchase of intimacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- van Zoonen, L (2002) 'Gendering the internet: claims, controversies and cultures'. *European Journal of Communication*, 17(1): 5–23.

## Appendix A: About the participants

**Table 1: Participants by gender and age**

	Female	Male	Transgender	Total
<b>18-19</b>	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
<b>20-29</b>	8	3	0	<b>11</b>
<b>30-39</b>	10	4	2	<b>16</b>
<b>40 and over</b>	8	2	1	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>40</b>

N=40

**Table 2: Participants by age and work setting**

	Independent/ agency	Brothel/ parlour	Manager/ receptionist	Total
<b>18-19</b>	0	2	0	<b>2</b>
<b>20-29</b>	5	6	0	<b>11</b>
<b>30-39</b>	14	1	1	<b>16</b>
<b>40 and over</b>	8	0	3	<b>10</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>40</b>

N=40

**Table 3: Current and previous work in sex industry**

	Independent lone worker	Agency	Independent collective	Brothel/ parlour	Manager/ receptionist
<b>Current:</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Previous:</i>					
<b>Independent</b>	-	1	1	1	0
<b>Agency</b>	10	-	0	4	1
<b>Brothel</b>	4	1	0	-	3
<b>Street</b>	4	0	0	0	0

N=40

**Table 4: Geographical distribution by work setting**

	Independent lone worker/ agency	Independent collective	Brothel/ parlour	Manager/ receptionist	Total
<b>London</b>	14		2		<b>16</b>
<b>North</b>	5		6	3	<b>14</b>
<b>South</b>	1	2			<b>3</b>
<b>Midlands</b>	2	2	1	1	<b>6</b>
<b>Scotland</b>	1				<b>1</b>

N=40

**Table 5: Length of time in sex industry by work setting**

	Independent lone worker	Agency	Independent collective	Brothel/ parlour	Manager/ receptionist	Total
Less than 1 yr	1			2		3
1-5 yrs	7		4	5	1	17
6-10 yrs	6			1		7
More than 10 yrs	8	1		1	3	13

N=40

**Table 6: Qualifications by work setting**

	Independent lone/ collective/ agency	Brothel/ parlour	Manager/ receptionist	Total
No qualifications	1	1	1	3
GCSE/NVQ2 or equivalent	3	1	0	4
A levels/NVQ3 or equivalent	7	5	0	12
Diploma/ HND or equivalent	6	0	0	6
Degree/ higher degree or equivalent	10	2	1	13

N=38 [2 not known]

**Table 7: Participants with children**

<i>Work setting:</i>	Children aged 18 or under	Aged over 18	Total
Manager/ receptionist	0	2	2
Brothel	4	0	4
Independent/ agency	3	2	5
Total	7	4	11

N=38 [2 not known]

**Table 8: Participants funding studies while sex worker**

<i>Work setting:</i>	No. funding studies
Brothel	4
Independent/ agency	14
Total	18

N=40

## Appendix B: Research instruments



### **Prostitution, diversity and sex markets: an occupational study of indoor sex work in Great Britain**

#### **Participant Information Sheet**

Jane Pitcher, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, Brockington Building, Loughborough LE11 3TU.

Email: [J.Pitcher@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:J.Pitcher@lboro.ac.uk). Tel: 07944 970151

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

I am a PhD student at Loughborough University, Department of Social Sciences. My research aims to explore the working conditions of adult women, men and transgender workers in the indoor sex industry in Great Britain and their views on the terms, conditions and characteristics of their work. I also aim to consider whether sex work may be viewed as comparable to other forms of labour, or whether there are aspects of this work that differentiate it from occupations in the formal service sector. My research will locate analysis of prostitution as work within the wider socio-economic context and debates on power and control in societies.

#### **Who is doing this research and why?**

I have been undertaking research into the sex industry for more than 10 years. I aim to base my findings on the experience and knowledge of sex workers who participate in the research. The objective of my current study is to build on previous research to develop a greater understanding of sex work as an occupation.

My previous research includes a study on communities and street sex work, funded by Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Further information about the study can be found at [www.jrf.org.uk/publications/living-and-working-areas-street-sex-work](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/living-and-working-areas-street-sex-work). I am co-author, with Teela Sanders and Maggie O'Neill, of *Prostitution: sex work, policy and politics* (Sage, 2009). I am a member of the UK Network of Sex Work Projects and a volunteer with SWISH (Terrence Higgins Trust), a local sex work project in Coventry. My current study is part of a student research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

#### **How will the research be conducted?**

I wish to undertake semi-structured interviews with adult sex workers in the indoor sex industry, including private/independent workers, people working from commercial premises and sex workers working through agencies. The emphasis is on people who see themselves as having made a decision to sell sex for money. In addition,

where third parties (such as agents or maids) are identified by interviewees, I will also interview a small number of third parties.

I would like you to take part in an interview to discuss your working experiences. The aim of the interview will be to explore topics such as your working conditions and working practices, including the services you offer, rates of pay, hours of work and your relationship with clients. I should also like to ask about how you see your work comparing with that of others, including workers in other sectors of the sex industry and people working in occupations outside the sex industry.

