

E-PROSTITUTION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INTERNET ESCORT
WEBSITES

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Abstract of Thesis

E-Prostitution: A Content Analysis of Internet Escort Websites

Technology and the sex industry are extremely intertwined, perhaps more so than ever due to the Internet boom of recent years. Prostitution on the Internet, specifically in the form of Internet escorts, has expanded greatly, though it has been the subject of notably little scholarly attention. Moreover, male and female sex workers have rarely been studied within the same tier of prostitution. The goal of this thesis is to examine the content and design of male and female escort websites, focusing on the main similarities and differences in the ways male and female providers market themselves. Using systematically sampled provider websites from two escort review websites, The Erotic Review for females advertising to heterosexual men, and Rentboy for males advertising to homosexual men, I conducted a content analysis of 127 Internet escort websites (105 female and 22 male). Variables included general demographic information, affiliations, physical descriptions, inclusion of a biographical sketch, photograph details, service details, scheduling details, and website details. The analysis shows industry-wide patterns of the types of information included on the websites, including levels of disclosure and marketing techniques, though information presented often varied widely. There were also prominent differences in male and female websites, although most clustered around the prevailing industry standards. The Internet is constantly transforming the practices of prostitution through expediting communications between escorts and clients, reframing the traditionally gendered power relationships within prostitution, and empowering escorts to take control of their own marketing and management through entrepreneurial means.

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Introduction

With the advent and expansion of any new technology, the sex industry is likely to be among the first industries to capitalize upon it. A prime example of this is the Internet boom of the late twentieth century, and into the twenty-first. Sex and the Internet are virtually inseparable in today's world, as nearly everyone with a computer can easily find, purposefully or otherwise, a seemingly endless list of sexually explicit websites, from pornography to prostitution, and everything in between. The Internet's appeal to workers in the sex industry is inherently obvious; the ease of use, breadth of instantaneous distribution, secure anonymity, and possibly, most importantly, free speech laws (at least in the United States) that allow 'obscene' materials to be posted online make the Internet a prime venue for engaging in sex work.

Prostitution on the Internet is proliferating, yet the research on this is woefully lacking, specifically in the field of escorts and their use of the Internet in advertising sexual services. Moreover, male sex workers have been studied less often than their female counterparts, and there are even fewer systematic comparisons of men and women working in the same tier of prostitution. It remains an open question, therefore, whether and in what ways gender shapes prostitution services and, more specifically, marketing patterns.

This thesis will examine the content and design of male and female escort websites, focusing on the main similarities and differences in the ways male and female providers market themselves.

Literature Review

The lack of research on Internet-facilitated prostitution stands in contrast to the near saturation levels of study that some topics within the sex industry have received in recent years. Street prostitution and strip clubs have been studied quite often, resulting in a plethora of information about them compared to the little we know about indoor prostitution. Indoor prostitution has been less frequently studied because researchers have had difficulty gaining access to participants, hidden from view.¹ The advent of the Internet, however, has alleviated some of these access issues through the increased availability of advertisements, resources, and other prostitution-related websites.² However, technology seems to have moved faster than researchers can keep up with, as the literature has only just begun to branch out into new arenas, including Internet-based prostitution research.³ In order to obtain a more complete and comprehensive representation of Internet escorts, the biases currently dominating research on the sex industry as well as relevant gaps in the literature must be identified and discussed.

A disproportionate amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the heteronormative female-sex-workers-servicing-male-clients scenario. This view of prostitution, while invaluable due to the overwhelming majority of sex workers who are heterosexual females, overlooks homosexual or bisexual male prostitutes, a subsection of the sex industry that is growing. As Weitzer suggests, this trend of focusing on female sex workers may reflect larger societal prejudices at work regarding the double standard

¹ Janet Lever and Deanne Dolnick, "Clients and Call Girls: Seeking Sex and Intimacy," *Sex for Sale*, ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York: Routledge, 2008): 85-100.

² Teela Sanders, "Researching the Online Sex Work Community," *Virtual Methods*, ed. Christine Hine (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 67-79.

³ Tammy Castle and Jenifer Lee, "Ordering Sex in Cyberspace: A Content Analysis of Escort Websites," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11.1 (2008): 107-121.

applied to the promiscuity of females, who are labeled as “sluts,” as opposed to that of males, whose sexual prowess is viewed as “a badge of honor.”⁴ Some of the ‘feminist’ literature on sex work even goes as far as to paint prostitution as strictly a women’s issue, inherently exploitative and devoid of any free will or agency on behalf of the worker.⁵ Most morally based literature on the sex industry completely ignores male providers; rather it focuses on male customers who are described as “prostitute users” and on pimps and condemns all male involvement in sex work as “exploitation and abuse” of “prostituted women.”⁶

One important question is whether female providers differ significantly from male providers, especially within the same tier of prostitution. A study by Hubbard and Whowell suggests that male escorts’ use of Internet, along with the influence of queer theory, have resulted in a slight increase in research and a boom in websites focused on male prostitution.⁷ The Internet’s role in changing the scope of research on prostitution is quite evident in the growing focus on homosexual and bisexual males selling sex to other men, though there is still a severe dearth of literature on the topic. Despite the shortage of available research and their smaller population, male escorts may be less susceptible to some of the negative aspects of working in the sex industry in comparison with female escorts. The aforementioned double standard referenced by Weitzer, along with Cameron, Collins, and Thew’s assertion that “the social stigma of working as a male homosexual prostitute may actually be considered as slight or negligible, while being a

⁴ Ronald Weitzer, “Why We Need More Research on Sex Work,” *Sex for Sale*, ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York: Routledge, 2000): 7.

⁵ Donna M. Hughes, “Prostitution Online,” *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2.3-4 (January 2004): 115-131.

⁶ Hughes (2004): 12.

⁷ Phil Hubbard and Mary Whowell, “Revisiting the Red Light District: Still Neglected, Immoral and Marginal?” *Geoforum* 39.5 (September 2008): 1743-1755.

part of, and supported within, the liberal social world of an urban gay community” indicates that men may experience less of the potentially harmful features of escorting than women do, though more research is needed to corroborate these claims.⁸ The focus on heteronormative sexual relationships within prostitution-related research is problematic, creating a gender bias that has influenced public policy and has resulted in limited study of homosexual and bisexual male escorts.⁹

Gender and sexual orientation, though, are not the only causes for variety in sex work nor are these the only biases represented in research on prostitution. Social class and socioeconomic status, of sex workers as well as of their clients, are integral parts of understanding prostitution, especially online escorting, and available literature shows a strong partiality toward the study of street prostitution. Weitzer suggests that indoor prostitution is very different from street prostitution, often less disruptive and offensive to communities, if noticed at all, and therefore is often more easily accepted as long as it “remains discreet.”¹⁰ In the same way as the heteronormative archetype of prostitution research concentrates so heavily on female providers, who represent the majority of sex workers, the focus on street prostitution throughout the literature gives the impression that street prostitution is the “most widespread type of prostitution globally.”¹¹ Logic follows then, that possibly the main reason for street prostitution dominating the research, is that street prostitutes comprise the majority of sex workers and are consequently many times more accessible for study, whereas escorts are much more difficult to contact and

⁸ Samuel Cameron, Alan Collins, and Neill Thew, “Prostitution Services: An Exploratory Empirical Analysis,” *Applied Economics* 31 (1999): 1525.

⁹ Chris Ashford, “Sex Work in Cyberspace: Who Pays the Price?” *Information & Communications Technology Law* 17.1 (March 2008).

¹⁰ Ronald Weitzer, “The Politics of Prostitution in America,” *Sex for Sale*, ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York: Routledge, 2000): 170.

¹¹ C. Harcourt and B. Donovan, “The Many Faces of Sex Work,” *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 81 (2005): 202.

recruit for participation in a study, as evidenced in Lever and Dolnick's study involving 998 street prostitutes compared with only 83 escorts.¹² The notion that street prostitutes represent the majority of sex workers is questionable, as indoor prostitution may be more widespread though less visible.

