

Sex Work, Advertorial News Media and Conditional Acceptance

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Abstract:

Media depictions of sex work and workers are a key site where perceptions of the sex industry are established and contested, particularly for audiences who may have little to no direct interaction with it otherwise. The presence of an advertorial framing or function of news media coverage of the sex industry has been identified in previous work. This article analyses news media coverage in New Zealand post-decriminalisation to consider how advertorial frames are used to construct indoor low-volume sex work as acceptable, and identify the conditions which are attached to this acceptability. The advertorial frames often emphasise the respectability and/or desirability of the clientele, potentially indicating to male readers that they may be a client-type man. Simultaneously, this construction of clients as desirable is used to underpin a discourse of authentic pleasure on the part of the workers. These narratives obscure the sexual and emotional labour involved in low-volume sex work, stripping it of its status as work, and positioning work-sex as akin to non-transactional sexual contact. Such renderings often draw meaning and legitimacy by shifting existing stereotypes about the sex industry as dangerous or damaging to other workers: typically those who charge less for their services or who are perceived to see more clients. This article concludes that the establishment of one kind of sex work as more acceptable at the expense of other sectors of the industry may serve to further entrench existing inequalities among people who work in the sex industry.

Introduction

New Zealand decriminalised sex work for citizens and permanent residents in 2003, with the passing of the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA). While sex work is legal, restrictions are placed on where workers and brothels can advertise their services. They may not advertise on the radio, television, or in the newspaper, aside from in the classified advertisements section. The major job listing websites in New Zealand also bar brothel operators from advertising for sex workers. Sex work is, however, discussed in the news media, a site where the

general public draw much of their understanding of the industry, in the absence of any lived experience (Hallgrimsdottir et al., 2006; Hallgrimsdottir et al., 2008). Prior work, both in New Zealand and elsewhere, has identified the presence of an advertorial slant in some news media coverage of the sex industry (Fitzgerald and Abel, 2010; Grant, 2014; Easterbrook-Smith, 2018).

In jurisdictions where sex work is illegal, the aspects of the work which are criminalised are often a “talking crime” – soliciting, or naming specific acts for specific sums of money (Grant, 2014; Platt et al., 2018). Under a decriminalised model, workers and brothels can publicly discuss exactly which services they provide without concern about attracting police attention. In some cases, under a decriminalised framework, news media texts serve a secondary purpose as advertorial texts, intended to attract new clientele and workers.

As part of a doctoral research project, news media texts about sex work and workers post-decriminalisation were examined to determine if an acceptable sex worker had been discursively produced, and what conditions were attached to that acceptability. One of the findings of the project, identified as having potential for further exploration, was the presence of advertorial framing in some of the texts which discussed low-volume¹, higher-priced, agencies. This article expands on those findings, analysing additional texts and considering the advertorial function of news media texts in greater detail.

This article argues that the advertorial nature of these texts extends beyond the descriptions of the kinds of services and prices provided, and serve to interpellate men to consider or reconsider themselves as client-type-men. Restrictions placed on overt advertising limit agencies and brothels to outlets where would-be clients specifically seek out information about sexual services: classified advertisements for “adult entertainment” and online escort directories. Agencies make use of news media coverage to reach a wider audience. The buying and selling of sex have been and still are heavily stigmatized activities, and news media is a key site where this stigma is negotiated, resisted and reinforced (Hallgrimsdottir et al, 2006; Van Brunschot, Sydnie and Krull, 2000; Farvid and Glass, 2014).

¹ In this context ‘low-volume’ is used to reflect the way these agencies positioned their services in comparison to other brothels where workers were perceived to see a higher number of clients per day or week. This is reflected in some of the news media coverage interviewing workers and owners of these agencies (Meadows 2014; McCarthy 2015).

Three themes in particular are examined: a discourse of authentic pleasure and enjoyment on the part of the worker, commentary which positions clients as respectable or pitiable, and a recurring theme in which the managers and owners of low-volume agencies discuss their businesses in comparison to higher-volume brothels. These narratives function synergistically to position one mode of engaging in sex work as being all but indistinguishable from personal sexual contact, and more acceptable than other sectors of the industry. This is notable for its divergence from the direction which sex work activism has taken in recent times, with sex worker rights movements moving away from empowerment discourses and towards an emphasis on the labour dynamics (Mac and Smith, 2018). Weitzer has theorized mechanisms by which sex work stigma may be resisted, pointing out it is a virtually universal feature of engagement or association with the sex industry, while Pheterson has identified one of the aspects of sex work which is stigmatized is the notion of sex being provided indiscriminately, and therefore impersonally (2018; 1993). Within this context, a discourse of authentic pleasure is aligned with notions of empowerment and aims to resist stigmatization.

Research into self-perception of men who buy sex has found they sometimes use encounters with sex workers to affirm their own masculinity, and consider the apparent enjoyment of the worker validates their sexual prowess (Huysamen and Boozanier, 2015; Huysamen, 2019). Many clients also value the appearance of an emotional connection with sex workers (Sanders, 2008; Huysamen and Boozanier, 2015). Mentioning workers' genuine enjoyment therefore serves an advertorial function: the language of authentic connection in news media texts mirrors that found in more straight-forwardly advertorial texts. Discussing the price of services attracts staff, but also acts as an advertisement in a way more subtle than simply listing prices implies. High prices establish the services as a luxury and give the impression of exclusivity. The discussion of price and enjoyment is carefully balanced to make financial outcomes a mechanism by which engagement in the sex industry is excused for workers, but only if treated as a perk rather than a core motivator for engaging in the work. Central to these discourses is obscuring the labour being carried out as real work.

