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Abstract

Technological change, particularly the growth of the Internet and smart phones, has increased the visibility of male escorts, expanded their client base and diversified the range of venues in which male sex work can take place. Specifically, the Internet has relocated some forms of male sex work away from the street and thereby increased market reach, visibility and access and the scope of sex work advertising. Using the online profiles of 257 male sex workers drawn from six of the largest websites advertising male sexual services in Australia, the role of the Internet in facilitating the normalisation of male sex work is discussed. Specifically we examine how engagement with the sex industry has been reconstituted in terms of better informed consumer-seller decisions for both clients and sex workers. Rather than being seen as a 'deviant' activity, understood in terms of pathology or criminal activity, male sex work is increasingly presented as an everyday commodity in the market place. In this context, the management of risks associated with sex work has shifted from formalised social control to more informal practices conducted among online communities of clients and sex workers. We discuss the implications for health, legal and welfare responses within an empowerment paradigm.

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Technology, normalisation and male sex work

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Technological change, particularly the growth of the Internet and smart phones, has increased the visibility of male escorts, expanded their client base and diversified the range of venues in which male sex work can take place. Specifically, the Internet has relocated some forms of male sex work away from the street and thereby increased market reach, visibility and access and the scope of sex work advertising. Using the online profiles of 257 male sex workers drawn from six of the largest websites advertising male sexual services in Australia, the role of the Internet in facilitating the normalisation of male sex work is discussed. Specifically we examine how engagement with the sex industry has been reconstituted in terms of better informed consumer-seller decisions for both clients and sex workers. Rather than being seen as a 'deviant' activity, understood in terms of pathology or criminal activity, male sex work is increasingly presented as an everyday commodity in the market place. In this context, the management of risks associated with sex work has shifted from formalised social control to more informal practices conducted among online communities of clients and sex workers. We discuss the implications for health, legal and welfare responses within an empowerment paradigm.

Keywords: male sex work; Australia; Internet; normalisation

Introduction

This paper examines the impact that technological change, namely the expansion of online male sex services, has had on the normalisation of sex work. Using a sample of male sex worker profiles from the largest websites offering such services in Australia, the paper highlights aspects of this normalisation process with respect to the diversification and expansion of the male sex work market. Finally, the broader implications of agency and the professionalisation of the commercial aspects of male sex work for legal, welfare and health responses are briefly discussed.

Background

There is evidence of a growth in the global sex industry, facilitated by recent economic, ideological, demographic and technological changes, as well as greater tolerance of varied expressions of sexuality in Western countries (Ward and Aral 2006). Increasingly, attention is turning towards the growth of the male sex work industry, focusing on client bases as both male and female, and gay, heterosexual or bisexual identified.

Rissel et al. (2003) sampled 10,000 men in Australia and found that 16% had hired a sex worker at some point in their life. Of these, 3% reported hiring a male sex worker.

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While male sex workers are available to both male and female clients, it appears that hiring a sex worker may be more common among men who have sex with men than other population groups, given that meeting sexual partners over the Internet is also more common among men who have sex with men (Berg 2009). In New York City, a community-based survey of just under 700 non-monogamous sexually active male sex workers found that 42.7% had either paid for sex, been paid for sex, or both (Koken et al. 2005). The size of male sex worker populations is generally unknown, with particularly limited information on the growing numbers of men working 'indoors' (Minichiello, Scott, and Callander 2013) as a result of technological advances in combination with penalties associated with street sex work in some Australian states (and other international locations), as well as the gentrification of inner-city suburbs historically associated with sex work (Scott, Minichiello, and Meenagh 2015).