In researching male Internet escorts, Parsons, Koken, and Bimbi found that escorts differ from male street prostitutes across several factors, including education, income, HIV-status, sexual identity, and condom usage.¹³ Additionally, although education levels of Internet escorts naturally vary, they appear to have higher education than street workers as reported, for example, in some recent research on male¹⁴ and female escorts¹⁵ that found ninety percent or more of male and female Internet escorts had some college education.

Regarding social class as it relates to prostitution, Bernstein notes that recent years have seen an upsurge in middle-class sex workers, members of the "new petite bourgeoisie," who embrace sexual experimentation, fluidity, and independence.¹⁶ The sex workers who fit into this classification are well-educated, technologically and business savvy, and seek to ensure a meaningful and authentic sexual experience with clients; in other words, Bernstein's middle-class sex workers epitomize the type of sex workers who utilize the Internet to work as independent escorts.¹⁷ These women are a stark contrast from street prostitutes, who are generally lower class, usually without a

¹² Lever and Dolnick, 87.

¹³ J. T. Parsons, J. A. Koken, and D. S. Bimbi, "The Use of the Internet by Gay and Bisexual Male Escorts: Sex Workers as Sex Educators," *AIDS Care* 16.8 (November 2004): 1021-1035.

¹⁴ Jude M. Uy, Jeffrey T. Parsons, David S. Bimbi, Juline A. Koken, and Perry N. Halkitis, "Gay and Bisexual Male Escorts Who Advertise on the Internet: Understanding Reasons for and Effects of Involvement in Commercial Sex," *International Journal of Men's Health* 3.1 (Spring 2004): 13.

¹⁵ Juline Koken, David Bimbi, and Jeffrey Parsons, "Male and Female Escorts: A Comparative Analysis," *Sex for Sale*, 2nd Ed., ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York: Routledge, 2009): 259.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Bernstein, "Sex Work for the Middle Classes," *Sexualities* 10.4 (2007): 475.

¹⁷ Bernstein.

high school diploma, and often use drugs or alcohol.¹⁸ However, even within the population of Internet escorts, there is self-stratification based on class and deviance disavowal is common among all classes. According to Ray, escorts who advertise on the Internet often look down on those who utilize Craigslist, a website “considered by many sex workers to be the bottom of the barrel because of the type of clientele it attracts.”¹⁹ Racial differences within each class of prostitution are also a factor in the widely varied world of sex work, often in correlation with social class. Porter and Bonilla found that race plays a large role in drug use, HIV-prevention and risk, community formation, services offered, and rates among street prostitutes in Philadelphia.²⁰ Similarly, Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons purport that an “established racial hierarchy” exists among Internet escorts, the majority of whom are Caucasian, and this is evident through their rates as well as the common racial stereotypes referenced by clients and fellow sex workers.²¹

Class and race distinctions also apply to clients. Compared to clients of street prostitutes, the clients of male Internet escorts are typically higher-class and have lower instances of drug and alcohol use, abuse, and dependence.²² Furthermore, the majority of escorts’ clients were “white, middle-class men.”²³ This finding is corroborated by client characteristics as reported by street prostitutes and indoor call girls, in which a substantial majority of the call girls’ clients was white and middle- to upper-class.²⁴ The street

¹⁸ Lever and Dolnick, 94.

¹⁹ Audacia Ray, “Sex on the Open Market: Sex Workers Harness the Power of the Internet,” *C’lick Me: A Netporn Studies Reader*, eds. Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen, and Matteo Pasquinelli (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2007): 51.

²⁰ Judith Porter and Louis Bonilla, “Drug Use, HIV, and the Ecology of Street Prostitution.,” *Sex for Sale*, ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York: Routledge, 2000): 103-121.

²¹ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 273.

²² Kristofor Burghart, “Hookers.com, Experiences of the Virtual Girlfriend; Exploring Internet Advertisements on Escorts,” (Diss. University of Portsmouth, 2008).

²³ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 273.

²⁴ Lever and Dolnick, 90.

prostitutes' clients, on the other hand, were mostly African-American and their perceived socioeconomic class was more evenly differentiated, though the majority of clients (50%) were still thought to be middle-class.²⁵

The influence of technology, particularly the Internet, is credited with further widening the class distinctions present in prostitution between street workers and higher-class workers, like escorts.²⁶ This effect of technological advancement is noted by Ray, who states that “one of the most powerful changes the Internet has brought to the sex industry is that [it has] created a vast and visible middle class of sex workers who cater to middle-class men.”²⁷ Though street prostitutes seem to overshadow indoor prostitutes throughout the research due mainly to their accessibility, the frequency of indoor types of prostitution, including escorting, is difficult to say due to the secretive nature of the work and the impossibility of randomly sampling escorts.

The lack of external validity within prostitution-related research presents one of the most difficult aspects of studying the sex industry, in that randomization and, therefore, generalizability is implausible. Sanders states that “the Internet provides a unique window into underground cultures that are otherwise difficult to access,” which illustrates its usefulness in researching prostitution.²⁸ Though difficulties and confounding variables abound in the virtual world just as they do in the real world when conducting research, particularly in such a sensitive topic area as sex work, the Internet augments the availability of data and the accessibility of sex workers for researchers.²⁹

²⁵ Lever and Dolnick, 90.

²⁶ Burghart.

²⁷ Ray, 49.

²⁸ Sanders, 77.

²⁹ Sanders.

For these reasons, the Internet's role in facilitating research of the sex industry is invaluable.

As with any form of sex work, safety is of primary concern for workers and clients on the Internet. The Internet introduced a new level of anonymity to sex work, as well as providing a venue for escort/client interaction that is further hidden from law enforcement detection and intervention.³⁰ Harcourt and Donovan characterize Internet escorts as "high-risk" sex workers.³¹ On the other hand, some studies of online prostitution stress an antipodal role of the Internet, instead, as increasing safety for escorts. EscortWatchUK and GuardianAngel are two examples of websites devoted to creating online resource communities for Internet escorts, typically independent escorts, designed to provide reviews of and warnings about clients, as well as safe sex resources, relevant crime reports and advisories from law enforcement, and general information on staying safe while working alone.³² Additionally, client-screening websites, such as RoomService2000 and Date-Check, are available for Internet escorts to use as a method of verifying potential clients; though use of these websites may diminish escorts' independence, due in part to the cost of online membership and the reliance on a third party, thereby bringing escorts "one step closer to signing up with an escort agency."³³ The aforementioned websites, however, further validate Internet escorting as a legitimate business and provide important resources in the form of community forums, potentially

³⁰ Jenifer A. Lee-Gonyea, Tammy Castle, and Nathan E. Gonyea, "Laid to Order: Male Escorts Advertising on the Internet" *Deviant Behavior* 30 (2009): 321-348.

³¹ Harcourt and Donovan, 204.

³² Kim Davies and Lorraine Evans, "Skirting Danger and Sharing Connections: Internet Postings by British Escorts," Paper presented to American Psychological Association annual meeting (Aug 14, 2004); Kim Davies and Lorraine Evans, "A Virtual View of Managing Violence among British Escorts," *Deviant Behavior* 28 (2007): 525-551.

³³ Ray, 62.

providing opportunities for further normalization of the practices of prostitution, and promoting the humanization of online escorts, as Ashford suggests.³⁴

Besides changing the ways escorts may screen their clients and interact as a deviant community, the established connections between escorts and clients have also been transformed in the digital age.³⁵ It is plain to see that the proliferation of the Internet and online communications has deeply altered interpersonal relationships, allowing instantaneous transfer of information across the office as well as across the globe. This phenomenon is particularly true of relationships within the sex industry, as the propagation of online prostitution has revolutionized the nature of relationships between escorts and their clients.³⁶ Escorts who advertise online are now more able to tailor their advertisements and “target their services directly to interested individuals.”³⁷ Ashford presents the ‘McDonaldization thesis,’ in which clients search for “sexual acts as one might consult a menu,” and he credits this system with “promoting and sustaining the sex industry.”³⁸ For example, Holt and Blevins, in an exploratory study examining client reviews of online escorts, found the Girlfriend Experience (GFE) to be “the ideal” service for which male clients search online, a result that is quite consistent with many studies of clients’ motivations in seeking out escort services.³⁹

The use of the Internet in advertising sexual services not only allows escorts to “create deeper personas,” as Ashford suggests,⁴⁰ but also presents them with the

³⁴ Ashford.