As a result of eliding the actual sexual and emotional labour being performed, the work is recast as analogous to personal sexual contact. Although it is outside the scope of this article to address in detail, the possibility that this makes addressing workplace issues or

labour rights issues more difficult is considered, with reference to work by Maher et al (2012). Additionally, the slippage between reporting and advertising is discussed with the possibility that it increases the work expected of sex workers: the burden of emotional labour they are expected to perform as part of the service. Finally, these narratives as part of a broader theme of producing the acceptable sex worker are considered, with reference to the way that such narratives often produce acceptability in opposition to other sectors of the industry, allowing it to fall more heavily on workers who belong to other marginalised identity categories (Link and Phelan, 2001). In many cases, the narratives constructed by owners of agencies, of their competition as unethical or exploitative, function to re-inscribe stereotyped notions of how the sex industry functions on specific segments of it, particularly on workers who are already marginalised along racial lines.

Methods

From the data set examined in the original three-year project, eight texts were identified for further analysis; those which gave descriptions of clients or client behaviour, and/or descriptions of workers' attitudes to their jobs. The texts were published or aired in New Zealand between 2012 - 2016, and included newspaper and news magazine articles (predominantly 500 words or more in length), one televisual text, and a 40 minute radio interview. Further searches were conducted for texts published or aired since initial data collection ceased in 2016. The collection of additional texts for analysis aimed to determine if the narratives changed over time, or if similar language and frames continued to be used. The Newztext database was searched using the terms "sex work*" and "prostitut*" and further hand searches of outlets which were not reliably indexed were carried out (for example, *Radio New Zealand* and *The Spinoff*). Texts which discussed managed adult indoor sex workers who were legally permitted to work under the PRA were included², and texts which were primarily coverage of court cases involving sex workers were excluded. The decision to look specifically at adult indoor workers with the legal right to work in New Zealand was made in order to allow for a closer consideration of how distinctions of class (and, although not explicitly mentioned in the texts, race) were drawn to afford some sex workers respectability, without differences in the legality of the work. In the absence of a

² Under the PRA workers on temporary visas cannot engage in sex work, even if their visa conditions allow them to work in other jobs while in New Zealand.

distinct gulf between legal and illegal modes of work, what delineations are drawn to produce and distinguish the more acceptable or respectable sex worker?

The analysis of the texts identified recurring discursive themes, and noted the lexical decisions made in describing workers' feelings about their jobs, and their clientele. This approach, of identifying dominant themes, and considering the commonalities in how they function discursively, is methodologically similar to existing research on this topic (Hallgrimsdottir et al., 2006; Van Brunschot et al., 2012; Strega et al., 2014; Farvid and Glass, 2014). A discourse analysis approach modelled after Fairclough was used to analyse segments of the text relating to the key themes. Fairclough's work on analysing media discourse specifically is used (1995), where he notes an "ambivalence of voice" sometimes creates a slippage between reporting and reported voice (72, 81). This is useful in identifying advertorial frames: while advertorial language may be reasonably expected in quotes from managers and owners of brothels, the existence of an advertorial framing could be said to emerge when their preferred terminology is present in descriptions of their own or competing establishments outside reported speech.

Fairclough also proposes that a priority for critical discourse analysis should be considering the linkages between discourse and wider social changes and practices (1992: 269). Mass media representations of sex work have been identified not only as central to the formation of perceptions of the sex industry, but also key to the project of destigmatizing the sex industry (Weitzer, 2018). Within this framework, discourse is understood as being socially and culturally constitutive: discourses about sex work are how meaning is made of the industry in the popular, non-sex working, consciousness. Fairclough additionally proposes that discourse analysis be carried out with an awareness of manifest intertextuality and what he refers to as interdiscursivity, explaining it is responsible for ambivalence within texts, particularly indirect speech (1992). Within the analysed texts, many discourses about managed indoor sex workers rely on existing stereotypes about the sex industry to be made intelligible, evidence of Fairclough's rendering of manifest intertextuality.

Analysis:

A total of 19 texts were examined, spanning from 2012 to 2018. Some texts discussing low-volume indoor managed workers (usually referred to in the texts as agencies) also interviewed or discussed higher volume work, with those workplaces typically referred to as

brothels.³ The texts were analysed to determine how they characterised clients, how workers' and management discussed workers' feelings about their work, and comments on the remuneration of sex workers. The expanded analysis indicates that an advertorial framing is still evident in more recent texts, and offers a more comprehensive discussion of how sex workers acceptability is sometimes created through comparison.