While changes in the structure and organisation of sex work may be attributed to diverse technologies, including the mobile phone, which allow sex workers more spatial mobility, the growth of the Internet has had the greatest impact on the industry. Activity around the sex industry has been visible online from as early as the 1980s through advertisements and discussion among sex workers and clients (Cunningham and Kendall 2011). Cyberspace has extended sex work beyond the streets and recent years have witnessed growth in the number of men who sell sexual services on the Internet (Bimbi 2007; Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea 2009; Pettersson and Tiby 2003). Such e-technology has made the male sex industry more visible in public discourse and the number of male escort sites such as rentboy.com continues to increase. While there has been no attempt to quantify the proportion of men who operate online, research suggests many men are introduced to sex work via the Internet and that there has been dramatic growth in the number of men selling sexual services through this medium (Bimbi 2007; Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea 2009; Parsons, Koken, and Bimbi 2007). The market for male online sex services in the USA exceeds US\$1 billion annually, with millions of transactions each year (Logan and Shah 2009).

The growth of the Internet is not the first time that technological change has driven transformation in the structure and organisation of sex work. Historically, sexual practices have changed and been influenced by technological developments. During the nineteenth century, the location of sex workers was determined by stops required for watering and feeding horses. The motor vehicle expanded the area over which clients could search for sex workers, increasing the range of locations in which sex workers might operate. Additionally, the motor vehicle itself became a new site in which commercial sexual transactions might take place (Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea 2009), offering both privacy and an escape from law enforcement intent on limiting public displays of promiscuity. Further changes were prompted by access to pagers and the telephone, allowing sex workers to increasingly conduct their business indoors. Mobile phones have further expanded the potential horizons of sex work by facilitating a wider client base and offering new visual opportunities for sexual gratification through 'sexting' (Lee et al. 2013, 36). In the parallel pornography industry, technologies such as the camcorder, video and DVDs have expanded avenues for sexual communication and exploration (Quin and Forsyth 2005).

Telecommunications have increased the number of male escort workers, created new spaces in which sex work encounters can take place and expanded the client-base for male sex work (Holt and Blevins 2007). Both the sex worker and clients of male sex workers have been considered at various historical junctures as stigmatised personas, be they criminal or pathological. One of the reasons for such limited views of male sex work was that popular accounts of male sex work as well as scholarly work focused largely on the

most visible aspects of male sex work, which occurred in public spaces in urban settings (Perkins 1991; Smith and Grov 2011; Weitzer 2005). Significant changes in technology have moved sex work away from the streets and a previous association with delinquency and deviance (Holt and Blevins 2007; Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea 2009; McNamara 1994). Furthermore, the online male sex industry has provided male sex workers with new modes of operating that allow privacy and anonymity, protecting both clients and providers from harassment, embarrassment and the potential for police sanction (Liau, Millett, and Marks 2006; Wilson et al. 2009). Instead of the difficulties associated with cruising streets for clients, male sex workers are able to choose from a range of online venues, thus reaching a broader audience of potential clients, both in terms of sheer numbers and of socio-demographic characteristics (Ashford 2009; Holt and Blevins 2007; Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea 2009). Finally, there are commercial advantages to moving sex work online. Limited regulation of the Internet allows male sex workers to harness a wider range of advertising techniques to attract clients, including explicit language and colour photographs, and reduces payments required to third parties such as pimps or brothel owners (McLean 2013; Pruitt 2005).

While male sex workers have often been seen as a danger to their clientele in terms of blackmail or robbery, it is often forgotten that sex workers are also the victims of violent clients, especially in terms of homophobia. The Internet offers opportunities to protect sex workers by identifying dangerous clients and reporting their activities to other sex workers and authorities. The Internet may also provide a safer work environment through lower risk of robbery or blackmail. Client screening websites (e.g. RoomService2000.com, Date-check.com and providerbuzz.com) exist to provide sex workers with an opportunity to review clients and alert peers to personal risks. Additional well-being benefits associated with the transition from street to indoor sex work are also likely to accrue to male internet sex workers. In his classification system of sex workers Weitzer (2009), classifies both 'call girls' and 'escorts' as being prey to limited exploitation by third parties when compared to streetwalkers and individuals engaged in other forms of outdoor sex work. This echoes research that noted the impact of place of work on the self-esteem of sex workers. Call girls reported an increase of 97% in self-esteem from before they started sex work compared to only 8% among streetwalkers (Prince 1986). Recent research suggests that male sex workers who identify as bisexual or gay tend to identify sexual pleasure as an important aspect of their work along with other positive work-related experiences (see Vanwesenbeeck 2012). Indeed, Uy et al. (2007) argue that in contrast to dominant discourse, men involved in online male sex workers are not pathological or psychologically damaged – either in relation to their choice of profession or as a consequence of it.