³⁵ Davies and Evans (2004).

³⁶ Keith Sharp and Sarah Earle, “Cyberpunters and Cyberwhores: Prostitution on the Internet,” *Dot.cons: Crime, Deviance, and Identity on the Internet*, ed. Yvonne Jewkes (Portland: Willan, 2003): 36-52.

³⁷ Thomas J. Holt and Kristie R. Blevins, “Examining Sex Work from the Client’s Perspective: Assessing Johns using On-line Data,” *Deviant Behavior* 28 (2007): 334.

³⁸ Ashford, 42.

³⁹ Holt and Blevins, 336.

⁴⁰ Ashford, 42.

opportunity to highlight their attributes and foster various levels of “bounded authenticity,” an essential characteristic of the GFE that is important to many clients and escorts alike.⁴¹ The business aspect of online escorting is exemplified by the content and design of an escort’s advertisement or website. Female escorts utilize several strategies to remain competitive in an industry with an incredibly high number of providers, and website design often follows a general template common among most escorts. Castle and Lee’s analysis of online escort advertisements found that, though quality and professionalism of each website differed, many of the pertinent features were consistent throughout various websites.⁴² Both independent escorts and those affiliated with an agency tended to fit this standard mold, displaying many shared characteristics, such as including photographs of each escort, most of which depicted the escort in a semi-nude state and with their faces often blurred, cropped out, or otherwise distorted.⁴³ Female escorts’ tactics for gaining optimal client interest in their websites is exemplified in the following quote:

Lily found that the wording of her ad, as well as the photographs she used, made a big difference in terms of the types of clients she could get: Photos shot from a low angle attracted submissive men, while photos featuring her in conservative outfits baring little skin attracted vanilla clients who were easy to get along with.⁴⁴

“Biographical sketches” are also quite universally used in female escorts’ websites, including descriptions of the escort’s physical measurements and descriptions and personality dimensions.⁴⁵ Often, female escorts will also highlight their “education,

⁴¹ Bernstein, 482.

⁴² Castle and Lee.

⁴³ Castle and Lee.

⁴⁴ Ray, 52.

⁴⁵ Castle and Lee, 115.

intelligence and worldliness,” especially when advertising to higher-class clients.⁴⁶ Interestingly, an analysis of waist-to-hip-ratios of female Internet escorts offers evidence that escorts take advantage of “evolutionary-based mating preferences” which dictate a “near-universal male preference [waist-to-hip-ratio] of 0.70.”⁴⁷ Saad’s examination of escorts’ advertised waist-to-hip-ratios found significant results across five different geographical locations, though he prefaces this conclusion by arguing that it is unclear whether his findings represent the “standardization or adaptation” of advertising techniques among female Internet escorts.⁴⁸ Finally, in addition to the primary purpose of online female escort advertisements, that is appealing to clientele, Ray contends that such websites may also occasionally have a cyclical recruiting “effect of seducing wannabe workers into the industry under the pretense that the work is sexy, fun, and easy.”⁴⁹

Male Internet escorts also advertise intimacy in connection with sexual services, utilizing “bounded authenticity” in selling the Boyfriend Experience (BFE), though this feature seems less common than its female counterpart, the GFE.⁵⁰ Male escorts were more prone than females to include “their preferred sexual activities and physical assets” in their biographical sketches.⁵¹ Analogous to the common inclusion of measurements in female advertisements, male advertisements often focus, sometimes quite explicitly, on specific physical details about the size, shape, and description of the escort’s genitals.⁵²

Also repeatedly included in male escorts’ biographical sketches was information about

⁴⁶ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 266.

⁴⁷ Gad Saad, “Advertised Waist-to-Hip Ratios of Online Female Escorts: An Evolutionary Perspective,” *International Journal of e-Collaboration* 4.3 (2008): 44.

⁴⁸ Saad, 46.

⁴⁹ Ray, 50.

⁵⁰ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 265.

⁵¹ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 266.

⁵² Castle and Lee.

their role in intercourse (i.e., top, bottom, or versatile).⁵³ Furthermore, Ashford found that male escorts' disclose more personal, detailed, and explicit information on their advertisements than females do.⁵⁴ This finding suggests that male escorts may, in fact, experience lower levels or a different type of stigmatization related to their participation in sex work, perhaps because they are "already stigmatized due to their sexual orientation."⁵⁵ Many male escorts also note the importance of practicing safe sex in their online advertisements, including endeavoring "to educate their clients about the risks of unprotected sex and [refusing] clients seeking unprotected sex."⁵⁶ This finding is of paramount significance in male sex work especially, as homosexual and bisexual male escorts are a very high-risk population for HIV and AIDS and have been shown to engage in risky sex practices both with clients and with their partners.⁵⁷ The goal of this paper is to elucidate these various themes, common structures, and archetypal content that Internet escorts employ in website design.

⁵³ Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea.

⁵⁴ Ashford.

⁵⁵ Juline A. Koken, David S. Bimbi, Jeffrey T. Parsons, and Perry N. Halkitis, "The Experience of Stigma in the Lives of Male Internet Escorts," *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 16.1 (2004): 13-32.

⁵⁶ David S. Bimbi, "Male Prostitution: Pathology, Paradigms, and Progress in Research," *Journal of Homosexuality* 53.1 (2007): 26.

⁵⁷ Parsons, Koken, and Bimbi.

Methodology

The present study is a content analysis of escort websites, akin to what Sharp and Earle describe as a “covert cyber-ethnography.”⁵⁸ The general lack of empirically backed knowledge about Internet prostitution, along with an increased accessibility to sex workers made possible by the Internet, demonstrate the need for such an exploratory study. Female and male escorts were included in this research, all advertising primarily for male clients. The decision to include both genders was made in order to examine both heteronormative and same-sex male online prostitution.

Previous research has utilized web search tools, such as Google, to compile a sample of escort websites.⁵⁹ These Internet search engines are incredibly useful; however, search results are not often listed in a uniform manner and often include irrelevant websites. Websites catered specifically to the sex industry, such as escort review websites, provide a broad range of information that is exclusively associated with sex work while extraneous and irrelevant websites are minimized. These escort review websites, where clients (and, sometimes, escorts and agencies) can interact online through chat and e-mail, post narratives and ratings of their experiences with escorts, and search for escort advertisements, provide a source of very rich data about Internet escorts.⁶⁰ For these reasons, escort websites for this paper were selected from such review websites; The Erotic Review (www.theeroticreview.com) for female escorts catering to heterosexual men, and Rentboy (rentboy.com) for male escorts catering to homosexual men. At the time this research was conducted, a blanket search of escort

⁵⁸ Sharp and Earle, 41.

⁵⁹ Castle and Lee.

⁶⁰ Sharp and Earle.

reviews on The Erotic Review (TER) resulted in 84,709 results, while the same search on Rentboy produced 1,000 results. Both websites provide links to many of the escorts' own websites; the latter served as the sampling units.

Sampling

Systematic sampling was performed between May and July 2009, using randomly generated numbers to determine sampling intervals between one and ten entries. TER was sampled first; the permalink to the escort's website was extracted from every fourth entry ($n = 360$). Sampling from Rentboy was conducted in a similar fashion, with every entry that provided a link to an escort's website extracted ($n = 78$). Separate databases were kept for links extracted from TER and those from Rentboy. Broken, expired, or otherwise unusable (e.g. foreign language) links were noted and skipped, and the next n th entry was sampled. Sampling was stopped for each review website when twenty-five consecutive links yielded only repeat or broken/expired websites.