Descriptions of clients

Texts which included descriptions of clients tended to typify them as attractive and successful, or as deserving of sympathy. Some texts (Cooke, 2012; Tolley, 2016a) included discussions from indoor workers where they expressed more ambivalence about clients. Two of the texts from the sample discussed indoor managed workers and included comments from a city councillor and from neighbours to the brothel, expressing their perceptions of clients. In one, a councillor said his objection "was not with sex workers but with their clients", and "if sex workers were not safe from their clients, then neither were other people in their neighbourhoods", then alleged clients had been "preparing themselves" while waiting for their appointments (Motion, 2018). Neighbours of the brothels being discussed said they had not seen evidence of men "behaving in a lewd manner" on the street (Bay of Plenty Times, 2018). Although these accounts do not contribute directly to theorising the formation of 'client types' in discourses from indoor sex workers and brothel management, it gives an indication of the kind of stereotypes which their descriptions are operating in opposition to: of men who buy sex as dangerous (to sex workers and the general public), and perverted (Sanders, 2008).

Some texts discussed clients as being attractive, desirable and respectful, both in reported speech and reporting from journalists. In one, a worker from The Bedroom, a Wellington agency, describes her clients as "very respectful" and her work as "intimate encounters with nice men", while the journalist describes the scene when a client arrives, saying he is a "a tall, distinguished man in his 50s" (Dominion Post, 2012). In another interview, a sex worker at an unnamed agency discusses her clients, saying "most people that come here are really lovely and attractive", then adds that she would probably see her regulars as private lovers if she was looking for a relationship, and feels she is compensated for her time, it "doesn't

feel like the sex is being bought at all” (Tolley, 2016a). Two texts explicitly state that some clients are too busy with work commitments to pursue a relationship (Miller, 2017b; Tolley, 2016b), while a third (Meadows, 2014) discusses the income of the workers, adding that clients who might “whisk a girl away to Europe for two weeks” can significantly increase earnings. Elsewhere, Bones (2015) writes, of “high class” agencies (the text mentions Bon Ton, Funhouse and The Bedroom), that “[m]en are happy to spend more money to receive a safer, more enjoyable and sophisticated service.” In another interview, workers from Funhouse are described by a journalist as being able to “pick and choose” their clients, and their manager confirms clients want an appointment with someone who is enjoying themselves (McCarthy, 2015).

These descriptions serve to situate men who buy sex as respectful, and successful: particularly the discussion of men being too busy to date, but financially secure enough to book a sex worker for weeks at a time. The commentary from Bones indicates there is also a positioning of these men in opposition to other men who purchase sex, identifying their decision to use the services of low-volume managed workers as sophistication of taste, and carrying the implication that services elsewhere are less safe and less enjoyable.

Two of the texts which discuss higher-volume brothels also speak in positive terms, with the owner of a Hawera brothel saying of clients, “some of them are like Christmas presents” (Vinnell, 2018). A text discussing increased business in Hamilton for the Fieldays (an annual agricultural trade show) quotes a brothel owner, saying “all the farmers drop in and they have money to spend...they go a bit wallet crazy” and a sex worker, who explains: “The farmers are down to earth. They come stomping up the stairs, looking a little rough, but they have as much manners as the businessmen” (Manch, 2017). There are subtle but interesting distinctions between these two discourses. Comments from agency management and workers (many of the texts interviewing agency workers are explicitly conducted on-site, raising the possibility that management are supervising or nearby) tend to be flattering and positive, exceptionalising the clients, and emphasising their respectability and class position, while texts from higher volume brothels are still positive but with more complexity. Farmers are “a little rough” but otherwise good clients: not positioned as being financially successful enough that a two-week jaunt to Europe is the

norm, but “wallet crazy” for one week a year. These men are not exceptional, they are explicitly normal.

Another theme within the texts is of the client as lonely, socially awkward, elderly, or disabled, and deserving of sympathy. One article describes a service launched by The Bach, a Whangarei agency, which offers to teach migrant men “seeking intimacy and companionship” how to flirt and how to kiss (Keogh, 2018). Multiple texts identified the service being sought by men who visit agencies as “intimacy” or company (Keogh, 2018; Miller, 2017b; Cooke, 2012). In one radio interview, Sarah, the owner of an unnamed agency, says most of their clients are over 40, because of their pricing, and can be roughly split into married men who no longer have sex with their wives, single men who are too busy for a partner, and “the unfortunates, unfortunate looking, socially awkward, just not good with women full stop. They’re the loveliest men, they are so sweet. The women love seeing them, because they’re just nice, they’re just genuine” (Tolley, 2016b). In separate interviews, the owner of Funhouse also says that their clients include men who are “socially and romantically disabled” (McCarthy, 2015), and the owner of Bon Ton says her clients have included men whose wives were terminally ill, but insisted they keep up an active sex life (Simpson, 2017).

In two texts, managers explicitly mention providing services to elderly or disabled clients, one from a high-volume and one from a low-volume brothel (Vinnell, 2018; Cooke, 2012). Characterising clients as lonely was a more common narrative in the analysed texts. Accessing the services of sex workers is here explained as almost therapeutic. In one of the radio , a sex worker who works in higher-volume brothels talks about her clients as being “mildly annoying” to “pleasant”, adding that while she does not find her clients attractive, she knows sex workers who express that if their clients are young and “hot” they sometimes do (Tolley, 2016a). Jane’s interview is introduced with the explanation that she agreed to meet the journalist off-site, and her manager is not interviewed. Her commentary falls in a middle ground between the version of the client presented by agencies and the threat perceived by non-sex workers expressed in the first two texts discussed: her clients are broadly neutral, and she acknowledges that some sex workers find *some* clients attractive, but this is not a norm.