The normalisation of male sex work

Sex work has represented the archetypal form of gender deviance in modernity, being variously problematised as criminal activity or a source of contagion and pollution. As observed elsewhere (Minichiello, Scott, and Callander 2013), male sex work has not always been considered socially problematic. As a 'deviant' behaviour, male sex work has mostly been problematic because it was associated with homosexuality, rather than because it involved the sale of sex for money. Social concern about male sex work has centred on the way in which it challenged gender boundaries (drag or transgender sex work), class hierarchies (rough trade) or inter-generational barriers (kept-boys). Indeed, for the most part of the later-twentieth century, concern around male sex work centred on

the notion that the bulk of this activity involved older, predatory homosexuals preying on younger heterosexual males. Implicit in this problematisation of male sex work was the notion that the hustler or rent-boy¹ lacked agency and was exploited. This characterisation provides a contrast with female sex work, which was considered problematic largely because it was representative of patriarchal relations.

Weitzer (2009) notes three distinct paradigms operating in sex worker research. He suggests that the 'oppression' and 'empowerment' paradigms both offer one-dimensional perspectives on sex work that are diametrically opposed to one another. In this way, sex work has been associated with danger and risk. He suggests the need for an alternative perspective that moderates the oppression and empowerment paradigms by reflecting on sex work as containing '... a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations and worker experiences' (215) and has termed this the 'polymorphous' paradigm. While acknowledging the great variety of experiences associated with sex work, this paper argues that changes to the structure and organisation of sex work, in part facilitated by technology, have allowed for sex work (once 'prostitution' and considered almost exclusively in terms of female supply) to be imagined as an everyday phenomenon in many contemporary western cultures. In particular, it is the contention in this paper that male sex work has been normalised in recent decades, shifting from a stigmatised activity for both the sex worker and client, to something which represents, depending on contexts, an everyday object of consumption or risk.

The processes by which specific forms of deviance are normalised are not well documented. While at one level it can be argued that disciplinary power has made possible subtle, efficient and consistent forms of surveillance of diverse population groups, normalisation with reference to specific activities, such as drug use and supply, has often been reduced to a discursive or ideological effect, equated with a weakening, rather than strengthening, of normative controls. With respect to male sex work, it is clear that a liberalisation of sexual attitudes has contributed to the weakening of formal social controls to manage this activity. Kaye (2004) argued that new social meanings for male sex work were derived in the 1970s through the 'progressive integration of male prostitution into the gay cultural orbit'. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder, allowing gay men and women to present more visibly as discrete social groups and communities. This change helped facilitate the appearance of more gay-identified men in samples of male sex workers in the USA (Bimbi 2007). The focus of research into male sex workers broadened from the limited focus on young delinquents working the streets or as ambiguous vectors of disease to the general population.

There have also been important social shifts with regards to masculinity. In recent years, masculinity and male bodies have been openly represented in eroticised cultural terms of art, fashion and film (Kay, Nagle, and Gould 2000). These developments have changed popular thinking about male sexuality. Gidden's (1992) concept of 'plastic sexuality' and Bauman's (2003) arguments around 'liquid love' have forwarded the proposition that relationships in modernity are somewhat fluid and created the context for sexual script transformation. Such changes in sexual scripts have, as noted by Sanders (2008), brought both conflict and opportunities at an individual and societal level, with studies documenting the growing phenomena of straight identifying men engaging in what is known as 'gay for pay'. This has highlighted that the intrinsic nature of sex work is not all oppressive and that there are different kinds of worker and client experiences and varying degrees of victimisation, exploitation, agency and choice.