Both TER and Rentboy organize their reviews in reverse chronological order, with the most recent review posted first. Also, as new reviews are added several times daily, the list of reviews is constantly refreshing itself. The effects of these listing practices interfere with the randomization of the data, thereby making completely random sampling nearly impossible. In order to minimize the effect of this predetermined order of listings and to maximize the randomness of the sample, the databases of extracted permalinks from both review websites were systematically sampled for a second time. Every third entry from both the TER and the Rentboy databases were sampled, composing a final master list of female and male escort websites ($n = 127$) to be examined, coded, and analyzed.

Coding & Variables

Some of the variables were derived from standard factors examined in the literature on sex workers, such as demographics, whereas others were identified only after a cursory examination of several escort websites. All coding was performed exclusively by the author. Escort names and website URLs were recorded for each site to ensure no repeated entries and for organization purposes.

General demographic variables included age, gender, ethnicity, self-identified sexual orientation, and location. If the escort's location was unspecified, his or her area code was used to determine the state. Each escort's **affiliation** (agency, independent, or porn star) was noted, and, where applicable, the name of the agency. Escorts were categorized as independent by default unless the website was an agency site or their status as a porn star was mentioned.

Physical descriptions included measurements (bra/chest size – waist – hips) and/or penis size in inches, height in inches, weight in pounds, hair and eye color, and any additional body type descriptors included on the websites. Hair and eye color were deduced from available pictures when not specifically stated. Also, the presence or absence of a “**biographical sketch**” for the escort was logged.⁶¹

Photograph details consist of the explicitness of the photographs (fully clothed, lingerie/underwear, topless, nude, or pornographic), whether the escort's face was visible, blurred, or covered/cropped, and whether the photographs were of professional or home quality. Photos were deemed topless when nipples were visible; nude when breasts and buttocks or genitals were exposed without clothing; and pornographic when sex acts were depicted (including masturbation) and genitals were the focal point of the photo.

⁶¹ Castle and Lee, 115.

Service details covered services offered, requests for gifts, types of appointments available (incall, outcall, overnight, or travel), and the listed rates (USD) for each type of appointment.⁶² When rates were presented in monetary units other than USD, the current exchange rate was used for conversion and noted.

Scheduling details included methods of contact, methods of payment, and verification information requested. No actual phone numbers or email addresses were recorded, only whether or not they were provided on the website. When verification information was not explicitly stated, the types of required information were taken from the online scheduling forms on the websites, if available.

Finally, **website details** included whether the website featured an age disclaimer for entry to the site warning about sexually explicit material, whether a disclaimer stating that money exchanged was for time and companionship only (i.e. not prostitution) was featured, the presence of links to reviews, escort/verification websites, pornography (separate websites whose main purpose is to provide pornographic materials), or other websites, and the website's general appearance. The appearance of the websites varied greatly, ranging from nothing more than an erotic picture and a phone number on Craigslist (and similar websites) to professionally designed agency websites advertising several escorts, all with his or her own page, photo slideshow, and information. In order to measure this variable categorically, the appearance of the website was rated on a scale of 1 to 5. A 5 rating applies to professional websites with a sophisticated and interactive design, mostly found on upscale agency websites. A website with a rating of 4 had a semi-professional design showing some knowledge of website editing. A 3 rating

⁶² Incall appointments occur when the client goes to the escort's home. Outcall appointments involve the escort going to the client's hotel room, home, or another predetermined location.

encompasses template-designed websites, often using Escort-Site or SiteKreator, featuring customizable links and backgrounds, though displaying little knowledge of website design. Appearance ratings of 2 applied to erotic forum postings and review websites, such as Eros-Guide and Daddy's Reviews, where the format is structured and pre-set for escort related advertisements, though often including less information than custom-designed websites. Lastly, a website with a rating of 1 represents websites like Craigslist and CityVibe, where users are presented with a blank canvas for posting advertisements of any kind, which is not attuned to escort-specific information.

Any additional pertinent or particularly interesting information that was not covered by one of the above categories of variables was recorded in a notes section, including additional non-sexual services offered (house cleaning, body waxing, etc.) or escort services provided in exchange for donations made to the Red Cross. All frequencies and other statistical calculations were performed using Microsoft Office Excel.

Findings

Eight categories of variables were used in the present research, examining numerous aspects of escort website design and content. Since the present study investigated Internet escorts found on review websites TER and Rentboy, rather than on the Internet at large, these results are obviously skewed toward the content from those two websites. In addition, not all websites examined provided information applying to every variable. Those that did not specify were not included in calculations. Means are presented for quantitative variables. Frequencies presented for each qualitative variable represent the number of websites that explicitly provided the corresponding information. The only exceptions are those that were discussed in the methods section (hair color ascertained from photographs, location based on telephone area code, and types of verification information requested).

General Demographics

Table 1 shows the frequencies for qualitative measures and, for quantitative measures, the means for general demographic variables.

Of the 127 total websites, 105 advertised female escorts and 22 advertised male escorts. Sexual orientation was not often explicitly stated. Many female escorts reported being available for couples, multiple partners, or threesomes with other female escorts, thereby implying bisexual tendencies, though only escorts who were explicit in their sexual orientation were classified as such. This finding exemplifies Bernstein's concept of the "new petite bourgeoisie" among indoor prostitutes, experimental young women exploring their sexuality, and often embracing bisexuality as well.⁶³ Those escorts that did self-identify their orientation ($n = 37$) were mostly bisexual ($n = 18$). Unsurprisingly,

⁶³ Bernstein, 475.

heterosexual and homosexual self-classifications were gender-specific, with only females identifying as straight ($n = 7$) and only males identifying as gay ($n = 12$).

Table 1 - General Demographics

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Gender			
Female	105	82.7	
Male	22	17.3	
Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual	7	5.5	
Bisexual	18	14.2	
Homosexual	12	9.4	
Ethnicity			
White	80	63.0	
Black	6	4.7	
Latin/Hispanic	13	10.2	
Asian	11	8.7	
Mixed/Exotic	9	7.1	
Location			
United States	116	91.3	
Outside US	7	5.5	
Age (yrs)			27.1
Female			26.7
Male			29.3

The average age of female escorts was just under 27 years old, whereas the mean age for male escorts was just over 29 years old. The mean age reported across both genders was 27 years old. Previous studies reported differing mean ages, such as 39 years old for males and 34 years old for females in Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons' comparative analysis.⁶⁴ Contrastingly, Castle and Lee found that the ages of female *agency* escorts ranged from 18-29.⁶⁵ Several websites provided only a general statement of age, such as "mid-20s" or "40-something." This was more common among female

⁶⁴ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 258-259.

⁶⁵ Castle and Lee, 115.

escorts. Only websites that provided precise ages ($n = 63$) were included in the calculations of mean age.

Nearly all websites ($n = 119$) specified the ethnicity of the escorts. Ethnicities found in this research represented commonly accepted racial stratification among indoor sex workers, the majority of whom are Caucasian. Caucasian escorts were by far the most common featured throughout the websites ($n = 80$). This was especially true for males, as only two reported being Latin/Hispanic, four did not disclose their ethnicity, and the remaining 16 self-identified as Caucasian. Other ethnicities represented included black ($n = 6$), Latin/Hispanic ($n = 13$), Asian ($n = 11$), and “mixed” or “exotic” ($n = 9$). Escorts of mixed racial heritage typically described themselves as “exotic,” possibly in an effort to cater to a niche market. Another study suggests a similar theory, that “ethnicity appears to be a direct marketing ploy, which instantly distinguish an escort, and well as targeting a potential client group.”⁶⁶ Most escorts that self-identified as exotic indicated two to four ethnicities that applied to them, often including at least two of the above minority ethnicities (for example, one escort described herself as “an exotic black Chinese and Native American beauty”). Though Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons found evidence of racial discrimination among escorts,⁶⁷ claims of racism in prostitution have been only tangentially studied. More research is still needed to understand sexual commodification from a racial or ethnic standpoint.

The majority of websites ($n = 123$) provided either their locations or a telephone number whose area code could be used to assume their state of residence. Locations spanned the United States, as well as foreign countries. Most escorts were domestically

⁶⁶ Burghart, 37.