Discourses of enjoyment

A second theme examined within the analysed texts is commentary about workers' feelings about their jobs. There is an evident interest from journalists in reporting if sex workers derive enjoyment from their work. Workers in agencies are often reported as "loving" their job, both in their own words, and according to the owners and managers of the agencies. Sometimes these texts would include the acknowledgement that not all workers experienced the job this way, but this was often implied to be the case only for workers at other establishments. Texts which also discussed of higher-volume brothels tended to express more complex understandings of workers' experiences of their work: satisfaction with some aspects of the job, and less positive feelings about others.

When discussing the feelings of sex workers towards their jobs, it was common for managers and owners of agencies to express that loving the job or being authentically enthusiastic about the sexual labour was critical to being hired in the first place. The owner of The Bach expresses that she "only hires women who genuinely like sex, freely choose to work in the industry and aren't in desperate circumstances" (Keogh, 2018), and in another interview the phrase "desperate" is used twice when discussing who she will not employ, in addition to a comment about potential employees being rejected if "they appear to be trying to work out some sort of abuse issue" (Miller, 2017b).

Funhouse's owner says her workers "really, really enjoy it. And it's not obviously just about the sex but they all enjoy sex" and adds that "if you're going to be a sex worker it should be something that you actually want to do. And that's one of the big differences with Funhouse" (McCarthy, 2015). In another text she explains she only takes 5% of the people who apply to work for her, who must be "well-educated, personable, and genuinely keen to work" (Meadows, 2014). In another text, a Bon Ton employee, who the interview explains is being interviewed in the presence of her manager, discusses an interview at another workplace, saying "[t]hey didn't even ask me if I liked sex", only asking when she was available to start and how flexible her availability was (Olds, 2016).

Discussing the enthusiasm for the work in this way positions workers' ability and willingness to either enjoy or present a convincing facsimile of enjoyment as critical to securing and retaining a job with an agency. It also serves to obscure that the work is, in fact, work. The workers who are most respectable are those who perform acceptable femininities through

performances of caring, in this case for their client (Skeggs, [1997] 2002: 109). This acceptable femininity is also one which serves class interests, with the workers' willingness to engage in this unpaid advertorial performance benefiting their managers ability to profit from their labour. Acceptable sex workers are compelled to be the "entrepreneurial, self-optimising subjects" carrying out affective care and enthusiasm for the dual purpose of establishing a respectable individual position, and contributing to the profits of their employer (Elias, Gill and Scharff, 2017: 5). The managers and workers also articulate hallmarks of Hochschild's theory of emotional labour: a performance of enjoyment is a core part of the job, and the expectation of a "real" person means that workers must call upon "deep acting" skills for this performance to be sufficiently convincing ([1979] 2012, 1983: 5, 33-48, 107).

Additionally, the language used, and reasons given for rejecting applicants indicate a critical stance on why other sex workers engage in the work: they are desperate or abused.

Although distinct from discussion about migrant sex workers (who cannot legally work in the sex industry under New Zealand's decriminalisation model) these comments rely on a larger cultural conception of sex work as frequently indistinguishable from trafficking or exploitation to shift this stigma more completely to sex workers who are not employed by the agencies. After explaining that she rejects most applicants, Funhouse's manager adds she then refers them on to other brothels (McCarthy, 2015). As with the comment from the Bon Ton worker, the message being conveyed is that the workers who are not sufficiently genuine in their enthusiasm, or who are in some way being exploited, will work elsewhere.

This is also expressed in a radio broadcast, which begins by interviewing two workers from an unnamed agency, one of whom is described as being "effervescent" when she discusses her work (Tolley, 2016a). In a segue the journalist says that Milly and Aubrey are happy working for small and "caring" agencies, then asks how workers in bigger "licenced" brothels feel about the work (Tolley 2016a). This framing suggests, both through describing the agencies as 'caring' and through describing bigger agencies as licensed⁴ and implying they are therefore more business-like, that workers in higher-volume brothels do not have

⁴ This distinction also doesn't make a great deal of sense: managers of both small and large brothels must hold an operator's certificate, only being exempt if they are a "small owner-operated brothel" where no more than four sex workers work together, and each is wholly self-managed (Prostitution Reform Act, 2003).

the same affective engagement in the work. This structure conflates workers genuinely enjoying the sexual labour with being “happy” and cared for at work, creating a discursive linkage between authentic pleasure and a good working environment. Elias et al, writing about the theorisation of a postfeminist sensibility, note the identification of “the distinctive affective tone of postfeminism, particularly its emphasis upon the upbeat and the positive” (2017: 25). This affective turn is evident in these texts, where journalists describe workers’ affect in effusive language, or at least it is unable to be disentangled from their function as advertorial.

Another worker, Jane, is interviewed in a comparative position to agency workers. She explains the benefits and drawbacks of larger clubs, from her perspective. She says that they tend towards a more energetic party environment, with less focus on the appearance of emotional connection, explaining this is more compatible with her “hustle”. She clarifies that while she finds appointments which align with what the journalist describes as “the girlfriend experience” tiring⁵, she knows some workers who excel at them, distinguishing between their experiences without dismissing other ways of working as invalid. Jane also mentions that bigger clubs attract more clients, although they can be more rigid in terms of set shifts and strict management. Other interviews with managers of higher-volume brothels tend to reflect a mixture of experiences among their staff: Celeste, who runs a brothel in Christchurch says the industry can be difficult with very few workers meeting their financial goals long-term (Tolley, 2016b), while Nicky, who runs a brothel in Hawera, says that some workers can become emotionally numb working long term, while others are content to stay because the industry works well for them and suits their lifestyle (Vinnell, 2018).