While the normative shifts described above have impacted on attitudes towards male sex work, what is often missed are the practical aspects of normalisation or the material conditions in which they are manifest (Scott 2003). While shifting social mores have had a role in the normalisation of male sex work, especially in terms of social responses to homosexuality, it is also clear that material conditions have impacted on the way in which male sex work is structured and organised. Two aspects highlighted here are the impact of new technologies on male sex work and globalisation: both have led to sex work becoming increasingly normalised on the basis that it is readily accessible to an increasingly diverse spread of the population.

Methods

As well as reviewing the relevant literature, the profiles of 257 unique escorts were sampled in November 2013 from the six largest websites in which Australian male sex workers advertise. The majority ($n = 171$) of profiles were advertised on Rentboy Australia, a company providing networking for male sex workers, masseurs and their clients, which was founded in 1997. A further substantial group of profiles ($n = 24$) were located on Daddy's M4M Reviews, where male sex workers are able to upload their profiles and clients can review services bought through the profiles. The sampled profiles were also found on Adult Friend Finder ($n = 20$), a sex and swingers community website, Backpage ($n = 30$), a classified website specialising in adults services, Locanto ($n = 8$), a worldwide online classifieds network and My Male Companion ($n = 5$), a male escort service specifically catering to female clients.

Data were extracted from the advertisements and used to populate a spreadsheet in which various characteristics could be documented. The data collection specifically focused on collecting demographics, physical descriptions, information on sexuality, types and range of services offered and quoted rates. Descriptive statistics on these key factors were then calculated.

Results

Target clients and profile characteristics

In this sample of male sex worker profiles, those targeting male clients provide more physical detail than profiles directed towards female clients. Details include age, weight, height and ethnicity as well as body type classifications such as 'defined', 'muscled' or 'athletic'. Profiles specifically targeting male clients usually include explicit nude photographs and details about their penis, usually length and circumcision status, but sometimes also information on girth. Profiles for female clients tend to be less overt: profiles on My Male Companion included only black-and-white art-style images of mostly clothed escorts in which faces are cropped out. In this sample, most profiles included information about age: the range was 18–48 years and the average was 27 years. Although this is a relatively young group of men, they are by no means the 'teenage runaways' often portrayed in more historical descriptions of street sex workers and hustlers.

Charge rates associated with male sex work

Profiles sampled in this study indicate high income earning from sex work. Of the 257 profiles, 229 (89%) quoted an hourly rate for their services. There was no pricing information provided by the remaining 28 men. Many profiles included a range of price, rather than

focusing on a single cost. The least expensive hourly rate quoted was AU\$65–85 per hour for discreet massage therapy promising ‘lots of attention’ for women from a 31-year-old escort advertising on Locanto. Other profiles quoting rates at the lower end of the range were more likely to be advertising massage services such as that of a 37-year-old bisexual Melbourne escort charging AU\$70 per hour and offering ‘massage (both received and performed nude), discreet, female friendly, bi friendly for males with extras available’. The most expensive price quoted was AU\$650 for unspecified ‘discreet’ services in the Gold Coast, advertised on Rentboy. Of profiles quoting price, 59% were in the range of AU\$200–300 per hour. Average price from profiles where rates were mentioned was calculated by taking the midpoint for all stated ranges. This overall average was AU\$241.29 per hour.

Male sex workers described as ‘straight’ or ‘bi’ were more represented at the lower end of the price spectrum. Of only 12 profiles offering service for less than AU\$150 per hour, 8 were explicitly available for females only, 2 provided ‘bi’ services and the other 2 are assumed to offer gay services (both these profiles were from Rentboy and provided no information about sexual orientation).