⁶⁷ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons.

based ($n = 116$) throughout the country. Other countries represented included Canada ($n = 1$), England ($n = 4$), France ($n = 1$), and Argentina ($n = 1$). This finding differed significantly from previous studies, yielding a high concentration of escorts operating mainly domestically, within the United States, as opposed to abroad. For example, Castle and Lee observed that the majority of escort websites they examined were based in foreign countries where prostitution was regulated to a lesser degree than under American legislation.⁶⁸

Affiliations

Table 2 presents the frequencies of escort affiliations. Affiliations included agency and independent escorts, as well as porn stars who offered escort services.

Table 2 - Affiliations

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>
Affiliation		
Agency	20	15.7
Independent	102	80.3
Porn Star	5	3.9

A large majority of escorts worked independently (80.3%). Affiliations with escort agencies (15.7%) were exclusively found with female escorts, as no male escorts stated any affiliation with an agency. On the other hand, porn stars providing escort services (3.9%) were much more likely to be male, with only one female escort claiming porn star status. Since escorts that did not specify an affiliation were coded as independent as a default, all 127 websites were included. This, again, validates the value placed on independence characteristic of the middle-class escorts described in Bernstein's study.⁶⁹ The Internet has allowed for increased independence among escorts by

⁶⁸ Castle and Lee.

⁶⁹ Bernstein.

providing a secure and customizable venue where independent escorts can advertise their services without the need for high startup costs or industry insiders to aid their business.

Physical Descriptions

Table 3 displays frequencies and, where applicable, means for female physical description variables.

Table 3 - Physical Descriptions - Female

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of females)</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Measurements			
Bust (in)			35.42
Cup Size			D
Waist (in)			24.73
Hips (in)			35.10
Waist-to-Hip-Ratio			0.705
Height (in)			64.97
Weight (lb)			120.58
Hair Color			
Brown	56	53.3	
Blonde	31	29.5	
Black	10	9.5	
Red	6	5.7	
Gray	1	1.0	
Eye Color			
Brown	20	19.0	
Blue	16	15.2	
Green	12	11.4	
Hazel	9	8.6	
Gray	1	1.0	
Black	1	1.0	

Physical measurements, especially bust and cup size, were specified on about half of the female escort’s websites (chest: $n = 64$; cup size: $n = 62$), with an average bust size of 35.42 inches and a D-average cup size. To find the average cup size, numerical values were assigned to each cup size (A=1, B=2, ..., F=8, G=9), then averaged, giving a numerical mean of 3.92, with a corresponding cup size, when rounded to the nearest whole number, of D, which indicates that the average female escorts presented herself as

full-bosomed. Given our culture's preoccupation with breast size, and the societal value placed on this statistic, this finding was not surprising. Waist and hip measurements were slightly less commonly disclosed (waist: $n = 50$; hips: $n = 48$), with mean measurements of 24.73 inches and 35.10 inches, respectively. Waist-to-hip-ratios (WHR) were calculated for each escort whose complete measurements were provided ($n = 48$) by dividing waist size by hip size. WHR ranged from 0.61 to 0.82, with an average of 0.705.

Table 4 presents the physical description variables for males, in frequencies for qualitative and means for quantitative measures.

Only one male escort provided his chest size, while three disclosed their waist size, and none provided hip measurements. Most of the men who disclosed these body measurements (excepting penis size) also offered personal training services in addition to escorting, suggesting that these men may have given their chest and/or waist sizes for reasons not exclusively related to escort services. About two-thirds (68.2%) of male escorts provided details about the size of their penises, 8.10 inches on average (ranging from 7.5 inches to 10 inches). Less than half (45.5%) of the males, though, stated whether or not they were circumcised (circumcised: 36.4%; uncircumcised: 9.1%). When this information about male escorts' genitals was presented, it was featured prominently on the websites, either as a headline or very early in a physical description. For example, the main page of one escort's website stated "SEXY and sophisticated guy with 9.5 CUT COCK" (*emphasis in original*). These findings, along with the bust measurements for females presented above, validate the concept of 'body capital,' illustrating the different ways males and females commodify their own bodies.

Table 4 – Physical Descriptions - Male

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of males)</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Measurements			
Chest (in)			48.00
Waist (in)			29.00
Penis Size (in)			
Circumcised	8	36.4	8.10
Uncircumcised	2	9.1	
Height (in)			
			71.00
Weight (lb)			
			169.44
Hair Color			
Brown	14	63.6	
Blonde	6	27.2	
Black	1	4.5	
Shaved	1	4.5	
Eye Color			
Brown	5	22.7	
Blue	9	40.9	
Green	3	13.6	
Hazel	2	9.1	

Height was disclosed in 76 websites, and weight disclosed in 60. The average height among female escorts was 64.97 inches, and for males, average height was 71.00 inches. Average weight for females was 120.58 pounds, with two female escorts declaring their weight to be less than 100 pounds (minimum weight was 92 pounds; maximum was 168 pounds). For male escorts, the average weight was 169.44 pounds (ranging from 130 pounds to 195 pounds).

By far, most escorts had brown hair ($n = 70$), followed by blonde hair ($n = 37$), with other hair colors being much less common. Brown hair was the majority among both male ($n = 14$) and female ($n = 56$) escorts. Eye color was more evenly distributed, with brown and blue (each, $n = 25$) being the most common. Most female escorts had brown eyes, whereas the majority of male escorts had blue eyes.

Slightly less than half of the websites ($n = 59$) included verbal physical descriptors, such as “curvy,” “firm,” or “defined,” in addition to or instead of numerical measurements. “Curvy” was by far the most popular word used to describe female escorts, though “busty,” “petite,” and “toned” were quite commonly used as well. Male escorts tended to use descriptions like “muscle” or “muscular,” “defined,” and “athletic” with much less emphasis placed on physical measurements (excepting penis size) than females. Interestingly, females often described themselves as having a “dancer’s body,” while males were likely to describe themselves as having a “swimmer’s body.”

From these findings, a standard physique could be constructed, for both male and female escorts, using mean measurements and mode descriptors. The prototypical male Internet escort could be described as having a “muscle” “swimmer’s body” with brown hair and blue eyes. He is Caucasian and stands five feet, eleven inches tall, weighing roughly 164 pounds, and having about an eight-inch circumcised penis. The physical archetype for female Internet escorts, based on the findings, would possess a “curvy, yet firm,” “petite,” “dancer’s body” with brown hair and brown eyes. She is also Caucasian, slightly less than five feet, five inches and 129 pounds, with approximate measurements of 36D-25-35, a nearly perfect hourglass figure. These measurements would give her a waist-to-hip-ratio of 0.705, virtually the same as the “near-universal male preference...of 0.70.”⁷⁰ Whether these models represent a typical profile for men and women who enter the field of online prostitution or a marketing tactic that has resulted in near total physical conformity throughout the industry is unclear, though the influence of advertising techniques like these in escort websites is obvious.

⁷⁰ Saad, 44.

Biographical Sketches

Table 5 presents the percentage frequency of the inclusion of biographical sketches on escort websites, including frequencies by gender.

Table 5 - Biographical Sketches

	<i>% (of males)</i>	<i>% (of females)</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>
Biographical Sketch			
Present	54.5	66.7	64.6
Absent	45.5	33.3	35.4

Biographical sketches are often used to expound on an escort’s personal attributes, often emphasizing education or intelligence, personal hobbies, or long-term aspirations. As Burghart notes, these narratives are usually short and “commonly [share] the same characteristics and marketing ploys.”⁷¹ In the present study, sketches included information about the escort’s personal life, ranging from an overview of the educational degrees one female escort had attained, to a male escort’s experiences traveling the world. A few websites seemed to exceed the typical level of disclosure, including irrelevant information that was not analogous to the rest of the websites examined. For example, one female escort’s narrative described her as a “devoted mother” who found that escorting provided “the perfect balance of work, money, and time with [her] beautiful babies.” Yet another had an amendment posted to her biographical sketch on the main page of her website explaining that she had just undergone gastric bypass and breast augmentation surgeries, along with recent photographs of her bandaged torso, although she was still taking appointments for “lite play ONLY...until I’m all better.” 64.6% of websites, female and male, included a biographical sketch.