### **Where will interviews be held?**

The interview will take place in a venue that is mutually convenient. This might be a public space such as a cafe, a project meeting room, on working premises or other public locations which offer private meeting spaces.

### **How long will it take?**

I anticipate that the interview will take approximately one to two hours.

### **What personal information will be required from me?**

In order to compare experiences, I would like to obtain certain personal data, such as your age, ethnicity, sexuality, living circumstances and whether you have children. I should also like to ask you about your work and life history.

### **Once I take part, can I change my mind?**

You can change your mind at any time. After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have I will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form. If at any time, before, during or after the sessions you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact me. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

My research will adhere to Loughborough University's protocols concerning confidentiality and informed consent. All the information you provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researcher unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researcher is working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for your safety or that of others. You will not be identified in any reports or articles arising from my research. Ideally interviews will be recorded: the recordings and transcripts will be stored securely on a password-protected computer, to which only I have access. You will be asked before we start the interview if you consent to the interview being recorded and if you do not I will take notes instead.



**What will happen to the results of the study?**

I am due to complete my PhD by the end of 2013. I am hoping to publish papers and articles as the research progresses and will also share the results of my research with participants, through distribution of a summary of the main findings and discussion at various forums, conferences and meetings.

**What do I get for participating?**

You will be given a £15 voucher to thank you for giving up your time. If you would like a copy of the findings at the end of the research, I will be happy to send this to you. I am also hoping to discuss my interim findings with research participants during the study.

**If I have some more questions who should I contact?**

If you have questions about my research, please contact me initially at the email address or number given above. You can also speak to my supervisor, Dr Jo Aldridge ([j.aldridge@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:j.aldridge@lboro.ac.uk); tel: 01509 223670).

**What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?**

The University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing\(2\).htm](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm).

## **Semi-structured interview topics**

### **1. Individual background and entry into sex work**

1. How did you first get into sex work/sex industry (*e.g. how did you find out about the options; what were your initial reasons for starting to sex work? How did you feel when you first started?*)?
2. Brief summary of work history (*e.g. different types of locations in the sex industry; have you worked outside the sex industry and if so in what sectors or jobs?*)
3. How do other jobs you have done compare with your current job (*e.g. parlour work compared with independent work; how do previous jobs outside the sex industry compare with sex work?*)?
4. Personal background (*e.g. age, ethnicity, sexuality, educational background/highest level of qualifications*).
5. Your living situation (*e.g. live alone, have children, partner(s)?*)

### **2. Current work characteristics and organisation**

1. Current job/working status (*e.g. independent/agency sex worker, parlour worker, escort, manager/receptionist, working collectively?*)
2. How long worked in the sex industry? Have you changed jobs? Have you spent time out of the sex industry (*in another sector/doing something else. Doing any other job now outside sex industry?*)?
3. How would you describe the work you do? (*e.g. what services do you offer [are offered in your establishment]? Anything out of bounds?*)
4. Conditions of work (*e.g. health and safety/precautions, including screening clients, usual hours of work, recruitment practices in establishments. Seasonal variations in work? Examples of good practice?*)
5. About your clients (*e.g. on average how many in one week, what sort of ages, background etc., male/female/couples? Do they tend to have specific demands? Balance between sexual and other services?*).
6. Usual methods for advertising and contacting clients? How establish a contract with them?
7. Rates of pay and what they relate to (*e.g. types of service, transaction times, rates for third parties?*) Typical weekly or monthly income?
8. Have you encountered any problems in your work? If so, what (*e.g. troublesome/violent clients, robbery, problems with neighbours, police?*)

9. If you have had any problems, how have you dealt with these?
10. Do you have anywhere you can go for advice or support relating to your work (e.g. *trade union, support project/do managers provide support*)?

## **2. Work and personal relationships**

1. Describe your relationship with clients (e.g. *more established relationships with some, their behaviour towards you? Transaction emotional as well as physical? Who is in control*)?
2. Do you/have you worked with any third parties (e.g. *agent, maid*)? How has that been (e.g. *how does it work, how are they paid/how much, what do they do*)? [*for managers etc – describe relationship with sex workers*]
3. How do you see your work-life balance? (e.g. *leisure/work hours*)
4. Has your work affected your personal/non-commercial relationships in any way (e.g. *with family/friends or partners*)? How do you balance your work identity and identity outside work (e.g. *have different identities, sexual and emotional*)?

## **3. Views on your work and aspirations**

1. What are the essential skills and qualities required for your job? How do you acquire learning – on and/or off job? [*managers – training for staff?*]
2. Do you see sex work as similar to or different from other jobs? If so, how? [*also compare with other forms of sex work or sex workers*]
3. What would you say are the conditions for job satisfaction in your work? Do you experience job satisfaction? [*best/worst things about the job?*]
4. What do you see yourself doing in the future (say five or ten years' time)? Why is this?

## **4. The regulatory and legislative context**

1. What do you know about current legislation around sex work in the UK?
2. How do the laws affect your work or personal life (e.g. *the way you feel about safety? Do you think the law affects the way other people think about sex work*)?
3. Are there any changes to the law you'd like to see (e.g. *any occupational standards*)?

## **5. Other**

Any other comments?

**Prostitution, diversity and sex markets: an occupational study of indoor  
sex work in Great Britain**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)**

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researcher.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_