Many of the texts also highlight the financial aspect of the work, with enjoyment paired with discussions of the money earned in commentary about low-volume workers. Authentic enjoyment of the work is presented as a mechanism by which to sanitise the transactional nature of the experience, positioning the money as a bonus and further serving to undermine sex work as a legitimate job. Sarah, an agency owner, says she refuses to employ

⁵ The “girlfriend experience” is a service in which it is expected the sex worker will give the appearance of intimacy as well as sexual labour, and in this context often implies that kissing and cunnilingus are among the services included (Bernstein, 2007: 7; Sanders, 2008: 93).

workers who do not have another source of income, because this means sex work is “a bit of fun” for them, rather than workers feeling “I need to do this...even when I’m not in the mood” (Tolley, 2016b). One of the employees of The Bach says “[y]oung women of today own their own sexuality and if they choose to monetise it - that's their right” (Miller, 2017b), while the owner of Bon Ton explains “[t]he very nature of the sex industry only empowers women” (Simpson, 2017). The owner of The Bach also links empowerment and financial benefits, saying: “the ladies make great money, they have a good time and they walk out of here feeling like a million bucks” (Miller, 2017a). Bones discusses low-volume agencies as a place where women “get paid well to do something they enjoy” (2015) and goes on to say:

Women are searching for safe and supportive environments in which they can explore their sexuality. Smart, attractive and ambitious women are using sex to earn money—and there is nothing wrong with it! (Bones, 2015)

Framing like this is not uncommon: the sexual labour of sex work is often framed as thrilling or titillating for the workers, rather than being routine or simply work. One text describes a worker feeling a “thrill of anticipation” when a client rings the doorbell (Dominion Post, 2012), while another text discussing a Bon Ton worker says of her decision to start sex work “[t]he appeal is the money and the sexual thrill” (Olds, 2016). In a paragraph discussing agencies which offer kink and fetish services, the author notes “women tend to work for agencies that reflect their own areas of interest” (Bones, 2015). Sarah, an agency owner says, “I wouldn’t take women who have done lots of escort work for a low end- a lower price, either” adding “they get almost tainted” (Tolley, 2016b). Sarah goes on to explain what she means, saying she calls it “the parlour look” where workers enter “work mode” before a job, unlike her workers, who she claims are excited to see each client (Tolley, 2016b). Other managers also offer this interpretation of workers’ attitude to the sexual component of the work, describing a girlfriend experience being provided by a woman who is attracted to clients physical attributes, and concluding , “they’re happy about what they’re doing, they love what they’re doing” (Parsons-King, 2016).

There are some counternarratives, particularly in more recently published texts: one of the agency workers explains she is not very sexual in her private life, and understands work-sex as distinct from her personal sex life (Tolley, 2016a). One brothel worker explains she finds

the work good for her self-esteem because the process of dressing up for clients reminds her she is desirable, but does not specifically mention the sexual labour (Vinnell, 2018). Workers and managers from higher-volume brothels tend to talk about the job paying for day-to-day expenses and being a realistic alternative for women facing increasing competition for jobs in smaller towns (Vinnell, 2018). Healy, from the NZPC, points out that as in other industries, most sex workers do the work because they need money for regular living expenses (Radio New Zealand, 2016).

An additional narrative thread present in some of the texts is the linkage between higher prices and more respect: either from clients, or in terms of self-respect. The owner of Bon Ton discusses clients from what the journalist calls “lower-end brothels”, saying “[i]f you allow them to get away with treating girls like pieces of meat then they will. You should show respect for yourself and respect them too” (McAllen, 2015). Bones writes of men happy to spend more for a “safer” service, implying lower prices are linked to an increased risk of disease transmission, and drawing upon associations of the working class as a “dangerous, polluting” social group (2015; Skeggs, [1997] 2002, p.1). In another interview the owner of Funhouse says changing attitudes result in sex work being well paid, as at her agency, and that men will respect women more for providing those services (McCarthy, 2015).

Discussion

Client’s self-image as acceptable

Advertorial frames like this allow male readers to see themselves within the described archetypes: men who view themselves as respectful, genuine “gentlemen” are then interpellated by the discourses as being client-type men. The discourse of clients as attractive and generous, shy but kind, or as busy professionals, permits an identification and the incorporation of being a potential client into self-image (while, of course, the actual distinguishing feature of a client-type man is a willingness and ability to pay a sex worker for their services, with Sanders observing “men who buy sex are not a homogenous group” (2008: 38). The discourse of selectiveness, as in the claim that an agency only hire 5% of applicants also reassures them that the sex worker they are seeing is carefully vetted for genuine enthusiasm: this linkage between ‘authenticity’ and exclusivity in client perceptions

has been identified by Bernstein, while Huysamen and Boozanier have noted clients expect that an encounter will seem more genuine if it is more expensive (2007: 103; 2015: 549). The implication that men who use the services of workers at lower-priced or higher-volume brothels are inherently less respectful, or dangerous, also serves an advertorial function by encouraging men to use the services of agencies to distinguish themselves from this stereotyped group.