⁷¹ Burghart, 27.

Photograph Details

Table 6 shows the frequencies, in percent, for variable of photograph details, including the breakdown of frequencies by gender. Unlike most of the previously discussed variables, the categories of photograph details are not mutually exclusive. Because multiple photographs were commonly presented on each website, more than one factor may be present on a website.

Table 6 - Photograph Details

	<i>% (of males)</i>	<i>% (of females)</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>
Explicitness			
Fully Clothed	63.6	55.2	56.7
Lingerie/Underwear	40.9	82.9	75.6
Topless	81.8	52.4	57.5
Nude	77.3	33.3	40.9
Pornographic	63.6	15.2	23.6
Visibility of Face			
Visible	72.7	53.3	56.7
Blurred	9.1	20.0	18.1
Covered/Cropped	40.9	41.0	40.9
Quality			
Professional	77.3	44.8	50.4
Home/Amateur	50.0	61.0	59.1

Nearly all of the websites (97.6%) included photographs. Often, escorts' websites used photographs as their main focus or selling point by featuring a photo gallery, background image, or slideshow on the main page of a website. This was especially true when the photographs were of a higher, more professional quality (50.4%). More than half the websites (56.7%) featured photographs where the escort's face was completely visible, sometimes even showing close-ups.

Explicitly pornographic photographs, mainly depicting intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, and masturbation, were featured on nearly one-quarter of websites (23.6%). Most photographs, however, were less explicit, showing escorts in various lingerie or

underwear outfits (75.6%) or in a topless photograph, with nipples exposed and visible (57.5%). A much larger proportion of male websites featured graphic photographs of their genitals, buttocks, or sex acts than their female counterparts (males: 63.6%; females: 15.2%). This could be related to the higher concentration of porn star escorts who are male, gender differences in body capital or commodification, or the significantly more pornographic images and text included on Rentboy than on TER.

Service Details

Table 7 shows frequencies of the main services offered on escort websites as well as self-identified sexual roles (top, bottom, or versatile) for male escorts.⁷² Several additional services were advertised, but only the most commonly mentioned were included in the analysis. Again, these variables are not mutually exclusive, as most escorts offered a variety of services. Regarding sexual role, a male escort could also identify with more than one sexual role, and many did, sometimes varying dependent on the type of sexual act (e.g. one role for anal sex and another for oral sex). Sexual roles were explicitly stated on 16 of the 22 male escort websites included in analysis (72.7%).

About two-thirds of the websites examined ($n = 84$) mentioned at least one service offered by the featured escort. The GFE/BFE service was the most popular service explicitly stated on escort websites ($n = 48$). Nearly all of those escorts who offered a GFE/BFE were female ($n = 44$). Interestingly, several female escorts lamented the popularity of GFE, stating that it was overly used and more often than not was falsely indicative of the service one would provide. One escort stated that she is “better than a

⁷² ‘Tops’ take a dominant/active sexual role; ‘Bottoms’ take a submissive/passive sexual role; ‘Versatile’ men can take either role.

GFE,” while still another responded to a user question in the Frequently Asked Questions section of her website with

Now why on earth would you want that? Chances are if you are cumming [*sic*] to see me, then you already have a real girlfriend who is not doing something right. I offer escape from GFE. I don’t wanna be anyones girlfriend...I’m fun, kinky, and sexy...definitely not a GFE.

Nevertheless, GFE remains “the ideal” service sought by clients on the examined websites, confirming an observation by Holt and Blevins.⁷³

Table 7 – Service Details – Services Offered & Sexual Roles

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>
Services Offered		
GFE/BFE ⁷⁴	48	37.8
Kissing	23	18.1
Massage	28	22.0
Manual Masturbation	11	8.7
Covered Fellatio	6	4.7
Bareback Fellatio	17	13.4
Cunnilingus	7	5.5
Anal Cunnilingus	2	1.6
Full Service Sex	36	28.3
Anal Sex	21	16.5
Porn Star Experience	3	2.4
Multiple Partners	30	23.6
BDSM ⁷⁵	10	7.9
Fetish	19	15.0
Sexual Roles		
Top	11	50.0 (males)
Bottom	1	4.5 (males)
Versatile	9	40.9 (males)

Many escorts did not specify services included in their GFE, thus leaving its meaning somewhat elastic. The GFE service is conventionally defined as “the type of

⁷³ Holt and Blevins, 336.

⁷⁴ GFE: Girlfriend Experience; BFE: Boyfriend Experience

⁷⁵ BDSM: Bondage/Domination/Sadomasochism

sex that a client would expect within a consensual non-commercial relationship,”⁷⁶ a definition that can easily be applied to the male counterpart, BFE, as well. Escorts often provide their own descriptions of their GFE/BFE, some of which are presented as follows:

I'm a girlfriend type with an emphasis on kissing and cuddling.

I provide a caring spirit, warm hands, intelligent (and sometimes hilarious!) conversation. The kind of intimacy you've previously experienced only in your wildest dreams!

My GFE includes: DATY [“Dining At The Y” or cunnilingus], BBBJ [“Bare Back Blow Job” or fellatio without a condom], Multiples, and Light Kissing.

I want to touch you everywhere -- not just physically, but mentally, emotionally.

Candles flickering, scented oils, the scent of lavender, soft music. I want to make everything around us a wonderfully inviting and cozy atmosphere.

I especially love longer dates involving dinner or theater, with a delightful "desert" afterward. This gives us a great opportunity to enjoy each other fully, with the luxury of time on our side.

It is a companionship that comes with an affectionate human connection that can be explored together, comprising of meaningful encounters with a man who is willing to open himself up to me.

You will be pampered and made to feel like the king of my kingdom. I would love to spend time with you taking a nice, warm shower together, giving you a great massage, kissing, hugging, teasing...

Each moment we spend together combines to create that perfect boyfriend-next-door experience. Every time we meet, that spark just feels too real. We're drawn in a way that's hard to explain and difficult to recreate. Together, we embark on an intimate journey, discovering thoughts and urges we never expected. We allow ourselves to get lost in the dance, our minds racing, bodies surging. Touch and taste, sight and sound, with each encounter, fiery passion grows from the forging of our new friendship.

The above GFE/BFE quotes tend to focus on spending time together in an intimate, companionship based relationship, often involving “true girlfriend” activities, such as

⁷⁶ Burghart, 35.

kissing and conversation. Many escorts who described their GFE/BFE also mentioned their openness to “long term friendships.”

The Porn Star Experience, or PSE, was not a commonly offered service ($n = 3$), although commanded very high rates when it was presented. Only one female escort defined her version of the PSE by stating, “the *only* difference between GFE service and PSE service is Greek [anal sex].” This service is most often associated with porn stars who perform escort services on the side, although any escorts can claim to offer PSE. The PSE is typically in direct contrast with the GFE, as the PSE generally refers to an escort who is sexually aggressive and offers “naughtier” services, like those found in pornographic films.

Some sites listed other services. The most common were Full Service Sex ($n = 36$), Multiple Partners ($n = 30$), Sensual Massage ($n = 28$), and Kissing ($n = 23$). Any overtly prohibited services for each escort were recorded as well, frequently including anal sex, BDSM, and “bareback-anything.”⁷⁷ Though unprotected sexual acts were typically only mentioned in reference to oral sex, surprisingly few escorts specifically prohibited unprotected contact, a finding that is worrying due to the high instances of sexually transmitted diseases among prostitutes. Indeed, more males than females stressed the importance of safe sex and condom use. It is possible, however, that many escorts may refrain from mentioning safe sex on their websites in order to attract more clients; rather waiting until the client has arrived, and paid, for the appointment to convey a no bare-backing rule. A few escorts offered non-sexual services in addition to the sexual services listed above. House cleaning, personal assisting, cooking, personal grooming, and personal training were the most widespread additional services. Among

⁷⁷ Bareback refers to sex acts without using a condom.

those escorts that offered travel companionship, translation and tour guide services were mentioned quite often for countries or areas with which they were familiar.