Sex work services offered

Escorts in the sampled profiles provided a range of sexual and non-sexual services. Escorts targeting female clients provided only non-sexual services, while those targeting male clients offered a range of activities that included non-sexual services such as ‘travel’ and ‘companionship’ and sexual services ranging from kissing to penetrative anal intercourse. Although certainly not the norm in our sample of online male sex worker profiles offering services to other men, there were some individuals offering non-sexual services outside of those commonly associated with sex work (such as massage or companionship). Of the 257 profiles in our sample, 8 included men who offered handyman, yoga, personal training, counselling and personal coaching services. The most frequently cited services were massage ($n = 94$), oral sex ($n = 48$), kissing ($n = 47$) and anal sex ($n = 38$). Male sex workers’ advertisements generally specified sexual positioning for both oral and anal sex, with the vast majority indicating that they were ‘versatile’ ($n = 125$). This is likely a strategy to increase their client-base and market share. Among those specifying that they were ‘versatile’, 34 noted a preference for active/top and 15 for passive/bottom. A smaller number specified exclusive sexual positioning: 27 exclusively as active/tops and 9 as passive/bottoms. A number of varied other activities were also advertised by escorts to a lesser degree than those already discussed (see Table 1). In assessing the 257 profiles sampled in this study, none explicitly advertised that they were available for unprotected anal sex or ‘barebacking’. There were, however, six profiles in which the language suggested that they may, in fact, be open to riskier sexual practices than explicitly documented in their advertisements. This included two profiles ‘open to most scenes’ two advertising for ‘special requests’, one profile ‘into most things’ and another that ‘says no to very little’.

Beyond specifying whether escorts were targeting male or female clients, a small number further demarcated their target clients by including that they were specifically comfortable and willing to engage with disabled clients. ‘Disability friendly’ was included in 5 of the 257 profiles sampled.

The number of activities advertised ranged from the most basic ‘escort’ with an hourly rate of AU\$250–500 per hour from a profile listed on My Male Companion to describing numerous potential sex acts. For example, a 25-year-old Perth male with no information about sexual orientation offers the following services for AU\$250–300 per hour on Rentboy Australia: versatile, escort, fantasy, travel, massage, fetish, companionship, boyfriend

Table 1. Activities offered by Australian online male sex workers in this sample.*

Activity	Number (%) of total
Sexual	
Anal sex 'versatile'	125 (48.6)
Massage	94 (36.6)
Oral sex	48 (18.7)
Kissing	47 (18.3)
Kink	37 (14.4)
Role play	34 (13.2)
Fantasy	29 (11.3)
Anal sex: exclusive active/top	27 (10.5)
Toys	19 (7.4)
Erotic services	12 (4.7)
Anal sex: exclusive passive/bottom	9 (3.5)
Porn	8 (3.1)
Fetish/bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, masochism	8 (3.1)
Rimming	7 (2.7)
Wrestling	4 (1.6)
Mutual masturbation	4 (1.6)
Fisting	3 (1.2)
Watersports	2 (0.8)
Stripping	2 (0.8)
Non-sexual	
Companionship ^β	48 (18.7)
Boyfriend experience ^β	40 (15.6)
Dining ^β	13 (5.1)
Dating ^β	6 (2.3)
Social outings ^β	2 (0.8)

*Totals add to more than 100% as individual profiles frequently advertised numerous varied services;

^βThese services offered to both male and female clients

experience, threesome. This same demand is evident in the sample of profiles in this study: 18.7% of profiles advertise companionship and a further 15.6% offer a 'boyfriend experience'.

Discussion

Data on age, income level and educational level from this sample of online male sex workers all suggest that older stereotypes of men typified in the oppression paradigm are outdated in the Australian context. Within a predominately empowerment paradigm, it is argued that the Internet has facilitated the normalisation of both sex workers and their clients by making it easier to access, as attested by the statistics measure of the hits of these websites.

This assessment of Australian profiles of online male sex workers is in keeping with findings from analysis of escort profiles in the USA in which the same characteristics were generally included in advertisements and where the 'typical' online male sex worker was found to be Caucasian with a muscled swimmer's body, brown hair, blue eyes and an eight inch circumcised penis (Agresti 2007). Over time, it appears that there has been a change in the 'status' of homosexual male sex workers as reflected by income earning potential. In this sample, men offering homosexual services were most likely to charge higher rates than those directing their services to female clients. This is contrast to historically

published work documenting higher income and status among male sex workers who identify as heterosexual compared to those identifying as gay (Allen 1980).