These discourses are reflective of men's self-reported conceptions of themselves as clients. Sanders has found that men who buy sex are acutely aware of the stigmatization of this activity, and the stereotypes about the clients of sex workers (2008). They often differentiate themselves as a respectable client by emphasising they specifically sought out workers who they believed wanted to be in the sex industry (2008: 50-55). Prior research has found that clients who use the services of indoor sex workers will often make a point of distinguishing indoor sex work from street-based sex work, thereby associating themselves with the sector they perceive as more acceptable (Huysamen and Boozanier, 2018; Sanders, 2008).

The respectability of the client and sex worker are produced through their association with each other. Sex workers using the respectability of clients as part of their "self-making process" is a phenomenon identified elsewhere (Carrier-Moisan, 2015), in that workers use the class position of their clientele to explain why their form of sex work is different to others. The emphasis on how successful some clients are, and discussions of the cost of the services, is one way this is achieved within the analysed texts. The clients also achieve respectability in relative terms through their association with the 'right' kind of sex worker. They are still men who buy sex, but only from successful and highly educated women, who are excited to be having sex with them. The transaction is minimised as much as possible, with agency owners situating their role more as matchmakers than management.

Heuristics of consent and generosity

The identified discourse of sex workers being sexually excited by the sexual labour they provide is another mechanism by which clients are attracted, and acceptability established. As demonstrated earlier, these discourses of enjoyment are explicitly created in opposition to sex workers at high-volume brothels, the manifest intertextuality described by Fairclough

(1992). The choice being presented to clients or potential-clients through these texts is between hiring a worker who is authentically excited to see them, or a worker who is providing a service because it is her job. The erasure of the labour is necessary for this comparison to function, and reframes consent in a sex work context as though it can be negotiated and given under the same terms as in personal sexual contact. 'Enthusiastic consent' is a heuristic which has gained prominence for understanding what good consent and sexual negotiation looks like in a private context, but as some sex workers have pointed out, cannot be neatly mapped to work sex, and bears little resemblance to the tactics sex workers report employing to distinguish between professional and personal selves (Shane, 2013; Mac and Smith, 2018; Brewis and Linstead, 2000).

The enjoyment discussed in the analysed texts is reminiscent of the language of sex positivity, particularly 'enthusiastic consent'. Gill identifies a postfeminist sensibility as being, in effect, "gendered neoliberalism" and this co-option of the language of sex positivity suggests an "entanglement" between feminist concerns with consent, and advertorial motives (2017; 2007). Clients often highlight the performance of enjoyment by a sex worker as being integral to their experience of purchasing sex, in part due to a linkage between performances of virile masculinity and sexually satisfying a female partner (Huysamen and Boozanier: 2015: 549-550; Huysamen, 2019). Stripped of an association with personal pleasure and connection with a private partner, 'enthusiastic consent' is used to legitimize some sex work by positioning it as an empowering choice, and secondarily to signal to potential clients that this is an opportunity to re-establish their masculinity through sexual performance. This permits a distancing from the inherently transactional and often presumed-to-be-indiscriminate nature of work-sex, identified by Pheterson as one of the contributors to the stigmatization of the work (1993). The empowerment here is located primarily in sexual subjectivity, dependent on erotic pleasure presumed or advertised as being enjoyed by the sex worker.

The fantasy that sex workers providing an all-inclusive or 'girlfriend experience' service are sexually attracted to and aroused by their clients is prominent in advertising copy for the sex industry, with the service being presented as including "authentic intimate connection" (Bernstein, 2007: 7). The impression of a genuine connection, the way the job is carried out, becomes "part of the job itself" (Hochschild, [1979] 2012: 5). The inclusion of this fantasy in

news media, however, collapses the distinction between media intended for clients and media which is used by the general public to form an impression of the real conditions of the industry. Proposing that all 'acceptable' sex workers are sexually attracted to every client they see perpetuates stigmatizing stereotypes of the sex worker as hypersexual, rather than acknowledging the work carried out by workers to draw a distinction between private and professional lives (Sanders, 2005a; Sanders, 2005b; Brewis and Linstead, 2000).

Additionally, the focus on workers' sincere enjoyment further allows clients to position themselves as different to stereotypical representations of clients and explain the financial component of the agreement as a perk, or "helping her get ahead in life" as one owner puts it (Tolley, 2016b). Ironically, this demand for convincing authenticity potentially increases the work required by the sex worker in question: having her work framed as aligned with personal sexual desires and preferences heightens the requirement for emotional labour within the interaction. Hochschild discusses one form of emotional labour as invoking a specific emotional response in clients ([1979] 2012), and Abel has identified the use of Hochschild's 'deep acting' as a protective mechanism used by sex workers (2011). In this instance the emotional response is not just a feeling of being desired, but also acting where the worker must additionally give the impression of letting down boundaries around sexual privacy, conveying that whichever services have been negotiated are also coincidentally exactly what the worker desires.