Table 8 shows the frequencies, in percent, of types of appointments offered and requests for gifts, broken down by gender as well as overall. Most escorts offered more than one type of appointment.

Table 8 – Service Details – Appointments & Requests for Gifts

	<i>% (of males)</i>	<i>% (of females)</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>
Types of Appointments			
Incall	63.6	73.3	71.7
Outcall	72.7	58.1	60.6
Overnight	45.5	27.6	30.7
Travel	45.5	26.7	29.9
Other	18.2	17.1	17.3
Requests for Gifts			
Present	0.0	23.8	19.7
Absent	100.0	76.2	80.3

Among female escorts, the most prevalent type of appointment offered was incall (73.3%), where the client goes to the escort’s home. Outcalls, where the escort goes to the client’s home, hotel, or other meeting place, were next in frequency (58.1%). As for male escorts, the prevalence was reversed, with outcall services the most common type of appointment offered (72.7%), and incalls slightly less common (63.6%). When an escort offered overnight (male: 45.5%; female: 27.6%) or travel (male: 45.5; female: 26.7%) appointments, the two types were often offered in conjunction with one another and required an additional deposit to reserve. Other appointment types offered (male: 18.2%; female: 17.1%) included weekend or week-long packages, threesomes, BDSM or fetish services, bachelor/bachelorette parties, and at one Las Vegas agency, a “High Rollers Package” comprised of a weekend with two female escorts, a VIP hotel suite, limo service, and champagne.

Requests for gifts or “wish lists” were featured on 19.7% of websites, all for female escorts, typically involving a disclaimer of some sort, such as “gifts are always appreciated but never expected.” Wish lists largely included lingerie, chocolates, champagne, sex toys, and designer clothing or accessories, although some escorts added more expensive items, like jewelry, furniture, cars, and vacation packages.

Table 9 shows the mean hourly rates for each type of appointment (incall, outcall, or overnight) by gender.

Table 9 - Service Details - Hourly Rates

	<i>Mean</i>
Hourly Rates - Overall	
Incall	\$278.02
Outcall	\$328.69
Overnight	\$1401.53
Hourly Rates – Female	
Incall	\$289.28
Outcall	\$355.85
Overnight	\$1837.65
Hourly Rates – Male	
Incall	\$216.12
Outcall	\$227.44
Overnight	\$916.95

Hourly rates were stated on most websites and varied tremendously. For example, the average incall rate was \$289.28 per hour; however, incall rates ranged from \$100 per hour to \$550 per hour. Rates also varied depending on services requested (for example, some escorts required an extra \$50 - \$150 for anal sex), outcall locations (up to \$200 extra for hotels), and whether the booking was for one person or a couple (couples usually required a surprisingly universal extra \$200). Some escorts offered discounts for group rates (\$50 off per person when two or more book together), military or local residents (10-15% off at one agency), birthdays (\$25 - \$100 off during birthday month),

VIP or Fan Club memberships (10% or \$50 off each booking), or educators and environmental or political activists (\$100 off any service). As Table 9 shows, rates for female escorts were, on average, higher than those for male escorts, especially overnight rates at double the cost (females: \$1837.65; males: \$916.95). When escorts offered travel companion services, rates were typically \$1200 - \$6000 per day plus all travel expenses, though some offered weekend or weekly packages for discounted rates.

Contrary to previous findings suggesting a financial “glass ceiling” exists for minority escorts as opposed to Caucasian escorts,⁷⁸ the present research finds that many “exotic” and minority escorts charged the same or, in some instances, slightly higher rates than Caucasian escorts. In fact, among the eleven escorts, male and female, with rates of less than \$200 per hour, eight were Caucasian and three were Asian. Varying rates corresponded to several indicators, such as website appearance, age, and services offered, but ethnicity was not involved to the level previously theorized. Escorting is a unique industry in that females hold the financial advantage over males within the same position. Given this reversal of economic gender roles, it may be appropriately hypothesized that other predictors of fiscal earnings may not apply to escorts as they do to the general population.

Scheduling Details

Table 10 shows the frequency of scheduling detail variables. Most escorts posted more than one contact method.

Phone numbers ($n = 90$) and email addresses ($n = 70$) were the most common contact methods on escort websites. Many escorts ($n = 49$) also provided an online form for questions or to make an appointment. Several websites that did not include phone

⁷⁸ Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons, 274.

numbers or emails expressed that first-time clients would receive the escort’s personal contact information once all screening procedures had been completed, in the interest of the escort’s safety. Those websites often stated that repeat or regular clients need not use the online form to contact them; rather, subsequent appointments could be made by phone or email. Other methods of contact ($n = 6$) included text message (SMS), voice pagers, and social networking websites (MySpace).

Table 10 - Scheduling Details

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>
Methods of Contact		
Phone	90	70.9
Email	70	55.1
Instant Message/Chat	11	8.7
Online Form	49	38.6
Other	6	4.7
Methods of Payment		
Cash	34	26.8
Credit	9	7.1
Other	2	1.6
Verification Information		
Requested	48	37.8
Not Requested	79	62.2

Cash was by far the most widespread payment method accepted by escorts ($n = 34$), especially by those who work independently. Very few websites, however, specified acceptable methods of payment. Credit cards ($n = 9$) were most often accepted by agency websites, although, a few more professional independent websites had set up a credit card payment form online. Other mentioned payment methods ($n = 2$) included wire transfer services, like Western Union.

Client verification procedures serve many important protective purposes for escorts, including protection from law enforcement and vetting clients who seemed likely to mistreat, disrespect, hurt, or steal from them. Verification practices were mentioned

on 48 escort websites, all female excepting one male escort's request for hotel booking information for outcalls. Most escorts who required screening information were quite forthcoming with the reasons for these stringent practices, such as explaining "I can't be comfortable if I'm worried about you arresting or killing me" or referencing recent news stories ("after what happened in Boston, we can't be too careful"). Furthermore, many escorts warned clients against mentioning money or sexual services on the phone, through email, or in person, often stating that any such behavior would result in the immediate end of communication or the appointment, without refunded payments.

The most commonly referred to verification websites included TER's White List, RoomService2000, and Date-Check, with many escorts requested the client's member name for one or more of these websites. Additionally, references from other, "well-respected and established providers" were demanded for first-time clients on several escort websites. Some websites went further to specify the type of provider from whom they would accept references, denying any "Craigslist, or other non-professional" escorts and requiring that the referral escort be "TER reviewed" or verifiable through Internet searches. Business names and phone numbers were commonly requested verification information, generally alongside a promise of discretion and a notice that business names must be able to be confirmed through Internet searches and legitimate business cards must be presented upon request at first meeting. Independent or small business owners or employees were often offered an alternative way of confirming their employment or were asked to provide additional screening information including previous providers or review websites. Finally, photo identification was required by several escorts upon first meeting, sometimes requiring that a Driver's License number or other identifying details be

provided during the reservation process or otherwise prior to the appointment in order to verify the client's identification.

Website Details

Website details, including disclaimers, links, and website appearance, are variables based on the design and content of the website itself. Table 11 presents frequencies for website detail variables as well as the mean for website appearance ratings. Many escort websites provided more than one disclaimer and various types of external links.

Table 11 - Website Details

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% (of total)</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Disclaimers			
Entry to Website	63	49.6	
Time Only	58	45.7	
Links			
Reviews	95	74.8	
Escort/Verification Websites	57	44.9	
Pornography	24	18.9	
Other	22	17.3	
Website Appearance			2.74
5	18	14.2	
4	19	15.0	
3	39	30.7	
2	13	10.2	
1	38	29.9	

At least one disclaimer was present in nearly half of the websites, and many had one disclaimer of each kind. Entry disclaimers ($n = 63$) require that the Internet user click a button or link after listing the terms of the website. This type of disclaimer often includes an age requirement (18 or 21 years), a statement about the “sexually explicit,” “adult,” or “hardcore” content on the website, and statements affirming the Internet user’s agreement to not bookmark the website, not show anyone the website, and not publish or steal the content within. Time only disclaimers ($n = 58$) state that any money exchanged

is for “time and companionship only,” and “anything beyond” that is a private matter between consenting adults. Some escort websites featured customizable modifications to their disclaimers. One female escort’s entry disclaimer requires visitors to certify that the following statements are true

I do not find images of nude adults or other sexual material to be offensive or objectionable.