While many of the profiles did not provide information on sexual orientation, a significant proportion of profiles advertising 'boyfriend experiences' were straight or bisexual sex workers suggesting a premium on this as a heteronormative experience and less in demand for gay men. Indeed, the shifting geography of male sex work, which has seen an increase in escorts located online, may mean that more women are inclined to use such services as they present as discrete and are normalised when compared to earlier forms of street or brothel work. Many online male escorts market their services in terms of a boyfriend experience predicated on romance. They may also emphasise the (hetero) normality of their work. Weitzer (2009) has noted that clients of indoor sex workers (including those online) demand much more than just a sexual experience and that there is a premium on providers being friendly, affectionate and attentive. He specifically draws attention to the rise of 'girlfriend experience' in which the sex worker play acts the attentiveness expected of a girlfriend in real life.

The online sex industry is increasingly driven by market demands: millions of male online sexual transactions in the USA are estimated at over US\$1 billion annually (Logan and Shah 2009). Minichiello, Scott, and Callander (2013) have pointed to the 'McDonaldisation' of the online sex industry with regard to choosing personal attributes of male sex workers, including ethnicity, physical appearance and positioning preference. However, it is also argued that the McDonaldisation of online sex extends to the availability of a range of different sexual services from which clients can pick and choose their own personal combination. This thesis is reinforced by Minichiello, Marino, and Browne (2001), who note that online male sex workers tend to engage in a higher number of different sex acts with each client at a single meeting than male sex workers working through other avenues. With the ability to choose particular services through online services there have been fears that internet male sex workers, and online homosexual relationships more generally, might give rise to demand for specific sexual acts with increased health risks. Durkin, Forsyth, and Quinn (2006) have noted that social responses to new technologies, termed 'techniways', allow individuals to use the Internet for the formation of 'deviant' subcultures by marrying changes in lifestyle with changes in technology. Specifically, the Internet as a techniway might allow for the formation and continued engagement of communities that may not have discovered their shared sexual preferences, given their relatively small numbers, geographical dispersion and fears associated with legal or moral sanction.

In keeping with previous research among online male sex workers (Bimbi and Parsons 2005; Wolff et al. 2014), it appeared that very few male sex workers sampled in this study routinely offer unprotected sex to clients. Australia was the first country in the world to unionise sex workers, allowing them access to employment benefits largely taken for granted in other employment sectors (Scott, Minichiello, and Meenagh 2015), and enforcing legal sanctions against unprotected commercial sex acts. Therefore, in Australia particularly, the view of sex work as a social problem has been replaced by acknowledgement of sex work as a legitimate occupation (Perkins et al. 1994; Perkins and Prestage 1985). It may be that legislative frameworks in the Australian sex industry discourages blatant advertising of unsafe sexual practices, but is not a guarantee that some amount of barebacking is not practiced by male sex workers, given variations in situation, mood or partner.

Welfare and legal responses will need to take account of the way in which recent technological changes have facilitated the normalisation of sex work. Researchers have argued that our understandings of sex work have been predominately framed by

perspectives from locations where sex work is illegal and where empowerment and agency are less developed (Weitzer 2009). The normalisation of male sex work suggests that welfare perspectives might be less relevant in settings where sex work is viewed as just another occupation and where sex workers are increasingly agents in their career choice. Legal responses might also need to adapt to greater agency in the sex work industry. Currently in Australia, the legal framework regulating sex work varies widely by state: the current mix includes decriminalisation (New South Wales), licensing (Victoria, Queensland, Northern Territories) and criminalisation of activities associated with sex work (South Australia, Western Australia). As male sex work is increasingly normalised, a shift in the regulation of male sex work is noted, away from formalised controls with criminal powers, towards more neo-liberal forms of management in which a regulating gaze is exercised by the clients and sex workers themselves, the internet becoming a vehicle to self-regulate and monitor the practices of both clients and sex workers. It is acknowledged that text information provided on websites cannot truly reveal the complex interactions that surround the male sex industry. They may reflect public appearances of what is deemed desirable in the market place. Research is now needed to uncover and deconstruct the meanings behind these sexual encounters from the narratives of clients (both male and women) and male escorts.