Respectability by Comparison

Discussing the impact of advertorial frames is not to suggest the existence of an audience unable to critically interpret media and consume it with scepticism, or to imply that brothel owners' vested interest in presenting their businesses in a positive light is surprising. As demonstrated in the analysis of texts earlier in this article however, coercive or otherwise negative working environments are often positioned as existing primarily in higher-volume and lower-priced agencies. The comparison between high and low-volume workplaces allows owners to situate their own business practices as beyond reproach, as in the assurance from Bon Ton's manager that she declines "coarse" clients who will instead use the services of high volume brothels, which she describes as operating like "a zoo" (McAllen,

2015). Elsewhere the owner of Funhouse reiterates this dichotomy by referring to the experiences of women working for “the worst parlour in town or for us” (Cooke, 2012).

This is also evident in the discussion of a changing demographic among sex workers: claims that “high-class agencies” attract “sophisticated” workers (Dominion Post, 2012), and “a new class of sex worker” is attracted by “higher-end brothels in favour of the back-alley establishments that we expect” (Bones, 2015). These comments by implication suggest another kind of less acceptable worker, unsophisticated and discreditable, who works elsewhere. Workers who are able to perform respectable femininity may “construct distinctions between themselves and others”, with empowerment and “sophistication” used to distance themselves from the stigma of sex work (Skeggs, [1997] 2002: 99). Narratives of genuine enjoyment are presented as intrinsically linked to working for low-volume agencies, with workers who express being motivated by money without also finding the work satisfying or “empowering” (Simpson, 2017) constructed as pitiable, misguided, or making a bad choice. The ‘high class’ sex worker in this figuration is a symbol of “individualistic striving”, attaining singular distinction, not part of a collective striving for a dissipation of the stigma against sex work (McRobbie, 2015: 4). More complex discussions, as from the brothel worker who explains she does not derive pleasure from work-sex, but knows some friends who do with selected clients, are not possible within the advertorial framework of agency work.

An emphasis on the enjoyment workers get from their work also displays the kind of manifest intertextuality which Fairclough (1992) describes: they anticipate and respond to persistent stereotypes about sex workers as emotionally damaged, working against their will, or as drug-using (using one stigma to support another) (Abel and Fitzgerald, 2010). The focus on clients as charming or pitiable functions through a similar mechanism: it pre-empts widely circulated stereotypes about clients (Sanders, 2008), that they are “lecherous and unattractive” as one worker puts it (McAllen, 2015), or that they are violent – implied through repeated mentions of changing attitudes to assault from police (Cooke, 2012; Olds, 2016; Tolley, 2016b; Radio New Zealand, 2016; Miller, 2017b). This manifest intertextuality is leveraged by accepting and responding to identities of “sex worker” and “sex work client” as stigmatized.

Contingent Acceptability

A further function of emphasis on sex acts within discourses of sex work, and positioning workers' sexual labour as being fundamentally the same as personal sexual contact is limiting or removing the ability to discuss workplace issues or labour rights, or even to speak of it in frank terms as work. This is magnified by the clearly advertorial function of much media coverage: advertising speaks of sex work in specific terms, but advertorial frames in news media blur distinctions between reportage and curated realities. This framing accentuates the relationship between client and worker and minimises the relationship between worker and management (or worker and worker, in the form of workplace organising.) Positioning the interactions in this way mean that the solution for any issues raised by the worker, or dissatisfaction with conditions, are positioned in terms more appropriate for resolving issues in a relationship than a workplace. Brennan says she declines applicants who express they are applying for the job solely for financial reasons, and only accepts applicants who are "genuinely keen to work", but keen to work in a way not motivated by money.

Disqualifying workers who express too much interest in money indicates the way in which approaching sex work within the agencies in a manner which too explicitly identifies it as a job is taboo. This makes respectability contingent on fiscal stability and solvency outside sex work, an explicitly classist positioning. Existing research indicates an excessive focus on gendered intimacy may make arguing for improved conditions in sex work more difficult (Maher et al., 2012). This would appear to be the case within advertorial media: the self-conscious and self-monitored expressions of enjoyment may well be true in some cases but are disclosed with a knowledge that clients and potential clients will be among the audience (Agustín, 2004). Expressions of dissatisfaction may render a worker or agency less appealing, impacting future earning potential, particularly given workers are independent contractors, usually wholly dependent on the manager for bookings.

The analysed texts offers details about specific sexual acts and sums of money, using individualistic frames. Workers who are constructed as respectable and acceptable are constituted as such through their conspicuous self-monitoring and expression of appropriate, positive, affective engagements with their work (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2015).

Such individual framing forecloses the possibility of discussing structural issues informing the experiences of the sex industry. A focus on who does work for agencies, and taking management's word for who does not - workers who are "desperate", are not "confident" enough or who are too transparent about their financial motivations - circumvents a question of why the category of 'confident' and 'white' seem to overlap so completely in this instance.

In early 2016, 91% of workers at the three agencies most prominent in the examined texts were marketed as pākehā/white. A survey in July 2019 found at the four most prominent agencies the proportion was now 85%, with one agency only employing white women.⁶ None of the analysed texts directly mention the race of the workers being discussed, a striking difference compared to texts about other forms of sex work in New Zealand, which often mention the race of (non-white) sex workers (Easterbrook-Smith, 2018; Easterbrook-Smith, 2019). Questions of racism in the industry are made invisible, as are questions of normative beauty standards: Gill highlights that other women are often recruited to assist in the monitoring of unruly bodies (2007). If female management make the decisions about who is or is not a marketable sex worker, to what degree are their own preferences or prejudices reproduced in their hiring practices (Brooks, 2010: 99-102)? These questions would be interesting regardless, but become urgent in light of the way that discourses about these few agencies implicitly and explicitly shape discourses about workers employed at other brothels, or working in other ways.