I am at least 18 years of age and have the legal right to view and possess adult material in my community.

I am NOT a spiritually un-evolved religious fanatic hell-bent on saving [name removed]’s soul by harassing her with badly written emails.

I am NOT an aspiring escort who is too lazy to write her own text. (Plagiarism is for losers).

External links to at least one other website were present on nearly three-quarters of the escort websites examined, though many had multiple links to a variety of websites. The most commonly linked websites featured reviews of the escort at hand ($n = 95$). Links to escort search websites and client verification websites were not quite as widespread as review links, though were present on nearly half of the websites examined ($n = 57$). Links to independent pornography websites were even less prevalent with 24 websites displaying links to pornographic websites. Other linked websites ($n = 22$) included social networking sites (especially MySpace), sex toy merchandisers, tourist guides for the escort’s location (including rental cars and hotels), parental control websites (e.g. Net Nanny, Cyber Patrol, etc.), and safe sex organizations (from female condoms to HIV/AIDS research). One escort included a link to Playboy, where she had been featured in an article. A few escorts also provided links to their “day job” or “passion,” such as personal photography, art, and music. Former research has proposed that the common inclusion of external links on escort websites “suggests that the self-

regulation of the online sex websites, has allowed escorts to form a homegenic [*sic*] community, which forms close protective relationships.”⁷⁹

Website appearance ratings evaluate the professionalism of each escort website’s design on a scale from one to five (five being the highest). The scale is explained in the Methodology section of this paper. The overall mean, including female and male escorts, of website appearance was 2.74. Across both genders, the most common ratings were three ($n = 39$) and one ($n = 38$). Ratings of two ($n = 13$), four ($n = 19$), and five ($n = 18$) were less common, though rather evenly distributed. When differentiated by gender, there is a clearly higher level of professional website design among male escorts than female escorts, with mean website appearance ratings of 3.45 and 2.59, respectively. Interestingly, this finding is paradoxical to the apparent professionalism of the review websites used for this study, as TER has a much more sophisticated and interactive design than does Rentboy.

⁷⁹ Burghart, 37.

Conclusion

Scholarly work exploring the sex industry can generally be classified into three distinct paradigms: oppression, empowerment, or polymorphous. In the United States, the oppression paradigm is the dominant model for research and public policy, and portrays sex work as inherently evil, exploitative, and abusive – describing sex workers as extremely oppressed victims who lack any personal agency whatsoever. Consistent with this emphasis on oppression, Donna Hughes offers several examples of how the Internet has provided a means of further exploiting women in the sex industry, asserting that the Internet would not be advancing at its current rate without the sex industry, thereby condemning the Internet as a main facilitator in oppressive prostitution.⁸⁰ While research by Sharp and Earle,⁸¹ and Davies and Evans,⁸² among others, suggests that escorts who use the Internet have tipped the scale of power in their favor, Hughes maintains that “new Internet technologies shift the balance of power toward the perpetrators.”⁸³ Albert, Gomez, and Franco also note the Internet’s “important” role in escorting, contending that the Internet acts “as a means to link demand and supply.”⁸⁴ It could be argued that technology, then, is more responsible for facilitating prostitution by *expediting communications* between suppliers (i.e. escorts) and demanders (i.e. clients) than necessarily for creating increased supply of, or demand for sex workers.⁸⁵ The Internet seems to magnify the degree of entrepreneurialism within prostitution, thereby empowering Internet escorts and potentially reframing the gendered power relationships

⁸⁰ Donna M. Hughes, “The Internet and Sex Industries: Partners in Global Sexual Exploitation,” *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* (Spring 2000): 35-42.

⁸¹ Sharp and Earle.

⁸² Davies and Evans (2004).

⁸³ Hughes (2004): 119.

⁸⁴ Rocio Albert, Fernando Gomez, and Yanna G. Franco, “Regulating Prostitution: A Comparative Law and Economics Approach,” *Fundaciòn de Estudios de Economia Aplicada* DT 2007-30 (2007): 20.

⁸⁵ Sharp and Earle; Ray.

traditionally found within this type of sex work. That is not to say that all Internet escorts are necessarily empowered simply by taking control of their own marketing, though many are certainly using technology to their advantage.

As evidenced in this thesis, escorts are working independently, attempting to vet clients to increase safety, and creating successful businesses online. As with all types of sex workers, Internet escorts vary in their sexual orientation, services offered, and physical appearance, to name but a few variables. There does seem to be a sort of “industry standard” for the inclusion of certain information on Internet escorts’ websites, although much of the included information was diverse and wide-ranging. Though the quality and appearance of the websites differed immensely, there were some websites, consisting of no more than a Craigslist ad, which presented nearly the same information as some of the professional-level websites, although in a more rudimentary manner. Male and female escorts also included different types of information in their respective websites, though the majority often kept to the overall industry-wide patterns of disclosure and marketing tactics.

The Internet has greatly facilitated the opportunity for interpersonal communication, while, at the same time, significantly increasing the level of anonymity involved in such interactions. The Internet has transformed the practice of information exchange, creating an ideal setting in which escorts can advertise their services. They are able to create characters and personalities, specifically design their websites to attract their preferred clientele, and increasingly try to protect themselves through mechanisms designed to screen potential clients discreetly and safely. Some escorts even take advantage of some of the Internet’s unique abilities to market webcam shows or online

chat in addition to their in-person services. Technology and the sex industry are deeply intertwined, increasing the “mainstreaming” of the latter, though stigma for sex workers continues. Potential implications of further research could have a beneficial effect on all parties involved through strengthening the advantages the Internet provides for escorts and continually boosting protective mechanisms, such as client verification websites, that are becoming more widespread.

While the current paper is focused strictly on male and female escorts who advertise for male clients, the literature suggests that these types of advertisements may differ from those of male escorts advertising to female clients, an area that should be investigated further in future research.⁸⁶ In addition, female escorts providing services to female clients are another population that has been largely overlooked. Quinn and Forsyth elucidate the role of the Internet in transforming the sex industry, suggesting “changes in sexual mores and the social organization of particular activities are to be expected under any circumstances, the advent of new telecommunications technologies has revolutionized sexual expression.”⁸⁷ The technological/sexual revolution to which they refer has presented virtually infinite sources of data and new areas for research. In addition to aforementioned areas for future research, Uy and colleagues posit that increased research on male Internet escorts is important to “shed light on a social phenomenon that occurs surreptitiously as well as to identify the potential unique health issues (physical or psychological) that these men may face.”⁸⁸ This notion of public health within prostitution can just as easily be applied to female internet escorts as well as

⁸⁶ Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea.

⁸⁷ James F. Quinn and Craig J. Forsyth, “Describing Sexual Behavior in the Era of the Internet: A Typology for Empirical Research,” *Deviant Behavior* 26 (2005): 196.

⁸⁸ Uy, et al., 14.

other sex workers throughout the sex industry, and more research on every facet of sex work is necessary to increase instances of safer sex practices in an industry with such high risk for sexually transmitted diseases.

The heteronormative form of prostitution has consistently dominated the research. My inclusion of male escorts advertising for male clients adds another level of variability to the present research, though further research is definitely needed. In comparing female escorts to male escorts, this thesis is one of a limited supply of scholarly work on the sex industry investigating both genders within the same tier of prostitution. A more complete understanding of this marginalized and stigmatized population could provide safer and more reliable working conditions for Internet escorts. Future scholarly research comparing genders, including transgendered sex workers, across all types and levels of prostitution, as well as sex work outside the heteronormative archetype, is crucial to augmenting the currently limited knowledge of the sex industry as a whole.

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