The focus here on predominately what might be termed the 'positive' aspects of male sex work on the Internet is not to say that the move towards online male sex workers is completely unproblematic. McLean (2012) has pointed to a range of harms associated with selling sex through the Internet, notably continued stigma and a lack of support networks. While the normalisation of the sex industry as a positive development for managing stigma has been noted here, McLean remarks that this might be a form of professional distancing among male sex workers that increases stigma and social isolation. Although male sex work in a relatively liberal environment (such as in Australia) tends to encourage adoption of safe-sex behaviours, the move towards an online sex industry might have implications for the sexual health of male sex workers and their clients. Indeed, evidence of safe sex among Internet-based male sex workers is contradictory and worthy of further investigation.

Of note here is that the normalisation of male sex work may pose problems for public health in that internet escorts, like their clients, do not present as discrete groups or sub-groups within the population. The move online means that male sex workers have less opportunities for contact with industry peers, are geographically dispersed and often highly mobile and transient in terms of their service provision, and have little or no contact with traditional service providers that have targeted street-working sex workers, considered to be highly vulnerable. Indeed, male sex workers largely evade formal forms of surveillance and regulation, be it medical or criminal. The professionalisation of sex work also fits an individualistic ethos which, in part, emphasises the discretion and independence of the sex work and ability to 'care' for themselves in terms of their health and well-being. Conversely, websites like The Erotic Review allow clients to share their reports on sex workers, with between 500,000 to 1 million unique visitors monthly (Cunningham and Kendall 2011). Online communities may also provide new ways of disseminating safer-sex messages to male sex workers and their clients (Parsons, Koken, and Bimbi 2007) and new avenues for research that seeks to engage with participants for whom privacy and discretion are a priority. What is interesting here is the way in which the internet may at once atomise sex workers, while creating opportunities for clients to communicate as a social grouping.

One thing can be said with a degree of certainty. Technology, including medical science, has provided people who seek the services of male sex workers with more options. People have the option of going on the internet and viewing the profiles of thousands of male escorts, easing the process of finding the 'right' escort for the client and making the transaction no different to purchasing other services in the marketplace. Some have claimed that technology has provided a sense of legitimacy to the sex business. Escorts do not have to stand on corner streets or wait in brothels, but be anywhere and attending to their daily lives while they are 'on call' for work via mobile calls, text message or Skype calls. Sexual health is being promoted in the media as a topic of health promotion interest rather than surveillance and shock. Hundreds of websites have popped up assisting people, clients of sex workers and sex workers to enjoy their sexual activities and 'play safe'. The use of the word 'play safe' in popular culture signals a sharp departure from a moralist perspective so prevalent a few decades ago. In men-who-have-sex-with-men communities in Western nations, new and emerging anti-viral drugs are getting HIV-positive individuals away from hospitals and funeral parlours and assisting the management of their illness in communities to the point that it is hard to identify who is HIV-positive, unlike the earlier days of the disease. Clients and workers are everyday people, undetectable by appearance, health status, race and other socio-demographic indicators.