Although management and owners at all the profiled agencies and brothels speak in positive and promotional terms of their businesses, the use of comparative rhetoric to situate their business as better, or more "ethical" than other workplaces is restricted to low-volume agencies. Working at a low-volume agency is positioned within these discourses as the correct 'choice', usually by the interviewees but sometimes in direct reportage too. Managers make dismissive, dehumanising or pitying comments about workers at other brothels: they are treated like "a piece of meat", work in "a zoo", they are "mushrooms, kept in the dark and fed bullshit" (McAllen, 2015; Cooke, 2012). Within this discourse the only sensible choice is to work at a low-volume "ethical" agency, and, distressingly, there is

⁶ The survey in 2016 considered Funhouse, The Bedroom and Bon Ton. In 2019 Funhouse, The Bedroom, Bonton, and The Bach were surveyed.

a continuation of discourses that other sex workers are at least partially responsible for any violence they experience because of their choice of workplace. The choice however is not materially possible for most sex workers, and the postfeminist sensibility underpinning these constructions “blames women for their disadvantaged positions” (Gill, 2017: 609).

Those who meet the highly specific criteria for the profiled agencies represent a vanishingly small proportion of the sex industry as a whole, although this is only directly addressed by one journalist among the analysed texts (McCarthy, 2015). Discursively then, these narratives of selectiveness and enjoyment both erase the skilled and effortful labour involved in sex work, but also redistribute rather than breaking down stigma within the industry. Acceptability as a sex worker is available only to those who are already closest to inclusion (Link and Phelan, 2001), while stigmatization remains for workers who are marginalised in other ways by being Māori or Pasifika, migrant, transgender, working class, disabled, mentally unwell, drug-using, or a host of other identities not represented in agencies. Instead of more firmly situating sex work as a legitimate job, identified as a core part of the project to reduce stigmatisation of sex workers, a distinction is made between legitimate and illegitimate modes of engaging in it, producing acceptability only in comparison to other sectors of the industry.

The acceptable and respectable sex worker created in these discourses is made intelligible through normalising discourses which frame her sexual behaviour as similar to that of non-sex working women. The acceptable sex worker is not produced through framing her work as legitimate, but by framing it as pleasure: an informed choice to do something she enjoys, with the money as an incidental bonus. This acceptability relies on the implication or outright statement that she is not like other sex workers. “It’s not what you would expect from a woman who sells her body”, as one text puts it (Dominion Post, 2012). Complaining about workplace conditions or identifying parts of the job which are challenging or boring are not possible within this framework, without risking the conditional acceptance, tenuously obtained.

This framing significantly limits the ability to allow for sex workers to be treated as having agency. Their choice is only valid if they enjoy their work, not if it is an informed choice to

do a job which is simply better than other options – no choice at all, in other words. If workers are denied the dignity of having their work respected if they do not make the correct ‘choice’ about where to work, and discourses persist about “coarse” clients at high-volume workplaces, then an understanding of the sex industry in which sex workers are partially blamed if they are victims of violence is perpetuated (Mac and Smith, 2018: 34). Unsurprisingly, comments from experts who do not have a direct financial stake in particular businesses are more nuanced. Catherine Healy identifies that people’s experiences in the sex industry exist across a spectrum, and Georgina Beyer, a former MP, says her own experiences in the industry were mixed: sometimes violent, but also providing her with resilience and skills (Miller, 2017b). She adds that she felt the PRA should be passed because maintaining the status quo would do nothing for workers, which Healy concurs with. These more considered points identify that decriminalisation is a net positive for workers, supported by a recent meta-analysis (Platt et al., 2018), and identify how the work can be fulfilling aside from the two-dimensional narratives of pleasure provided by managers. Narratives of “genuinely keen” sex workers serve to flatten their experiences, and in both over- and de-emphasising the sexual component of the service, contribute to a perception that the industry does not require or develop other skillsets.

Weitzer (2018) has identified acts on an individual level which may attempt to reduce sex work stigma, which could include an individual worker attempting to distinguish themselves from what they consider disreputable kinds of sex work, and establishing their work as a service profession like any other, but adds these acts may have little or no impact on wider society (721). He proposes a set of pre-conditions for reducing stigma on a structural level, which include the decriminalization of sex work, the use of neutral language, changes in mass media representation, efforts from owners and managers (but points out that in some areas the interests of management and workers diverge), and sex worker activism. I suggest that the discourses identified here, although some aspects are positive, serve to redistribute stigma rather than reducing it, highlighting the way that horizontal surveillance occurs within the sex industry as lateral whorephobia, and indicating the dissonance between news media productions and the stated position of many sex work rights movements (Mac and Smith, 2018). The findings reinforce that, as Weitzer notes, decriminalization creates the conditions in which sex work stigma may be reduced, but it is not, in itself, a

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destigmatization. The conditional acceptance of sex work for some is presented such that it is functionally unattainable for workers who cannot or do not want to work in the way offered by low-volume agencies.

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