So what does all of this mean? Sociologically speaking, we have witnessed a silent cultural revolution. A movement away from blaming the individual for their deranged sexual desires and all the consequences of their private sexual acts becoming public knowledge with adverse social consequences, including stigmatising them and suppressing the existence of either male-to-male sexuality or male prostitution. There are two obvious observations here. First, it reflects the progress achieved at a societal level to move towards the normalisation of male sexualities and the sex industry. This new environment, at least in Western countries, speaks more openly and positively about its citizens having sex with other men, and about both men and women purchasing sex from male escorts. The discourse is no longer about deviance, crime and deranged human interactions. In turn, this new environment of tolerance is empowering people to educate themselves about the options available to them and learning how to 'shop' for sex so that they can find and express their sexualities. Not surprisingly, new advertising products are entering the market, where escorts include podcasts, video shows and live chats to win a bigger share of the client base. Even before the escort and client meet, a dialogue and negotiation has occurred about, for example, price, what can be made available on the sex menu, possible risk-playing scenarios and penis and body size. While these topics may still not be commonplace conversations, they are conversations people are having on the Internet and in the communication media, and statistics show that such interactions are not infrequent.

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Note

1. Hustler is largely a North American term associated with young male sex workers, often identified as 'rough trade' or delinquents, who work streets and bars for an older, often affluent,

homosexual clientele. Rent-boy, might be considered the UK equivalent of the hustler, although the term has stronger welfare as opposed to delinquent of criminal justice associations.

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Résumé

Les changements technologiques, en particulier la progression d'Internet et des smartphones, a accru la visibilité des escorts masculins, élargi leur fichier de clients et diversifié les établissements dans lesquels ils peuvent exercer le travail du sexe masculin. Plus particulièrement, Internet a délocalisé certaines formes du travail du sexe masculin en les éloignant de la rue et ce faisant, élargi leur présence sur le marché, leur visibilité et leur accessibilité, et la portée de la publicité pour le travail du sexe. En nous basant sur les profils en ligne de 257 travailleurs du sexe masculin, collectés sur six des sites web les plus importants qui font de la publicité pour les services sexuels masculins en Australie, nous discutons du rôle d'Internet dans la facilitation d'une normalisation du travail du sexe. Plus précisément, nous examinons comment l'engagement dans le commerce du sexe a été redéfini en termes de décisions « consommateurs-vendeurs » mieux éclairées, à la fois pour les clients et pour les travailleurs du sexe. Plutôt que d'être perçu comme une pratique « déviante », une pathologie ou une activité criminelle, le travail du sexe masculin est de plus en plus présenté comme un produit de consommation de tous les jours. Dans ce contexte, la gestion des risques associés au travail du sexe est passée d'un contrôle social formalisé à des pratiques plus informelles exercées par

la communauté des clients et des travailleurs du sexe en ligne. Nous abordons les implications de ces changements pour les réponses à apporter en matière de santé, de soutien juridique et de bien-être social dans un paradigme d'empowerment.

Resumen

Los cambios tecnológicos, especialmente la mayor difusión del Internet y de los teléfonos inteligentes, han contribuido a elevar la visibilidad de los hombres que se desempeñan como acompañantes, incrementando su clientela y diversificando los escenarios en los que puede tener lugar el trabajo sexual masculino. Específicamente, el uso de Internet ha permitido alejar de la calle algunas formas de trabajo sexual masculino, ampliando su alcance en el mercado, su visibilidad y su accesibilidad, así como el ámbito de la publicidad para el trabajo sexual. Con base en los perfiles cibernéticos de 257 hombres sexoservidores seleccionados de los seis sitios web anunciantes de servicios sexuales masculinos más importantes en Australia, el presente artículo examina el rol desempeñado por Internet al facilitar la normalización de dicho trabajo. En especial, se analiza cómo ha sido reestructurada la participación en la industria sexual en términos de posibilitar mejores decisiones consumidor-vendedor, tanto en el caso de los clientes como en el de los sexoservidores. Más que la percepción de este trabajo como una actividad aberrante, expresada en términos patológicos o de actividad criminal, crecientemente se presenta el trabajo sexual masculino como un bien cotidiano que se encuentra disponible en el mercado. En este contexto, el manejo de riesgos asociados al trabajo sexual ha transitado desde un control social formal hacia prácticas más informales llevadas a cabo en las comunidades de clientes y sexoservidores en línea. Asimismo, el artículo analiza las implicaciones de lo anterior en los ámbitos legal, de salud y de bienestar de acuerdo a un paradigma de empoderamiento.